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## Aging Network Volunteer Spotlight

### Volunteer Team Reduces Caregivers' Isolation and Stress

**W**ith events such as *Informational Tuesday*, intergenerational *Paint Night Thursdays* and weekend respites, Sandra Gates and Gabriel Lara, volunteer project leaders with the Caring Together, Living Better Program (CTLB) in Maywood, IL, are two busy volunteers! CTLB has partnered with AgeOptions, the local Area Agency on Aging, to provide family caregivers of older adults with resources and support to help them through their caregiving journey.

“With these programs, caregivers feel connected to a larger community of caregivers and they are not alone,” said Gabriel. “They also have access to resources that they never knew about before and they are able to let go of their anxiety.”

Sandra and Gabriel began making voluntary Ministry of Care visits to people who were homebound due to illness in 2014. Their outreach network expanded when a new Health and Wellness committee formed at their parish, St. Eulalia, in 2016. The committee connected with AgeOptions, as they felt it would give them more tools to use to inform and inspire caregivers. With this new partnership, they launched the Caregivers Luncheon/Forum series. The luncheons draw approximately 30-40 caregivers, and cover a variety of timely topics including stress management, estate planning and financial literacy.



Sandra Gates (top) and Gabriel Lara (bottom) volunteer with Caring Together, Living Together Program in Maywood, IL

Volunteers like Sandra and Gabriel design programs to fit the need of the caregivers and provide them with a stress-free outlet for a couple of hours. CTLB has also trained volunteers who are able to visit once a week to give caregivers a break (sometimes called respite care), a much in-demand service.

For Sandra, volunteering “does not only break up the monotony of an otherwise boring week,” but also brings her great pride and satisfaction in encouraging caregivers to keep going. Like most volunteers, Sandra finds she gets as much out of the work as she gives: “When you’re working, you don’t get to really use all of the skills that you might like,” said Sandra. “Volunteering allows me to tap into those skills that have been dormant.”