

Irving's Carole Larkin Serving Patients, Caregivers, and Dealing with Dementia

by Mark Miller

If you or a loved one are diagnosed with some form of dementia, you'll naturally have a wide range of questions of what lies ahead and thanks to Irving resident and Dallas business owner Carole Larkin, you can receive all the answers in one place.

Larkin's Third Age Services provides education and knowledge for dementia patients, their families and professionals who come into close contact with them. The 62-year-old Philadelphia native first became a geriatric care manager in 2004 after earning her Master of Applied Gerontology degree with a specialty in aging services from the University of North Texas. "Most people have loved ones with them at home so one part is to talk to them at home," said Larkin, whose first business was to directly help affected people in DFW. "The next is for those who are too far away so they call a professional." Thanks to technology, that can be through telephone, email or Skype consultations which Larkin began this spring. At the same time, she began a business to teach health care professionals through a program called Virtual Dementia Experience.

"What Virtual does is teach people how to walk in the shoes of someone who has dementia but also is a way to separate the people who have compassion from those who just do it to have a job," she said. "The experience is such that we put tinted goggles on you to give you tunnel vision. We put inserts in your shoes with spikes in them to reflect people who have neuropathy. We have special gloves so their hand-eye coordination doesn't work and they become clumsy. There are ear phones with so much noise and stimulation that it disconcerts people and annoys and confuses them. "We also give them five tasks to do, normal things that caregivers have to do. When you have all this junk on you go from normal to what are supposed to do?"

Currently Larkin presents the Virtual Dementia Experience on-site at the companies that hire her. But she soon hopes to take that to the Dallas headquarters of the American Federation of the Blind where a mock house shows the latest technology for people to get around. Larkin also writes articles for www.alzheimersreadingroom.com, one of the subject's biggest blogs. And she includes a wealth of information and resources on her www.thirdageservices.com website which includes information on her consultation fees and services.