

Health

Black caregivers find support in each other

Caregivers and their health

by Destinlee Jaram May 15, 2023



Juanita Brooks Wade and her late mother, Violet Brooks, at an event to celebrate Mothers in 1996, three years before the death of Violet Brooks. (Photo courtesy of Juanita Brooks Wade)

Every morning in his Charlotte home, Jared Rose wakes to feed, medicate and care for his grandfather – a daunting task he shares with his mother.

At age 24, Rose is a full-time caregiver.

His 75-year-old grandfather, Bernie Gaddy, has Alzheimer's disease, a degenerative form of dementia that often leads to death.

Each day, Rose and his mother help Gaddy bathe, eat, take his medications, get dressed and exercise. For them, in-home care was their first and only choice.

"It didn't feel comfortable just leaving him" in a facility," Rose said of the family's decision.

Rose and his mother are among a growing number of Americans providing in-home care for loved ones. And like many caregivers, Rose said he and his mother were unprepared for the challenges they'd face – the sudden changes in their lifestyle that would lead to emotional stress.



"It was a very, very difficult," Rose said, "new experience for the both of us. It just wasn't something we expected at the time."

Why it matters: In North Carolina last year, an estimated 369,000 families chose to provide at-home care for a loved one with dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

Nationwide, caregivers provided 533 million hours of unpaid care valued at \$8 billion, the association reported.

The cost of caregiving

In North Carolina, 18% of dementia caregivers report experiencing poor physical health, according to the Alzheimer's Association.

For Rose, a former college student, the issue boils down to not having time for himself.

"Sometimes it's hard to work out," Rose said. "It's just difficult to get outside the house; you have to pick and choose when you're going to go."

The majority of Rose's schedule revolves around his Gaddy. On average, he said, he spends about six hours a day caring for his grandfather.

"It's affected my interpersonal relationships with people, how I go about, what I do on the weekends," Rose said. "I really don't leave my house until eight o'clock because my granddad gets in bed at that time."

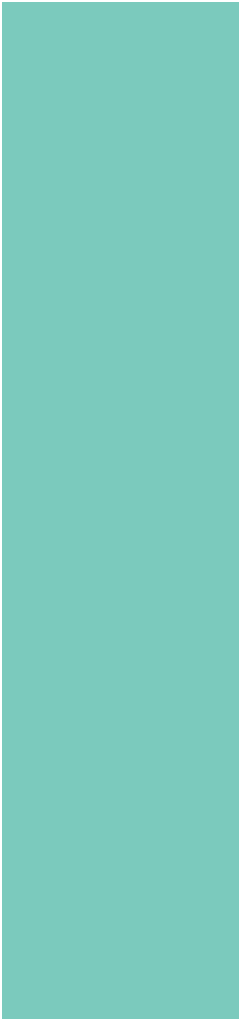
To earn money, Rose said he picks up gig work every now and then.

Chronic conditions

Juanita Brooks Wade, a facilitator with the African American Caregiver Support Group in Charlotte, knows firsthand the toll that caregiving can take.

In the 1990s, Brooks Wade said, she developed Graves' disease, a hyperthyroidism condition, while caring for her mother, Violet Brooks.

"It was really scary. I knew something was wrong," Brooks Wade said. "I couldn't focus on me. Anytime I thought I *should probably get this checked*, I would feel guilty... I just



put it off."

Brooks Wade said she spent half her time working and the other half caring for her mother, who died in 1999.

She said the autoimmune disorder was brought on by stress, but she didn't seek treatment until after her mother's death.

As a result, she said, her treatment was more difficult and she now takes thyroid replacement medication.

Brooks Wade said what happened to her is common among caregivers, who sometimes spend most of their time caring for their loved ones and can't prioritize their own health.

Stronger together

Today, Brooks Wade helps facilitate the only Alzheimer's support group in Charlotte dedicated to Black caregivers.

The group's co-founder, Ashley Stevens, was inspired to help others through her own experience caring for her grandmother and great-grandmother.

"My great-grandma's experience of living with Alzheimer's and caring for her really planted the seed for me and led me to be able to work alongside other caregivers, other Black family caregivers, who look like my own family and need support navigating the disease," Stevens said.

Stevens, who is a certified dementia practitioner, wanted to create a space for Black caregivers to get support and advice.

"We needed a safe space to talk about challenges and other experiences as a Black community," she said.

On the second Wednesday of each month, about 20 members meet to share advice and offer emotional support.

To learn more about the African American Caregiver Support Group, call 202-321-0845.

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Elizabeth Ann Hardin

May 15, 2023 at 2:03 pm

Thanks for this information on the African American Caregiver Support Group. Caregiving for someone is a long, often lonely, challenging journey. I also recommend the Frankie Mae Foundation.

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