

Mother-Daughter Team's New Venture Helps Care for Aging Parents

Adel Buff '15 and her mother, former Maimonides School teacher Katerina Sherman, have co-founded an organization called ElderCareCompass. But they emphasize that "we are not concentrating on the population over 75."

"At the forefront of our work is offering comprehensive support to caregivers navigating the complexities of caring for the older generation," Katerina explained.

"For the past five years we have been dealing with my parents' issues: Medical, financial,

"We found many people in the same boat, everyone reinventing the wheel for themselves," she continued. This led to the creation of ElderCareCompass, a platform that not only aims to support caregivers but also embodies the Jewish value of *chesed* (kindness), "extending compassion and assistance to both the elderly and those who care for them."

The concept, Adel explained, is "to create a place where caregivers can get some emotional support, and get answers to their

questions, try to give them options." ElderCareCompass is a manifestation of *chesed*, Katerina said, "toward the elderly and to those struggling with what every one of us goes through."

The mission of ElderCareCompass is stated on elder-carecompass.org as, "Through empowering education, meaningful connections, and comprehensive resources, we strive to equip caregivers with the tools and confidence needed to navigate their caregiving journey. Our organization is committed

to honoring and valuing the vital role of adult children as caregivers, promoting their resilience, and enhancing the quality of life for both them and their beloved parents."

"We aim to provide a supportive network that fosters knowledge-sharing, emotional well-being, and practical guidance," Katerina explained. "We get them in touch with professionals who can be instrumental in their journey. We have financial counseling, legal professionals who deal with estates – a network of experts who are dealing with different aspects of caring for the elderly."

Adel noted that there are resources page on the website.

One central feature is an eclectic series of evening presentations – from describing Alzheimer's to state funding for home care to

alternative medicines, including marijuana, for the elderly. Many of the talks "are by colleagues or friends of ours who have been doing this over the years and are happy to share their knowledge," said Adel. She added that they will consider ideas from former students and colleagues.

"We have built a solid network of people in every field, and we are expanding the list," Katerina said. "We are also trying to align with more psychologists, because a lot of adult caregivers have changing relationships with aging parents. There's a lot of psychological trauma."

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, they said, the need for such a platform has intensified, with ElderCareCompass responding by enhancing its offerings to support the increased challenges caregivers face. Adel said she wrote a thesis in graduate school on "changes in cognitive well-being due to isolation from families. Certain people didn't see their parents at all, and then there were people who 'hell-or-high-water' would see them." Katerina added, "You can clearly see the difference with people who were isolated."

As a certified nonprofit, ElderCareCompass is actively seeking public support and applying for grants to ensure that its services remain free and accessible.

The mother-daughter team has professional responsibilities of their own. Adel, who received her undergraduate degree from the University of New Hampshire, earned a master's in speech-language pathology last spring from Northeastern University and is working in that field with the elderly in nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities. Katerina, who taught high-school science at Maimonides School from 2000 to 2010, is a private tutor.

The proprietors are using social media and word-of-mouth to inform people about their services. "We initially were addressing needs of the Russian-speaking Jewish community and realized quickly that there are lots of people from different communities in the same boat, so our target audience expanded," Katerina related.

"Families and caregivers can call us directly and ask us for advice," Adel said. "In no situation are you alone." 🐾



Katerina Sherman (left) and Adel Buff '15

insurance, everything. They were each at different stages, physically and mentally. It was pretty much a full-time job for both of us," Katerina related.

"It was a very lonely, long, and emotionally draining journey," she said. "Figuring out all the details of their care was excruciatingly difficult because there's not a single resource that can guide you, and you literally have to ask around and go out on your own."

Katerina said when her children were small, "we had books about what to expect, about child development, what you should be looking for. Now there should be some kind of a guide that explains to grown children what are the normal and abnormal signs of aging."