

Podcast 103 – Veterans Directed Care

Host: Tania Anderson, CEO ARISE

Guests: Judy Wirt-the spouse of the Air Force Veteran Karl Wirt

Gabrielle VanDuser, Person Centered Counselor, ARISE Veteran Directed Care

TRANSCRIPTION

Tania Anderson 0:09

Welcome to the ARISE Podcast. I'm Tania Anderson, CEO at ARISE. It's my real pleasure to have with me today. Judy Wirt, who is someone who has first hand knowledge and experience with our veterans directed care program. And Bree VanDuser, who is a person centered counselor in that veteran directed care program. So welcome Bree,

Brie VanDuser 0:31

Thank you

Tania Anderson 0:31

And welcome Judy.

Judy Wirt

Thank you.

Tania Anderson

So, our veteran directed care program is relatively new here at ARISE, we did a podcast explaining it, but basically it's something that allows veterans to remain safe and independent in their homes as long as possible. And Bree connects veterans with helps get them set up with a budget and with staffing and with programs and those sorts of things just to achieve the goals that the veterans set. Is that basically how it works for you?

Brie VanDuser 1:02

Yeah. I help coordinate services, like, they identify the services that they want to receive. So, you know, like, if they want to do, like, cleaning services, they can let me know who they want to do that. And we facilitate the process with the VAA in getting that purchase order in place so that those services get billed to a rise rather than the veteran. It comes out of their spending plan.

Tania Anderson 1:25

And most of the in everyone comes out of the Veterans Administration Hospital and with a referral and a budget based on their level of need, and you basically put all those pieces together. And one of the one of the folks that you serve pretty early on. Is Judy and your husband Carl. So Judy, can you just tell us a little bit about Carl?

Judy Wirt 1:48

Yes, he developed dementia probably about two or three years ago, and was able to function for a year maybe two with it, then it became a real problem where he was confused and needed assistance and help. He went to silver fox in Baldwinsville, which was a wonderful thing for his sociability.

Tania Anderson 2:17

That's like a day program.

Judy Wirt 2:18

It is a day program, and did very well there, and was very happy there. He started getting a little more confused, a little more difficult to work with, and it took more of my time and energy to the point where I was getting tired and worn out. And at that time, the VA social worker from my primary his primary doctor there, suggested this new program that had just gone into effect, and it was through ARISE, and they said that he qualified for it. And what this program did was gave me a budget to help with caregivers, his transportation, anything that we needed for him. And that's when I met Bree. She came from ARISE. Everything had to go through ARISE. I didn't have any of the money or anything the budget was done for me by ARISE. And Brie was very good in finding out what I needed the most. What I needed the most at that time were caregivers and somebody to clean. And so, she was very diligent about figuring out the budget for me, and I was able to get caregivers in, and I got a, actually, a cleaning agency that came in every two weeks, which was a big, big help for me.

Tania Anderson 3:58

So, so Carl is how old? Judy Wirt He's 86 Tania Anderson And so this is a few years ago. So he was in his early 80s when you connected with ARISE, and I can only imagine that you just having to bear all of that care for him, keeping up the household and yourself just burden is not the right word, but it was a real drain on you.

Judy Wirt 4:25

It was a drain. And people I spoke to through VA on the phone, doctors and nurses and the social worker, all sensed that I was getting very weary and needed more help.

Tania Anderson 4:40

And of course, that's not good for you. It's also not good for Carl.

Judy Wirt 4:43

No, no, it's not because they sense that too. And they don't want that extra burden on you. There's nothing they can do about it, but they sense that you have an extra burden on you too. So it was a life saver for me to get this in this program. And it was nice not having to worry about the budget or the money or anything. It was taken care of by ARISE.

Tania Anderson 5:11

So, you basically were able to communicate with Brie. This is my situation. These are, this is what I really need help with. And she just, she made it happen for him.

Judy Wirt 5:20

Yep, she did. I really appreciate the organization and the agency. It helped him, and it helped me a lot. I was able to keep him home, until just recently, he took some bad falls and became immobile, okay? And I just couldn't do it anymore, because I couldn't do the lifting. You know, there was also some incontinence there that was difficult, and so I had to start looking for a nursing home for him.

Tania Anderson 6:00

Do you think that because of the VDC program, you were able to put off that transition into a nursing home longer?

Judy Wirt 6:08

Yes, definitely, definitely.

Tania Anderson 6:12

And I can imagine that, from my limited experience of people with dementia, that staying in the home, familiar setting as long as possible, really adds to their quality of life. Did you experience that?

Judy Wirt 6:24

Yeah, it does towards the end, after he took the falls and everything, it was a little different. He didn't seem to like being home, but it was very difficult taking care of him, because he wanted a lot of attention and he didn't seem home. Didn't seem to mean quite so much to him.

Tania Anderson 6:51

And I think that is a progression of the diseases as well.

Judy Wirt 6:55

It is, I believe. But yes, before that, it was so nice having him home and having the care. And even though I was terribly tired, I had people coming in that could help me.

Tania Anderson 7:09

Yeah, can you tell me a little bit about Carl? I mean, he's a veteran, so how did he serve? Where did he serve?

Judy Wirt 7:17

Well, he was a musician. He was in the Air Force band in Washington, DC, and he actually was, he didn't retire from the service. He spent his four years in the service. He did a lot of traveling with the band, even overseas.

Tania Anderson 7:36

When was this? What period of time?

Judy Wirt 19, early, 1960s

Tania Anderson Wow! And what did he play?

Judy Wirt

He played trombone and he also is a semi professional trombone player. He's played in a lot of local groups, and he was a very good trombone player, and he ended up teaching that was his career.

Tania Anderson

That was his career?

Judy Wirt

Yes. So he's had a good life, and met a lot of people, knew a lot of people, and now he's dropped everything like that. He has no interest in his trombone and his music. You know, it's just like he's dropped out. That's kind of sad.

Tania Anderson

I can imagine, because you do hear stories about musicians that think Tony Bennett is the most famous example that even though he struggled with dementia, he was able to recall all the lyrics to all those songs.

Judy Wirt 8:44

Yeah, that did not happen. I did take some harmonica into him the other day, because he plays all that kind of stuff. He actually did play it a little bit, and that made me happy. We kind I kind of sang away with then he put it down, and that was it he didn't want anymore.

Tania Anderson 9:05

Oh, wow. So, people listening to this podcast might be thinking, you know, I don't want I don't want someone in my house. It's my house. It's like, my privacy. I can do it. I can handle it. What would you say to that person?

Judy Wirt 9:24

I would say that maybe I had an inkling of feeling that way myself, but it takes about 10 minutes once you have somebody come in to feel comfortable that that burden isn't completely on you, that they can share that with you. Some of the those that come in are you get a little closer to than others, but you become quite close to them. And I'm a very private person myself, but that did not bother me at all it was, it was something that felt good to have somebody else there to take some of the burden off.

Tania Anderson 10:07

Do you think that by having someone in the house helping you out and improve the quality of time you spent with your husband?

Judy Wirt 10:18

Well, I think so, because I wasn't so tired that way. And of course, he happened to be really good with the person that came in too. It did not bother him. So that makes a difference. He got acquainted with him and it didn't bother him. So, we both would talk to them like they were almost a member of the family. And, yeah, I think it brought more of a closeness to both of us.

Tania Anderson 10:45

And that's a really important point that you just made, that, you know? It's, he's gotta say in this too, in terms of what services and supports and all that sort of thing, and the people right?

Judy Wirt 10:56

Sometimes perhaps they wouldn't want that, you know that he he accepted it so it worked out.

Tania Anderson 11:06

Well, that's wonderful. Is there anything else about your experience through this program that we haven't really touched on, that you'd like to share?

Judy Wirt 11:17

Other than we got in at the very beginning with Brie, and she did a great job. And I think we did a good job too, because it was kind of unorganized at the very beginning, you know. Tania Anderson It was kind of a startup, right? Judy Wirt Yeah, it was a startup.

Tania Anderson 11:32

So, you were the guinea pig.

Judy Wirt 11:34

But it worked out well for well, well for us. I just appreciated someone coming once a month or twice a month and going over the budget and everything. It just took everything off my mind, and she knew if I was under budget or over budget, and if I had a problem or wanted something extra, I could ask her, she take care. She would take care of it. If it was a negative answer, she'd let me know. If it was

positive, she'd let me know. I always, you know, knew I could hear from her. I think probably the most difficult thing was finding the caregivers, and they had to, of course, go through ARISE.

Tania Anderson 12:21

As employees, right? Yeah.

Judy Wirt 12:24

So that was difficult. That was kind of a trial and error, if you could even find them. So that was most difficult for both of us to get the caregivers.

Tania Anderson 12:35

And I think that's pretty universal right now, isn't it?

Judy Wirt 12:38

I'm running into the same thing at the nursing home. I mean, as far as some caregivers you can count on and some you can't.

Tania Anderson 12:47

Well, and unfortunately, that's sort of how our world is shaping up, I think sometimes. But I want to ask you, Brie, what did you learn from working with Judy and Carl?

Brie VanDuser 13:00

Well, I mean, with all of my folks, like, it's always a collaboration and effective communication is, like, truly, the most key point of this program. You know, it really means a lot when I hear me when my folks say, they don't have enough good things to say about me!

Tania Anderson

Of course, who doesn't like to hear that!

Brie VanDuser

Like it means a lot to me.

Tania Anderson 13:24

I hear the passion and the work that you do every day, Brie, and how important it is, and I see the impact and talking with you, Judy, and I just thank you for sharing your story with me, with us!

Judy Wirt 13:37

And thank you for having me. I appreciate coming as I said, this is out of my comfort zone, too. But if it helps anybody, that's good.

Tania Anderson 13:45

It does help people to know they're not alone. There is help out there, and we'll, you know, keep our loved ones safe and in the in their homes as long as we possibly can. And keeping caregivers like you is to give you as much support as we possibly can and just hang in there. Thank you. We wish Carl the best. And, wish you the best! And thank you Bree for what you do.

Brie VanDuser

Thank you.