

Hello, I'm Sheila Lirio Marcelo, Founder and CEO of Care.com, and today I would like share Audra Rodriguez's story with you:

Audra is a mother who lives and works in Washington D.C. Her mom—who's also her best friend—had a stroke three years ago. She's lived with Audra's family ever since. It has been very challenging; Audra has two daughters (3 and 4 years old), and works full-time as a physician's assistant. Since becoming the full-time family caregiver, Audra has seen her life change completely—she switched to a more flexible job, her husband left his career in the Navy, and they have spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours of their own time caring for her mother. Like many Americans, Audra is struggling with finding and managing care for both her children and her mother. She is stressed out with the pressure of making ends meet.

Care.com is devoted to helping families find high-quality care providers. As CEO, I hear stories like Audra's every day. These narratives resonate with me because I know right where she's coming from. At points in my life, I faced challenges moms like Audra go through every day: how can you even go to work if you can't find quality care for your loved ones? After my own personal struggle to find care, I was inspired to launch Care.com in 2006. Today, we provide trustworthy care options in all 50 states, have more than one million users, and feature thousands of listings—from babysitters to home health aides to special needs tutors.

I am happy to be able to present some of the experiences of our members, our own research, and data from other caregiving organizations to the Administration on Aging as it gathers input from citizens on the Older Americans Act in preparation of Congress reauthorizing or amending the Act for the 2012 fiscal year.

Care.com Applauds the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP)

The NFCSP has been a tremendous help to caregivers across the country as they look after their relatives and loved ones. Last year, caregiver funding helped states serve 600,000 caregivers including nearly 10 million hours of respite care (which is a vital resource for family caregivers) and facilitated over one million connections between caregivers and home care agencies. Often, caregivers like Audra rely on these types of assistance to manage their other responsibilities—work for some, child care for the millions who are in the Sandwich Generation, or a well-deserved break for those who are under stress and simply need rest. Respite care is not only valuable for the care recipients; it is also a much needed resource for part and full-time caregivers.

The Work/Life Impact of Caregiving

Respite care allows workers to work, maintain productivity, and avoid burnout. Nearly 16 million family caregivers are employed full-time¹ and more than one-third of the workforce has had significant elder care responsibilities within the past year². The total annual cost of lost productivity resulting from employees' caregiving responsibilities is estimated at \$33.6 billion or \$2,110 for each caregiver employed full-time according to the *MetLife Caregiving Cost Study: Productivity Losses to U.S. Business*.³

Respite care has benefits for both employees and companies. Employers need to have workers who are focused in order to cut down on losses through absenteeism. And employees who are under pressure at home need the relief respite care provides to help eliminate stress, balance their work/life responsibilities, and be better, more focused workers.

¹ MetLife. [The MetLife Caregiving Cost Study: Productivity Losses to U.S. Business](#). 2006. p. 4

² Families and Work Institute. [National Study of the Changing Workforce](http://www.familiesandwork.org/site/work/workforce/2002nscw.html). 2002. <
<http://www.familiesandwork.org/site/work/workforce/2002nscw.html>>

³ MetLife. [The MetLife Caregiving Cost Study: Productivity Losses to U.S. Business](#). 2006. p 4

The Need for More Funding to Support Family Caregivers

There are approximately 34 million Americans serving as unpaid family caregivers to elderly relatives⁴. In the *State of Care Index, July 2009*, we reported that families who provide care for an elderly relative spend an average of \$5,911 annually. Those in the Sandwich Generation who care for both elderly relatives and children spend \$16,457 annually for child and senior care expenses⁵. That's a cost burden that comes second to paying for housing in most households. However, the inflation-adjusted incomes of both the average middle class family and the average lower-class family have fallen over the past 30 years. Combine those facts with the recession that has increased work hours and decreased pay for many households, and we could soon face a national crisis where families are no longer able to provide the hundreds of billions of dollars worth of unpaid care they currently contribute due to the financial pressures they face.

Thankfully, the White House has recognized the burden these families are under. The Middle Class Task Force, chaired by Vice President Joe Biden, has earmarked \$103 million in the 2011 proposed budget to add to existing elder care resources, respite care, counseling, training, and referral programs. However, it freely admits this funding comes short. A recent announcement from the Task Force read, "Some have said these things are modest. And, to some extent, they are."⁶

At this crucial juncture with the baby boomer population nearing retirement and approaching the time in life where most will rely on family members for at least a portion of their care needs, now is not the time to cut the budget in the Older Americans Act. Rather, we should increase the support we give to families, allowing them to find and pay for the quality respite care and other home-based care options they so desperately need.

Our Proposal

In light the worth of the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), families' needs for respite care to balance work and life, the value respite care has for both caregivers and employers, and the crucial juncture America finds itself in—we propose that this vital program not only be extended, but increased. It is our belief that an increased budget for the NFCSP will help American families in the short term while also laying a foundation for further support and improvements to care for the future.

The budget for the NFCSP over the past four fiscal years have remained relatively flat (in fact, the allotment actually decreased from \$156 million in 2006 to \$154 million in 2009). We believe the program cannot be constrained by a budget that remains stagnant or shrinks at a time when the needs of American families are growing. Rather, we propose that the budget be doubled.

We also ask the Administration on Aging to consider devoting funds in a renewed Older Americans Act to improve the oversight and regulations governing elder care in America. In the same way organizations such as NACCRRRA (the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies) have successfully lobbied for safer standards for child care, we feel the same should be done in the senior care domain. As more Americans age and require in-home care, the U.S. government should respond by further regulating caregiving services, ensuring every older American has access to safe, educated, high-quality care providers.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this information.

Sincerely,
Sheila Lirio Marcelo
Founder and CEO, Care.com

⁴ National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. *Caregiving in the U.S.* Bethesda: National Alliance for Caregiving, and Washington, DC: AARP, 2004.

⁵ Care.com. *State of Care Index, July 2009*. Waltham, MA: Care.com. p. 1 <<http://www.care.com/stateofcare>>

⁶ McSweeney, Terrell. "Caring for Caregivers." *Middle Class Task Force* 28 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/01/28/caring-caregivers>>