

Among highlights at this summer's annual Night of 100 Women was a wellness space for caregivers to decompress and practice self-care.

LIGHTENING THE LOAD

Support Shown for Working Caregivers

By Symone C. Skrzycki

It's after 5 p.m., and their workday is just starting.

Assigned to the night shift? Not these employees. They've already put in a day's work at the office. Their evening responsibilities aren't tied to an official job, but the stakes are just as high – higher even – since they revolve around caring for loved ones.

It's a scenario that employees – and their employers – are increasingly facing as the former struggle to balance their careers and caregiving tasks.

According to the Women's Foundation of Indiana's 2024 "State of Women in Central Indiana Report," roughly one in four Hoosier women provide care for someone with an illness or disability and spend twice as much time as men caregiving each day.

As employers broaden their focus on enhancing their teams' mental and physical health, many are implementing programs to bridge the gap between careers and caregiving.

The mission of Cariloop, for instance, is to help relieve the stress and anxiety felt by caregivers. Headquartered in Richardson, Texas, it supports over two million employees worldwide.

"Forty-two percent of caregivers (participating in a Cariloop survey) have challenges such as insufficient caregiving support, workplace stigma and unpredictable interruptions to their work on a day-to-day basis," reflects chief commercial officer Lisa Leighton.

"They report missing an average of 1.2 workdays per month because they have caregiving obligations and that leads to $17.5 billion in lost wages every month across our country," she states. "It's not just an individual caregiving challenge. This is an economic challenge – and we need solutions. It's in every employer's best interest to make an investment in this type of a solution because they're leaving money on the table."

Making an impact

Employers such as the University of Notre Dame are prioritizing the needs of caregiving workers. All students, staff and faculty have free access to the Calm app. It features meditation, music to help sharpen focus or fall asleep, daily movement exercises, education series (parenting, new managers, etc.) and more.

Individuals also can utilize Notre Dame's employee assistance program through AllOne Health.

"They can help with mental health," comments Notre Dame director of benefits and well-being Rachel Otwinowski. "We always try to focus on, 'We know you're dealing with a lot, and we know caregiving (obligations) are very important, but don't forget to also take care of yourself.' That's so important."

Notre Dame hired a family services consultant, Maureen Baska, in 2023.

"She spends her day working on caregiving programs, benefits and helping people through any type of caregiving situation – whether it's childcare or elder care," Otwinowski notes. "She also does one-on-one consultations with anyone who has caregiving needs. It might be someone who has a first-time pregnancy, and they don't know what maternity leave looks like. She'll walk them through that. And recently, (for example), she met with someone whose mother is dealing with some health issues and lives out in New York. So, she's helping that person through, 'What are my leave options? What are resources we have?' "

Speaking from experience

Women's Foundation of Indiana is a nonprofit that invests in women and girls through grantmaking, advocacy and research.

President Tamara Winfrey-Harris is passionate about giving females a voice and helping close the gap between caregiving responsibilities and career opportunities.

"I'm caretaking a husband with early-onset dementia," she shares. "He can't be alone, so he needs regular care. That would be very hard for any family to do. I'm very lucky that I actually lead my organization and (am in this) sector. All of those things provide a little

bit of flexibility. I don't have to come in in the morning and punch a clock. I don't know how most families would handle that. I can't imagine doing this and having to work two jobs or also having to care for small children."

Women's Foundation of Indiana's annual Night of 100+ Women, held in June, was centered on caregiving. Attendees reflected on their experiences and their perceptions of what effective support would look like.

"I really don't think our society and community is set up to support caretaking," Winfrey-Harris asserts. "It's a burden that women mostly carry because they tend to be assumed – and assigned to be – the caregivers."

In 2026, the Women's Foundation of Indiana is hosting 11 statewide listening sessions. Locations are in Anderson, Bedford, Evansville, Fort Wayne, Franklin, Gary, Indianapolis, Jeffersonville, Lafayette, South Bend and Terre Haute.

"We get about 75 women together for table discussions," Winfrey-Harris describes.



The on-site KinderCare childcare center serves more than 100 Notre Dame families in South Bend.

"What's one thing we could change to help women thrive? What are the issues that you're seeing? What are the community organizations that are doing great work and service to women and girls? And we share some data on their county, so they know what's happening there."

Finding solutions

Cariloop's services range from fertility planning and childcare to eldercare and end-of-life planning. At its heart is the caregiver support platform.

"You have the ability to invite other people (such as siblings and other family members) into the platform to collaborate with you," Leighton observes. "And we have a team of licensed and certified care coaches that help you navigate your caregiving journey.

"An employee can open a case for anyone they're caring for. Oftentimes, we'll see our members open a case for mom and dad. Or they open a case for one of their kiddos. And they're able to open up a case for themselves. So, we're not just helping people care for others. We're encouraging people to care for themselves as well."

Notre Dame has partnered with Cariloop since 2024.

"We always recommend our employees connect with Cariloop in any caregiving situation, but specifically if they're dealing with eldercare issues," Otwinowski shares. "If they're looking for long-term care facilities, (for example), the care coach can do all of that vetting, gather background information and provide that to the family to kind of sift through. They can help with legal advice. They do the same thing with childcare situations as well."

Leighton emphasizes, "If you think about reasons employees need to take a leave of absence or step away from their job for a period of time – which in turn impacts productivity and economic impact – the root cause of almost every single leave of absence is caregiving, whether you're caregiving for yourself or you're caregiving for someone else.

"So, when you think about it from that perspective, instead of treating the symptoms (e.g., burnout, anxiety, sleep deprivation and quiet quitting), let's treat the root cause. Let's give people the resources and the support they need so you have a productive and thriving workforce and they're healthy and they're focused and they're able to show up."

Navigating the journey

In July 2025, Notre Dame partnered with KinderCare – the nation's largest childcare and early education provider – to open an on-site childcare center for Notre Dame families.

"Childcare in general is lacking everywhere," Otwinowski remarks. "It's really difficult in our area. We've had a childcare center on campus since the '90s. It starts at age two. KinderCare takes ages six weeks to five years. We focus heavily on infants. You have to be either a student or staff member or faculty member at the university to be eligible to use the center."

Another caregiver resource is an adoption reimbursement benefit available to all full-time employees who have been with Notre Dame for at least one year.

Reflecting on Notre Dame's supportive caregiving policies, Otwinowski says, "I feel like it all comes down to the Catholic mission of the university – and family is really kind of at the center of that. Even if you look at how many of our benefit plans are structured and set up, they're very family focused in general. It's always been kind of the nuclear family, but we have started to shift that over the last several years by adding in different programs and understanding that someone's family – in quotes – might not just be their spouse and their children. They might have parents living with them (for instance).

"Notre Dame, in general, is trying to create a supportive culture and make sure that our employees are well taken care of. That again extends to (not only) taking care of themselves but also taking care of their families."

Leighton points to the positive impact prioritizing employee well-being has on employers.

"I'm hearing from all of the incredible HR partners we work with. They'll say to me, 'Thank you for (your work with us).' (That's because) when you're able to provide this kind of support through someone's most challenging moments – some of their darkest days – and when you add this level of high-touch support and that experience to guide them through, you've got an employee for life. That builds loyalty in a way that other benefits simply don't."

RESOURCES: Lisa Leighton, Cariloop, at cariloop.com | Rachel Otwinowski, University of Notre Dame, at www.nd.edu | Tamara Winfrey-Harris, Women's Foundation of Indiana, at inwomensfoundation.org