

May 7, 2014

Keiro Caregiver Conference Equips Over 300 Caregivers from 3 Counties

On April 27, Keiro Senior HealthCare provided resources to over 300 caregivers and future caregivers from Los Angeles, Orange, and Ventura counties at its 17th caregiver conference, held at the Venice Japanese Community Center.

The free Genki Conference: Caregiver's Edition was presented by Keiro and the Westside Conference Organizing Committee, which included members from the Japanese Institute of Sawtelle, Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, Venice Japanese Community Center, Venice Pioneer Project, Venice Santa Monica Free Methodist Church, Westlight Community Church, West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple, West Los Angeles Holiness Church, and West Los Angeles United Methodist Church. It was made possible by the Keiro Endowment Fund with partial funding from the Aratani Foundation and the Takayama Foundation.

"Even though we held a caregiver conference here 12 years ago, we felt strongly that caregivers and the persons being cared for would benefit from another conference," says Jim Miyabe, pastor of Venice Santa Monica Free Methodist Church and chair of the conference organizing committee. "Our vision was to help caregivers, including myself, find tools, resources, and support in their caregiving efforts, so that we can provide the best care for our loved ones."

"Caregiving has become a major issue for many of our church members," says Gary Oba, pastor of West Los Angeles United Meth-



Attendees enjoyed talking with conference keynote speaker and poet Frances Kakugawa (right), who inspired an audience of over 300 caregivers and future caregivers with her caregiving-related poetry and insights.

odist Church and a member of the conference organizing committee. "Keiro knows about caregiving issues and who to call upon for help addressing these issues. We are fortunate to be able to rely on Keiro's expertise and resources in this area."

According to a 2013 study by the Alzheimer's Association, 61 percent of family caregivers rate the emotional stress of caregiving as "high" or "very high." To address this concern, keynote speaker Frances Kakugawa, who spent five years caring for her mother, who had Alzheimer's disease, encouraged listeners with the wisdom she gained from her caregiving journey.

Kakugawa established a poetry and journaling support group for the Alzheimer's Association-Aloha Chapter and is the published author of 11 books.

"Frances Kakugawa's sharing really helped me to remember the compassion for others necessary in this caregiving process," said Emiko Kuwata, who lives in a four-generation household with her mother, grandmother, husband, and children. "I feel empowered now that I attended the conference."

With 87 percent of long-term care provided by unpaid caregivers (according to the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP's "Caregiving in the U.S."), family

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members often experience tension among themselves as they care for a loved one and make caregiving decisions. Keynote speaker Christina Irving, a family consultant with the Family Caregiver Alliance, helped listeners understand family dynamics so that they can communicate more effectively with each other.

“The speaker was informative, and speaking from personal experience, the topic of familial relationship when disaster strikes is undervalued,” said Gayle Miya, whose family had to make some difficult decisions when her mother’s health started failing and her father experienced a stroke soon after. “We all wanted what was best for Mom but had drastically different ideas on what was ‘best.’”

In addition to the speakers, the event included lunch, a resource fair, health screenings by the SCAN Van, pre-scheduled consultations with attorneys (Steven I. Awakuni, Kevin J. Quock, and Richard Yang) and pharmacists (Miyako Kadogawa, Leonard Imada, Gwen Imada, Patsy Matsushita, and Lorraine Shimahara), and a breakout session on various topics, including hands-on caregiving demonstrations, home accessibility and safety, long-term caregiving resources, and health care reform.

“I was so glad to see many acquaintances from the community attend the event,” adds Miya, who attended two previous conferences and volunteered at this event because she found them worthwhile. “I wish more people would take advantage of these opportunities... especially before the need arises. As our community ages, I believe these services will become more and more valuable.”

“The Genki Conference was so beneficial because, first and foremost, it acknowledged and valued the important work of caregivers,” said Lori Tamura, connections pastor at Westlight Community Church and a member of the organizing committee. “It made a world of difference!”

“This conference was an extension of our current efforts to address health priorities in our community,” said Gary Kawaguchi, chair-elect of Keiro’s Board of Directors. “By continuing to work together with local organizations, we look forward to strengthening and



Nearly 150 attendees received a free stroke screening inside the SCAN Van.



Jim Miyabe, pastor of Venice Santa Monica Free Methodist Church and chair of the conference planning committee, and Dianne Kujubu Belli, chief administrative officer of Keiro Senior HealthCare, talked about the critical need for caregiver support in the community.

supporting them, their members, and the community at large.”

Keiro will hold another conference for caregivers (in Japanese) at Wintersburg Presbyterian Church on Saturday, June 7. To register, go to www.keiro.org/genki-conference-wpc or email kkusano@keiro.org with the subject “WPC Conference Registration,” include your name, phone number, mailing address, and indicate if you would like a free attorney consultation. You may also call (323) 326-7602.