

**ACAPcommunity: Meeting the Needs of Adult-Child Caregivers**

**in Western North Carolina**

ACAPcommunity’s mission is to provide information, resources, support, and community to adult-child caregivers so that they may better “care for their aging parents and for themselves”. ACAPcommunity was initially envisioned by Frances Hall in 2010, began offering programs to the public in 2012, and is now being expanded by Frances and Jane Everson into a non-profit organization.

ACAPcommunity is a nationally unique organization that is located in Hickory, North Carolina. Beginning in 2015, ACAPcommunity plans to expand statewide and nationally with the development of local chapters. Currently, ACAPcommunity’s initial chapter, ACAP-Hickory has nearly 500 people on its distribution list. ACAP-Hickory is meeting the needs of adult-child caregivers in Western North Carolina by offering educational programs with an average attendance of 45 caregivers each month. ACAPcommunity has identified six core curriculum modules[[1]](#footnote-1) and monthly program topics are selected from the modules based on community needs and priorities. Each program is facilitated by experts in issues of aging and/or family caregiving, and is offered at no-cost to caregivers.

In early 2014, ACAPcommunity leaders surveyed program participants in order to learn more about their backgrounds, experiences and needs with caregiving and with ACAPcommunity. Sixty-one (61) ACAP-Hickory program participants responded to the survey, and their responses underscore both the tremendous need for ACAPcommunity and its unique services and benefits[[2]](#footnote-2).

A recent Gallup poll found that caregiving is a primary task for mid-life adults in the United States; 72 percent of caregivers surveyed care for a parent and/or other family member. Seventy percent of the caregivers are aged between 50-64, that is, adults in their prime career years. Seventy percent of working caregivers report work-related difficulties as a result of their caregiving responsibilities.

In Western North Carolina, ACAP-Hickory respondents have similar experiences: sixty-four percent of participants (39/61) provide care for one or both parents, eighteen percent (11/61) care for one or two in-laws, and eight percent (5/61) care for a spouse or other family member. A small but intriguing number, eleven percent (7/61) attend because they care about healthy aging for themselves. An additional eleven percent (7/61) participants attend because they are professional caregivers.

Seventy-seven percent of participants (47/61) are working-age adults, between the ages of 25 and 65 years of age; twenty-three percent (14/61) are 65 years of age or older. Seventy percent (43/61) are working full-or part-time, nineteen percent (12/61) are not in the workforce because of caregiving responsibilities, eighteen percent (11/61) are retired, and six percent (4/61) are seeking work.

The Gallup poll found that sixty-eight percent of responding caregivers are female. In Western North Carolina, eighty-two percent (50/61) of respondents are female and eighteen percent (11/61) are male.

ACAPcommunity is meeting the needs of a large region of Western North Carolina with its ACAP-Hickory chapter: sixty-eight percent (41/60) of participants reside in Catawba County, but thirty-two percent (19/60) of participants attend from adjacent counties including Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Iredell, and McDowell. One respondent (1/61), visiting her family in Western North Carolina, noted that she lived in Tennessee and hoped that ACAP would expand into her state.

At the time of the survey, forty-seven percent (29/61) respondents were attending their first ACAP presentation, but forty-one percent (25/61) had attended two or more ACAP presentations and eleven percent (7/61) had attended five or more programs since it was opened to the public in 2012.

The Gallup poll found that caregivers experience stress at work and/or at home and sixty-nine percent have made career decisions in order to meet their caregiving responsibilities. Nineteen percent (12/61) of ACAP-Hickory respondents noted that they are either not working or are working part-time because of their responsibilities as a caregiver.

The Gallup poll cites the cost of these responsibilities to businesses: the cost of caregiving in terms of lost productivity to United States businesses is estimated to be between $17.1 and $33 billion annually.

ACAP-Hickory is helping caregivers with both their caregiving responsibilities and their career responsibilities, but the need for more assistance remains substantial. One hundred percent (61/61) of ACAP-Hickory survey respondents agree that they have learned new information

about caregiving as a result of attending ACAP-Hickory programs, eighty-three percent (51/61) agree that they have learned new skills, and eighty percent (49/61) agree that they have learned about new resources.

ACAP-Hickory participants are also benefitting from shared community with other caregivers. Eighty-two percent (50/61) agree that they have met other caregivers who offer them support. As a result of attending ACAP-Hickory, eighty-five percent (52/61) feel more confident, eighty-five percent (51/60) feel less anxious, and sixty-four percent (32/50) feel more balanced at work and/or at home.

ACAP-Hickory is fulfilling its mission and is meeting the needs of adult-child caregivers of aging parents and other family members in Western North Carolina with monthly educational programs. The Gallup poll data and the ACAPcommunity survey data underscore the tremendous need for additional program topics, additional training formats and expanded chapter locations and services. ACAPcommunity's vision is to continue to assess and meet these needs through validation of the core modules and program topics, additional chapters in other communities, additional training formats[[3]](#footnote-3), and additional evaluative research.

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1. *ACAPcommunity’s core modules are: 1) Psychological and Developmental Aspects of Aging; 2) Health, Medical, and Community Services Information; 3) Financial and Legal Aspects of Aging; 4) Housing and Transportation Options; 5) Family Dynamics of Aging; and 6) Managing Alzheimer’s and Dementia.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *The data cited in the following section may not always total to 59 responses as some respondents chose to answer only portions of the survey, and for some questions, multiple responses were allowed.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *ACAPcommunity currently offers monthly podcasts, “The Caregiver Community” which may be downloaded at the www.theMESH.tv or from Apple i-Tunes* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)