New York Corps Rethinks Value Of Family Care

April 2015

A group of New York executives has opened discussions it hopes will lead companies to reevaluate the importance of the unpaid army of people who’ve always provided person-centered care: family members.

“There are more than 67.5 million family caregivers in this country,” says Greg Johnson, an ordained minister and director of community outreach for EmblemHealth. “The valuation of the labor is over $500 billion. If we were paying these people, it would be more than Medicare and Medicaid combined. They are an enormous resource. And they need our support.”

In February, Johnson convened what he’s calling the Corporate Leadership Council of New York’s Partnership for Family Caregiving Corps. The Corps was founded by Johnson and EmblemHealth in 2012; Johnson says he wanted to bring the C-suite into the conversation, because “everyone is a family caregiver, sooner or later,” but also because he thought he had a business case to make for changing the culture around family caregivers.

Among those who attended the leadership meeting Feb. 25 were executives from Condé Nast, CVS, Johns Hopkins University, Tanenbaum, HealthCorps, and the Global Coalition on Aging.

“We want to create a work environment where people are allowed to say, ‘Look I’m a caregiver and my life is very difficult and I may need flexibility,’” Johnson says. “The caregiver knows what it’s doing to them, but the businesses may not know what it’s doing to their employees.”

Paid leave or lost productivity (or both) cost big American businesses anywhere between $17 billion and $38 billion every year, Johnson estimates. EmblemHealth and Johnson have come up with a set of guidelines for executives to think about as they try to create a culture that supports family caregiving. The program has started in New York, but Johnson says he’s confident it’s portable.

In fact, he’s hoping for a little of that famed New York cachet to help ensure the idea spreads. “If you say an American corporation is doing this, everyone respects it. But if you say, a New York corporation is doing this, everyone wants to get in on it,” he says.

The first step, Johnson says, is to recognize the problems of family caregivers. “What I have done, and what the partnership is doing, is to give a name to this,” he says.

“It’s one of those things that people don’t talk about. In so doing, we will help the employee to be a far better employee. And we think it will affect the bottom line. Who can multitask better than a caregiver? Who can adapt better to changing realities than a caregiver? Caregivers are unbelievably resilient people. We want that in business,” Johnson says.