Financial Lifelines

Family Reach is providing direct access, lodging and expanded financial navigation services to people with cancer.

June 15, 2020 By Bob Barnett

Family Reach, a national nonprofit organization based in Boston, has been helping people with cancer pay their bills for 25 years. Its staffers normally work through a network of oncology social workers and patient navigators at 440 hospitals across the country.

“They tell us about a family in trouble and let us know how we can help,” says Family Reach CEO Carla Tardif. That assistance may mean arranging for free access to a certified financial planner, providing financial education and paying direct grants to vendors to cover bills such as rent, mortgage and car loans. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many of these hospital workers were overwhelmed, so Family Reach pivoted. Among the changes:

Direct access. Anyone can now go directly to the website and fill out an application (https://familyreach.org/family-eligibility). “We don’t have funds for everyone,” admits Tardif, “but we can help. We can do the research that our cancer patients may not be able to do.”

Lodging. Family Reach already had a small program with the Hilton corporation to provide lodging for people in treatment, and now it’s been expanded.

Expanded financial navigation services. Through its network of pro bono certified financial planners, Family Reach can help individuals deal with their financial stress more effectively. That planning can help people not only financially but emotionally, says Tardif.

“All the financial and other fears that people with cancer have are magnified by this pandemic,” she says. “We can help you find resources. It might be a financial plan, a way to manage debt and credit cards. We’ll help you understand what is in your control and what you can do.” Her advice: “Speak up. Don’t be ashamed. You did not fail your family; the system failed you. Reach out early so we can give you all the tools you need. You are not alone.”

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