

Who'll care for my kid when I'm gone?



DONNA DOUGLAS
COMMUNITY SECRETS

For most of us, hugging our kids goodbye and sending them out into the world is momentous, exciting, expected.

Roots and Wings. That's what we're here for. Birth them. Love them. Raise them. Coach them. Point the way. And then get out of the way. Let them go.

For most of us.

Caring for kids is a big enough job in itself.

Caring for kids with a disability is a whole world unto itself. I know from good friends in this situation that the concern about care rules life from Day 1. But the worry gets much greater as the parent(s) age.

Who is going to take care of my child? Will there be enough money? Will there be a person who loves my kid enough to give them what I give them when I'm gone.

My friend has two 'adult' daughters with Down syndrome. Another friend has a teenager with severe

autism. Another is looking at her strapping son who is learning how to socialize through Pat O'Connor's valuable program, but he is non-verbal and people often react to him with fear.

So, the day-to-day issues can be daunting. But the real nightmare of worry happens when the parent thinks about the day they move into a nursing home themselves, or have a stroke, or die. Who, then, will care for their kid?

Karen Roy says the educational curve is steep and people often get just bits of information from lawyers and chartered banks.

"There are so many ins and outs, nuances to the programs," she says.

What happens when a disabled child turns 65 and hasn't paid into the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) or a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP)? And their disability payments come to an end? Parents can create their kid's pension plan, with some government money thrown in to the pot.

Karen is one of those parents. Her son is a special-needs kid, and she is acutely aware of the minefield of social services that are out there and

how difficult it is to find out about them and to access them. She also knows the worry for the parent of a child with special needs. Because she works in the financial field, Karen also knows about all the financial supports that are out there for families. She knows about wills and beneficiaries and how to leave money to a child without getting taxed for that.

She knows about experts who can help parents design a future for their child that has as much support as possible.

She knows about special funds, monthly support payments, help that parents can apply for.

Parents tell me: "I didn't know what I didn't know," she says. "I do something nobody else does... I help them complete the application for a disability tax credit. I help them reach back a decade to receive money. I help them write those letters to Canada Revenue. We talk about their wills and I refer them to a lawyer with expertise in this area."

Frequently a guest speaker at support and community groups, Karen is also holding her own workshop next week to help people with the confusing, conflicting information

that is often never given when people are seeking help.

When I saw the flyer promoting Karen's Workshop next Wednesday, April 12, about financial planning for special-needs kids, I was intrigued. What a great workshop service for worried parents!

Karen gets it. She understands how exhausting it is to raise a special-needs child, how at the end of the day there is no time, no energy, no advice for moving forward. For over 25 years she has been working in the retirement income field and because of her own situation, she's chosen to specialize in special needs planning.

Karen tries to offer this workshop twice a year and says participants will come away with increased accurate knowledge about many areas that will help them plan for a financially secure future for their child with a disability. They'll get advice. They'll get an advocate in Karen. They'll learn about resources that are available to them. They'll receive application forms and specific information about what Canada Revenue provides.

Registered Disability Savings

Program... a federal program that many parents never learn about.

Trust funds for the special-needs child.

Monthly incomes for that child as they reach adult age.

Available grant money and bond money, often tax-free.

Coaching people to reach back and access money from missed years.

Options for care.

There is so much available but there's no one place where parents can find it all.

Until now.

Next Wednesday, April 12, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 pm

Suite Success at ESS Direct, 411 Huuronia Rd., at Big Bay Point Road.

Space is limited so you have to register. You can do that through Karen's website at www.spectrum-financial.ca or by calling 705-725-0562.

Cost? Free.

Thanks, Karen.

Donna Douglas is a Barrie writer.

You can read 21 years of her columns on her website at www.donnadouglas.com. You can reach her at donna@donnadouglas.com.