



THOMAS MAINTAINING STABILITY THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Newly retired after a long career as a police officer, Thomas was immediately thrust into a new full-time role as caretaker for his mother. When she was diagnosed, her doctors made it clear that she could no longer live alone without assistance.

"She had been living independently and she was self-reporting that she was forgetting to take her medication, leaving the fire on the stove, going to the store only to wander for hours," Thomas said. "It was still a shock, it is difficult news to hear. It's almost like a cancer diagnosis," he added.

After watching his grandfather succumb to Alzheimer's disease when he was younger, Thomas was now faced helping his mother maintain quality of life with Alzheimer's as well.

"I was feeling a wide variety of emotions, anxiety and fear. Not knowing what was to come," Thomas says. "My family and I are willing to do pretty much anything to make her quality of life better."



"I was feeling a wide variety of emotions, **anxiety and fear. Not knowing what was to come."**

That's when Thomas was connected to United Way Strong Individuals and Families Impact Area Partner Meals on Wheels, who provided Thomas with the respite and support he needed to become a better caretaker for his mother. Through these programs, Thomas learned more about the illness that was affecting his mother, learning about outlets for his own stress related to his mother's illness and other educational training on how to make life better for everyone involved.

"What they do is educate the caregivers for people with dementia in order to make life better for everyone," he said. "All of those

things help the caretaker deal with a lot of the anxiety and makes you much more confident,” Thomas added.

Thomas admits that the training has been transformed their daily lives, as he is better equipped to deal with the unexpected events that come with Alzheimer’s every day. This support has also provided him with medical, elder law and financial expertise as it relates to his mother’s condition.

“Training and education like this are really essential,” he says. “It provides a lot less stress for the caregivers and family, especially in the moments toward the end when you just want to spend time with your loved one,” Thomas said.



“[Training and education] provides a lot less stress for the caregivers and family, especially in the moments toward the end when you just want to spend time with your loved one.”

Six years after his mother’s Alzheimer’s diagnosis, Thomas’s family has greater stability after this life-changing event. More than anything else, Thomas has the tools he needs to ensure his mother’s quality of life is as good as it can possibly be during this stage of her life.

United Way’s Strong Individuals and Families Impact Area helps families regain self-sufficiency when traumatic life events like mental illness, abuse or chronic stress threaten their stability. Through these resources, all individuals and families in San Antonio will be able to flourish economically and personally through all stages of life.

“I believe the value in United Way is tremendous and I know that for me personally, for 30 years as a policeman, I have given to United Way,” Thomas said. “Not everybody

understands the value of United Way and how far the dollar can stretch and the impact it has. My mom has continued to live with Alzheimer’s for six years and I attribute that longevity to us being able to participate in these programs that are free to us, but they’re free to us because of the generosity of other people donating to United Way.”

Thomas credits these programs with not only improving his mother’s quality of life but for making him a better person overall. His mother and his family are better prepared for the challenges they are experiencing and are making the most of the time they have now.

To learn more about United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County’s work and to hear more stories, visit uwsatx.org.

