

Agency for Change Podcast: Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger, Gerontologist and Caregiving Advocate, Home Instead

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Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 0:00

Be sure to take good care of yourself while you care for others.

Announcer: 0:07

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:30

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. I'm so glad you're joining us today. For this episode, I'm really excited to speak with Dr Lakelyn Eichenberger, a passionate gerontologist and caregiving advocate at Home Instead. We'll dive in and explore the vital role of caregiving support, the challenges and rewards of aging issues and the impact of gerontology education, something we don't think about very often. I know that Lakelyn is really an advocate for family caregivers and helping older folks embrace and enjoy the aging process, so I'm looking forward to hearing more about these subjects in our conversation. Lakelyn, welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 1:22

Thank you so much for having me, Lyn. It is a pleasure to be here.

Lyn Wineman: 1:26

I am looking forward to this conversation, and Home Instead is so well known as a brand throughout the country, but I'd love to start by having you tell us more about Home Instead.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 1:38

I would love to. Home Instead we are, as you mentioned, across the entire United States. We're actually a global organization. We're in 12 countries, but we started in Omaha, Nebraska 30 years ago. We just celebrated our 30th anniversary and so we provide in-home care.

A lot of people especially when we first started Home Instead, the only option was really a nursing home or to have family come along and help an older adult age in their own home. But a lot of people you know we've seen shifts in demographics and people are working. Maybe they don't have the capacity to care for their loved ones, and so hiring a service like home care can really come alongside a family and provide extra support. So we can provide things like bathing, restroom assistance, grooming, like housekeeping, meal preparation and also do things like transportation. And then we have specialized care for Alzheimer's and dementia at home Also we call them stay with clients, stay with a client through end of life and support them if they're on hospice. So really it's a personalized service at a time in a person's life when they might just need a little extra help and support or the family might need a little break from this very important role as a family caregiver and we can just come alongside the family and be that extra set of hands along that journey.

Lyn Wineman: 3:08

I love that. As you say this, I have vivid memories of one of my great grandmothers moving into my grandparents' house, kind of even as a child, it witnessed the stress that put on the family because she had some special needs that they were none of us were equipped to deal with, or another great grandmother that moved from daughter to daughter to daughter to daughter, and how disruptive that must have been to be in a different environment every month. So I love how this service line has evolved and how Home Instead has jumped out to take the lead in this space as well. So let's talk a little bit more about how these services help families, they help individuals, but they actually really enhance independence and quality of life for older adults. Let's talk more about that. Who doesn't want their mom or their dad or their grandma or their grandpa or their aunt or uncle to have more independence and a greater quality of life?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 4:12

Absolutely Well, and independence, especially here in the States, is something that we all cling to.

Lyn Wineman: 4:17

In the Midwest, especially right, Absolutely.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 4:23

And we don't want ever to take that away from someone. We really want to enhance their quality of life, to help them stay as independent for as long as possible. So sometimes people think, well, if I have a service that comes in to help me, or if I admit that I need help, then I'm going to, you know, admit that I'm no longer independent. I don't see it that way. I think our care professionals, who are trained to come alongside an older adult and help them, we specifically talk with them about how we don't want to do it for them. We want to do it with them and encourage them to do as much as they can for themselves for as long as possible, and for some people that just requires a little extra support in order to do that. And then, if it does get to a point where that person can no longer do something for them, we want to treat them with the utmost dignity and respect.

And really a big part of inviting someone into your home, it can be nerve wracking. It's developing a relationship with the care professional and we like to talk about relationship before task. Of course

we're there to do a task, that's why you hire a service, but we want to develop a relationship, we want to develop trust, because we are in your home and we are supporting you at what for some people can feel like to be a very vulnerable time in life. So I think that the more we can enhance that independence and that dignity and respect, you know, the better quality of life the older person will have.

Lyn Wineman: 5:53

I love that Lakelyn, and I'd really like to hear more about your role at Home Instead. Like what does your work look like and how did you become passionate about this work?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 6:07

Gosh, how much time do we have? I'm kidding.

I actually just celebrated my 11th anniversary with Home Instead and I have had, I feel like, such a neat journey. I started in the local Omaha franchise office, so I started helping to coordinate the care each and every day, so matching caregivers to clients, going into the homes of older adults, talking to them about our care, and I really saw firsthand the needs of older adults, the needs of family caregivers, and it really inspired me to continue my education in the field of gerontology. And so, while I worked in the franchise, I was getting a master's degree from the University of Nebraska Omaha's Department of Gerontology. I'm a proud Maverick. And so I started to learn more about the needs of this population and I was just fascinated. I couldn't get enough, and, before you knew it, my mentor at UNO, Dr. Julie Masters, convinced me to do the PhD program.

So I was going through school and then made the transition from our local franchise to our global headquarters, and now my role again has evolved. But, for the sake of time, now I get to do a lot of our external PR, marketing communications around support for caregivers, and that's both our professional caregivers that we employ but also family caregivers. So I get to advocate, educate on various topics related to caregiving and aging, and I love it. I love being kind of the spokesperson for our brand and just sharing information about how to best care for a generation of folks that have given so much to us. So it really is a joy to do something that I truly am passionate about.

Lyn Wineman: 7:58

Yeah, I hear your passion for both older adults, but also the caregivers. Tell me more. What built that interest in supporting the caregiver as well?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 8:12

Well, I love the Rosalind Carter quote. If you Google it she talks about how everyone will be a caregiver, need a caregiver, have been a caregiver or will be a caregiver, and so it will impact all of us and caregiving looks different across you know the life course, you know right now I just became a new mom, so I'm kind of in that caregiving era. But I have watched our family care for great grandma and my grandma is starting to need a little more support and care, and so I know that, especially being the oldest daughter, I probably will be one to step up and care for my parents. So caregiving really impacts us all. Whether we're ready to accept it or not. It's going to touch all of us at some point.

So I think that's one thing that really has motivated me to support caregivers, because caring for an older person especially, you don't really think about it until you're thrust into it or until it's happening. You know, whereas you know for a baby you have nine months generally to prepare for their arrival. When you're a caregiver for an older level and it can happen overnight a fall, a stroke, a heart attack, a hospitalization, diagnosis of something like dementia or Alzheimer's, and overnight you're thrust into that caregiving role, and so I'm really encouraged to have to see caregiving rise to the attention of kind of on a national level of our leaders in the white house and and various advocacy organizations, because you know the work that family caregivers do, it's not paid, but it is a really important role that they play and there's so many facets to it which are, all you know, very fascinating to me, and I could talk about it for hours on end, and I do as part of my job.

Lyn Wineman: 10:06

I think I could listen to you for hours on end because people, since this is a podcast, people can't see you, but I see the smile on your face and how you light up as you talk about caregivers and this, this area of care. So I really love that. I feel like I would be remiss, Lakelyn, if I didn't ask you how can we as individuals, or maybe even communities, support and provide better care for those who are aging around us?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 10:40

That's a really good question, and I think that, you know, one thing we can all do is embrace the fact that we're all aging and not try to avoid it and talk about it, normalize getting older, celebrate it, start talking about how we want to age before we're ever thrust into any of these crisis situations, Because, as I mentioned, you know, people often don't plan until it's almost too late to get in that crisis.

And so if we as a society, even from a young age, can normalize conversations around aging and not just around death and dying, which I think is also important but how about those months and years leading up to that? Because that's when we're going to have to rally around an older adult as a family or going to have to introduce supports like we provide at Home Instead. And so let's start talking about that sooner and get people more comfortable with the idea of having care and support, and that way we can also make sure we understand, okay, what is our loved one's wishes as they age and how can we make those wishes a reality and honor the wishes of our loved one. I think that would go a really long way.

Lyn Wineman: 11:51

I love that you know. I think one way we can normalize the process of aging is by telling stories, and I'm curious if you have any stories you could share. That really highlights the positive impact that home care services can have on not just an older adult but maybe their family as well.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 12:15

Yes, well, I kind of have two stories if you don't mind, I'm going to kind of share them as a way to just show the diversity of how home care can impact a person's life. So recently I was doing this presentation and wanted to get some firsthand accounts of the use of our services, and so I talked to two individuals. One was a gentleman and his name was Alan, and Alan was a war veteran in his 80s. He had battled

cancer which kind of weakened him overall, but he was married. He didn't want all of his burden of care to fall to his wife, so they looked into home care.

They had a regular caregiver care professional, as we call them coming into the house and Alan's goal was to get strong enough and healthy enough to go to meet up with his old military veterans one last time in a city not far from him, and so that's what the caregiver was there to do help make sure that he was doing his physical therapy, making sure that he was eating healthy meals, getting to his doctor's appointments, and it also gave his wife a break. And so I think sometimes, when you think of home care, that might be a more typical situation. You might find where we're providing support to an older person and giving their spouse or caregiver a little bit of a break. The other one was Sharon, and she actually was in her early sixties, she had just retired from her profession in the finance realm and she had a stroke, a very debilitating stroke, and her husband was still working and she really couldn't get out of bed by herself.

But her husband still wanted to get to work every day, needed to support their family. And so we were brought in to really help her every day get up, get out of bed. And she talked about how without the care professional she couldn't, she would have been just in bed all day by herself. And so you know, we've seen improvements in Sharon. She has a long road of recovery ahead of herself but we hope she graduates off of home care and can kind of go back to maybe what life was a little bit like before the stroke and and enjoy her retirement. But with her, you know that personal care of getting her up and groomed and ready for the day and helping her with meals, so a lot of the same kind of services are happening in both of those situations, but very different. So we can provide, um, you know again, that personalized care to enhance quality of life and really meet that person wherever they're at, and also ask you know, what are your goals and how can we help you work towards those goals?

So you know, hopefully that paints a little bit of a picture, but it's definitely not a one size fits all approach.

Lyn Wineman: 15:10

Yeah, I imagine you have many, many more stories just like those, and those are both beautiful stories about Alan and Sharon. So you and I, before we hit record, were comparing our microphones, because you also host a podcast, which I love talking to fellow podcasters, called Caregiver Chats. Can you tell us more about the inspiration behind starting the podcast and some of the topics you cover?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 15:35

Well, I'm so glad that you asked, because I have loved doing podcasting and you know this is kind of an evolution of what I used to do as a Facebook live video where I would interview various people, but what we found is caregivers are busy, so we wanted to meet them where they're at.

So we kind of turned that video series into just the audio only podcast version where you can tune in anytime so you can find Caregiver Chats on your favorite podcast app. I love, you know Apple and Spotify. They're easy to access, very easy, yes, and so it's been almost a year that we've had this podcast and we have covered a variety of topics, but really we're focused on the family caregiver and we focus on topics that are relevant to them. So things like the conversation around driving how do you talk about driving safety, or even what resources as a caregiver should you know about? So one of our most

popular podcasts is the top 10 resources every caregiver should know, and so we dove into a variety of topics, whether it's Alzheimer's and dementia caregiving, whether it's spousal caregiving versus caring for an aging parent. So I love that, again, this is such an accessible way for caregivers to get information and they can kind of now that we have a little bit of a library of topics they can sort through and find, you know, what ones are most relevant to them.

Lyn Wineman: 17:04

I love that about a podcast. You can decide to say, hey, I'm going to listen to everyone in order, or you can scroll through the list and go today, I really need to know about this thing and I'm going to go to that thing. So let's say that one of our listeners, because it's most likely going to happen to many of us, if not all of us, if we are thrust into the role of becoming a family caregiver, what advice do you have?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 17:34

That is a really good question and I would say you know, create a support network. Kind of take time to evaluate who all can you lean on in this caregiving journey, because for many people it's a marathon not a sprint.

It's usually a role that somebody plays for an extended period of time and it's okay to need help. It's okay to ask for help, and really you shouldn't do it alone. You should reach out to your support network. You know you might start with evaluating within your family unit who might be available and willing to support and then also, looking beyond that, you know what community resources are available. A lot of people don't know about their local area agency on aging. You can do a zip code search no matter where you are. Here in Omaha, the Eastern Nebraska office on aging is what ours is called and they are a great resource. So just calling them and discovering the support that they have. And then also looking into various care options so whether it's home care, like we provide at Home Instead, or various community living options in your area. Those are all really important things to research, even if you don't quite need it yet because, like I mentioned, once you get into crisis mode you kind of have tunnel vision or you might not have the bandwidth to do all of the research and make the best decision. And then also, while you're kind of doing this research and figuring it out, be sure that you're including your aging loved one, asking them, you know what's important to them, what are their wishes too, because, let's face it, as a gerontologist, I have to also advocate for the older adult.

They're still a person. They still have in many cases, you know, unless they have cognitive impairment, they can make a lot of their own decisions and they should have an input in the care that they're receiving. So I know that's probably more than just like one tip, but overarching, look into your support network.

Lyn Wineman: 19:40

That's fantastic. So one of the things I mentioned in the intro that we would talk about, and I have to tell you, we've done over 200 episodes of this podcast and you're the first gerontologist I've spoken to. Can you believe that?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 19:53

Oh my goodness Well, I feel so honored. And also congrats on 200 episodes. That's goals.

Lyn Wineman: 20:05

There you go. Well, you know it's something that I really love. I've told people that someday when I retire, I just want to be a podcast host for my hobby, so we'll see how that goes, how long I can carry this microphone along. So, Lakelyn, how do you see caregiving and gerontology education evolving, Because that's something most of us really don't think about very often, but it's probably going to once again impact every single one of us in many different ways.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 20:30

Oh, absolutely. You know, I actually get asked to talk to young people often about careers in aging and I think when we as a society think of a career in aging, we default to nursing home or healthcare. And it's so much more than that. Home Instead was actually three years ago purchased by a technology company.

Lyn Wineman: 20:52

Really.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 20:53

Yes, in the technology space, people are getting into aging products and services. So, no matter what you're thinking of majoring in or pursuing in terms of education, consider, would a minor or a class, maybe just one class, in gerontology be beneficial. Because, if you think about it, if you're designing buildings as an engineer or an interior designer, have you thought about it from an accessibility standpoint, from an aging standpoint? Even if you're a teacher, a lot of children, or I would say some children, are being raised by their grandparents or living in intergenerational households. If you are going into law, what about elder law? Or how will your aging clients need to think about, you know, aging related issues from a legal perspective? I could go on and on. If you named a major, I'm pretty sure I can put a gerontology spin.

Lyn Wineman: 21:51

You could find a way to connect it. I love that, and it's a perspective I haven't thought about before. And you're right, even one class or a minor could make such a difference, and it's a market that's going to continue to grow and grow.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 22:08

Absolutely Well, and, Lyn, if I may add you know I'm thinking about it from a KidGlov perspective you all are creating, you know, advertising and marketing campaigns for companies, and if we think about even just any company as the population, ages, the consumer is aging. What are they going to want from a consumer perspective? So, again, I think that any sort of education you can do, even if it's just following a few age-related podcasts or that one class in gerontology, it really can go a long way in helping to broaden your perspective on what aging is and could be.

Lyn Wineman: 22:47

Fascinating. That is such great advice. So, Lakelyn, with everything changing and the whole field progressing, I'm really curious what are you most excited about at Home Instead right now?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 23:02

Well, I'm going to go back to the technology I mentioned earlier. You know we were recently acquired by a technology company, Honor Technology, and what's really neat is, with the technology that Honor brings and the excellence in care that Home Instead brings, it's really kind of a perfect union of high tech and high touch, where we're using technology to become more efficient in some of our backend kind of operations so that those that are providing care in the homes every day can do it in a way that is meaningful and efficient.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 23:36

And especially, you know, workforce has been a topic for all industries especially long-term care, and of course, we need more and more people to come into this field. But what we're trying to think of is okay. If workforce is always going to be a challenge, how can we use technology to be more efficient without losing that high touch, that really personalized experience? So I think that's what's gotten me really excited and I'm learning more about technology than I ever thought I would, but in a really, really positive way.

Lyn Wineman: 24:08

I love that. I've got to believe that most people who are getting into this field are doing it because they love providing the care right. So if you can reduce the amount of time they're spending doing the non-caring things, it makes the whole field better for everyone. So I think that's really fascinating. So for our listeners, who have been hearing your excitement and all of the great things that are happening at Home Instead, where can they find information about Home Instead?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 24:42

I would say our website is probably the best place to go homeinstead.com. On there you can do a zip code search to find a location near you. As I mentioned, we're all across the US, across the globe, and also we have a care resource section with free resources and information. So if you're kind of maybe in that exploring planning phase, that care resource section of our website would be great. And then, of course, follow our podcast on your favorite podcast app and be sure to subscribe to it so that way you get notifications every time there's a new episode.

Lyn Wineman: 25:19

That's fantastic. We'll make sure to have links to all of those resources in our show notes as well. I'm going to ask you my favorite question next. Everybody who listens to Agency for Change knows that I'm inspired by motivational quotes, and I get to talk with such interesting people like you. Could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 25:47

I know you asked me this in advance, which I'm really grateful you did, so it gave me some time to think about it. But actually I end every one of my podcasts with this saying, and I hope that this will fit as a motivational quote if you will.

So I always say be sure to take good care of yourself while you care for others, because we know that we can't pour from an empty cup and so often family caregivers put themselves on the back burner. So I just always want to remind people that, in order to care well for others, you do have to care for yourself, and that self-care is going to look different for others but it's just really important to keep that on your radar.

Lyn Wineman: 26:26

I love it. It sounds like put the oxygen mask on yourself first right, yes, I love it, yes. Fantastic. So, Lakelyn, as we wrap up this great conversation today, I'm really curious. Wrap up this great conversation today, I'm really curious. What is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the good work that you're doing?

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 26:47

You know, I would say embrace aging. I know we haven't really talked about that, you know too too much in this podcast, but we're all aging and we can't escape it, as some of us might try harder than others. But and think about how you want to age, and I then think if we're all able to kind of reflect on that for ourselves, then as we care for others who are going through that aging journey, we'll have more empathy. Maybe it will help us plan ahead in all aspects of our life. And so if we're able to kind of embrace aging, then hopefully as a society, we'll start to continue to value the older generation and make sure that they have the care and support that they need and, of course, at Home Instead that's one thing that we are very passionate and fortunate to do is to care and support for those that have done so much for us through the generations.

Lyn Wineman: 27:45

That is fantastic, Lakelyn. I have had so much fun talking with you today. I feel like I've learned a lot, and I just want to say I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more organizations like Home Instead, and I really, really appreciate what you're doing and you taking this time with us today.

Dr. Lakelyn Eichenberger: 28:07

Thank you so much for having me, Lyn. It was a true pleasure, and thank you for all that you do to share out all of these wonderful stories and the great work people are doing across our community.

Announcer: 28:28

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from.

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