

The New London Barn Playhouse received an arts in health grant from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts to continue and expand their Improv for Caregivers program.

Improv for Caregivers, a communication workshop series for those who care for loved ones with dementia and Alzheimer's, began as a request from a Barn Playhouse patron who saw a need for caregiver connections and strategies in the community. After a pilot program last spring in partnership with Lake Sunapee Region VNA & Hospice, the Barn Playhouse will offer a series of eight monthly Improv for Caregivers workshops starting this October. The new program will incorporate guest speakers who specialize in different areas of caregiving, social events for caregiver networking and support, and workshops in Newport and Claremont.

Each improv workshop session combines insight from healthcare professionals with improvisational theatre techniques, with a goal of developing new communication skills, strategies to cope with stress, flexibility in relationships, and an understanding of loved ones' changing perspectives. With guidance from the VNA and caregivers in the community, the team of actors prepare short scenarios that portray situations caregivers commonly face, such as preparing for appointments, sundowning, taking away car keys, and hallucinations. Throughout the performance of these scenarios, actors pause to take suggestions from the audience, acting out different strategies in real time. Each scenario is followed by a discussion, where caregivers in the audience can share their own related experiences, successes, and challenges. Workshops typically end with a conversation about caregiver self-care and an opportunity for participants to ask the healthcare professionals questions.

The new Improv for Caregivers series will include the same improv workshop model with new scenarios, as well as guest speakers and social events. A full schedule with dates and times will be announced in mid-September, but the monthly breakdown is set:

- October: Improv workshop at the Barn Playhouse Fleming Center with a guest speaker who specializes in Ergonomics
- November: Support group session in partnership with the Council on Aging with a discussion led by caregiver Marcia Goulart
- December: Improv workshop at the Barn Playhouse Fleming Center with a guest speaker from the Alzheimer's Association
- January: Improv workshop at the First Congregational Church in Claremont
- February: Improv workshop at the Barn Playhouse Fleming Center with a guest speaker who specializes in nutrition
- March: Social lunch event at the Barn Playhouse Fleming Center for caregivers AND their loved ones with dementia and Alzheimer's
- April: Improv workshop in Newport with a guest speaker who specializes in memory care
- May: Improv workshop at the Barn Playhouse Fleming Center to wrap up the series, connect with caregivers, and gather feedback for future programming

Thanks to the grant, all of the upcoming Improv for Caregivers programs will be free of charge. Space is limited, though, so participants will still be asked to RSVP on the Barn Playhouse website. If any of the sessions reach max capacity, there will be a waitlist.