



Stacy Sinclair was 15 years old when her mother Christine was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Christine had been working as a hairdresser and experiencing symptoms for a while, but it took almost three years to get the diagnosis. With the family already supporting Stacy's younger brother Matthew who has Down syndrome and Stacy planning to leave for college, they faced several challenges. Christine's diagnosis caused her to fall into a deep depression.

With her symptoms taking a toll, Christine was only able to work two more years. Stacy went away to college, but moved home afterward and now lives around the corner so that she can help her father Marc care for her mom and her brother. Christine stayed fairly mobile for quite some time, but in early 2013 after being hospitalized for an infection, she lost the ability to walk—vastly increasing the amount of support she needs to get through the day. Now, every morning, Stacy, Marc or Matthew (depending on the day) spend about two hours getting Christine out of bed, bathing her, helping her in the restroom and feeding her. Matthew or (when he is working at a local deli) a nurse stays with Christine during the day and assists her with eating and other daily activities. In the evening, the bathing and feeding routine is repeated before Christine goes to bed. These hours do not account for the assistance Christine needs taking her medications and doing everyday things like writing and paying bills.

The Sinclair family's lives center around Christine and her care. While it is a lot, they provide care willingly so Christine can stay home with the people she loves. She was able to qualify for Medicare early on, but since Medicare does not cover long-term services and supports, the family experienced financial strain paying out-of-pocket for a nurse to come twice a week while Matthew worked. Only very recently was Christine approved for Medicaid. Scouring the Internet for any possible assistance, Stacy's grandmother Susan ran across the Virginia Lifespan Respite Voucher Program. The family applied for and was approved for a Lifespan Respite voucher that will support 16-18 hours of respite. Typically Stacy would step in to give her father and brother a break, but with the respite voucher, the entire family can have respite and run errands and hopefully even do something enjoyable like attend a car show.

Having a mom with MS and a brother with Down syndrome is "always tough," Stacy says but she quickly continues that she never feels sorry for herself because "people with disabilities deserve the same quality of life as anyone else." She and the rest of her family will do whatever they can to make that happen. They have had to educate and advocate for themselves but Stacy urges other families caring for loved ones, "Don't give up hope. There is help like the Lifespan Respite Voucher Program out there."

Since 2009, Lifespan Respite grants have supported better coordination and delivery of services to family caregivers like Stacy in 30 states and the District of Columbia. Vouchers to help family caregivers pay for respite are or will soon be made available in a few other states, and the program needs ongoing funding. Our nation's more than 60 million family caregivers save our government \$450 billion annually and – perhaps more importantly – enable loved ones to stay at home surrounded by their support networks and connected to their communities. That is exactly the hope that keeps families like the Sinclairs going.