

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Luba Routsong, I am a resident of Colchester VT. I have been a school counselor for 26 years and recently I retired.

My husband has Alzeimers. It is a disease that robs him of heart, soul, and body, a disease of perpetual loss and grief. It has no mercy, it destroys careers, relationships, dreams and hopes.

Upon his diagnosis I was overwhelmed with grief, confusion, and anxiety. I knew though I wanted to provide my husband with opportunities to slow the progression of the disease and to be able to maintain some semblance of quality of life.

However what I quickly learned was that it was much easier to access a plumber, electrician, carpenter than it was to access services for Alzeimers in the state of Vermont. In addition to the grief I was experiencing I felt abandoned and hopeless. The exact time my brain should have been operating at an optimal level, it was trudging through mud.

It has taken me a year to find a limited amount of resources. I have found the resources through a multitude of phone calls, friends, a social worker, a peer group for caregivers. I have begged, pleaded, cajoled, and have met numerous kind people. I have learned the best way to get services is to say to everyone I meet, my husband has Alzeimers. I have learned to say No and I have learned to say this is not acceptable. I have learned to create my own resources for my husband .

A piece of advice from the doctor was to keep my husband's brain activated through art, music, reading, socialization , and physical activity.

Here is the dilemma, finding an opportunity that offers the needed accommodations for an individual with Alzheimer's Stage One

MCI, and Dementia. Not only did a resource list not exist but the resources do not exist!

I realized I needed to create resources. I called a facilitator of a Alzheimer's peer group and asked is there an art class for Alzeimers. No there isn't, however the two of us spoke with BCA and requested a grant from Age Well. There will be a small painting class at BCA in September. We will provide 2 caregivers to supervise so participants' caregivers may have a couple of hours of respite. There will be no cost to participants.

My husband wanted to learn to play chess, so a neighbor volunteered to teach him. They play once a week. Another neighbor also volunteered to play with him once a week.

We were having coffee in a local bagel cafe when I spotted a man drinking coffee alone. I asked an employee if she knew him. She stated yes, he came in often and was a very nice man. I, a complete stranger, walked up to him and asked if he would be willing to have coffee once a week with my husband who has Alzheimers. His reaction was to say, "let's go meet him". For three months he and my husband have had coffee once a week for 2 hours. The kindness of strangers.

During this past year I have interacted with many kind folks. I have received help from the Alzheimer's Assn., Age Well, an Elder law attorney, Home Share, and the Memory Center. However it took a village, a year, and many tears of frustration just to find these resources. And still I have to create resources for my husband. I have lived in Vermont for 45 years and have always loved the quality of life. However its support of those with MCI, Dementia, and Alzheimers and their families is lagging. These diseases are not covered by Medicare, there are few funds available to help folks with caregiving, Medicaid Choice is available for residential placement but waiting lists are one to five years. There is no central resource center, the services and resources are far and few between. These people and their families deserve much more.

I urge you to pass S.206, a bill that will begin to address the lack of resources and support in the state of VT for Alzheimers individuals and their caregiving families.

Thank you