Empowerment Through Hero Generation with Nicole àBeckett and Dr. Shruti Roy

Candace Dellacona: Welcome to the Sandwich Generation Survival Guide. I am your host, Candace Dellacona, and I have such a treat for our listeners today, I have two amazing women, founders of an amazing organization that we're gonna talk about. Nicole àBeckett and Dr. Shruti Roy. Welcome ladies.

Nicole àBeckett: Thank you.

Candace Dellacona: So for our listeners, we'll give you, time to talk about your background.

But Dr. Roy, I'm gonna call you Shruti. You've been so kind to allow us the informality. And I'll call you Nicole, of course. We're gonna talk about your amazing and revolutionary platform called the Hero Generation.

So why don't we start though a little bit about who you both are and how you got here.

Nicole àBeckett: Sure. Again, thank you Candace, for having us and allowing us the opportunity to share about Hero Generation. Really the genesis of it came at the start of my caregiving journey, which was about 10 years ago. My dad was ending his 15 year battle with cancer. He had elected to, forego any further treatment, so we kind of knew what was coming. I was also six months pregnant at the time, and I wasn't in the Sandwich Generation when I started, but I certainly was by the time my dad had, finished his battle. I have a 20 year background in startups and I was looking for a platform at that time to help me with all the information and everything that was happening in that moment.

My mom was my dad's primary caregiver, but I was really supporting her. We were trying to figure out what's palliative care versus hospice care. I have a very large family who all wanted to help. They all wanted, were coming in saying, what can I do? What can I do? And as you can imagine, even just talking about it it's incredibly complex and stressful.

And I was looking for something to help me manage during that time and really bring some organization to the chaos, both, physically and emotionally that was happening at that time. And again, I didn't find anything that really suited what I was looking for and my dad passed in end of 2015 and then, you just go on with life.

And my mom, who had long suffered from a chronic lung disease, actually, just a few years later, really needed a lot more support and I had to step in as her primary caregiver. I'd had my second child by this time, so, again, I was just looking to bring some organization to the chaos that was happening by being a caregiver.

Stepping in, so many people know this role. You step in, you're helping with doctor's appointments, you're administering medication, you are picking up groceries, you are fixing stuff at the house. All of this. Intense work that you now have to do on top of your daily life of raising a family, working, et cetera.

And so again, I was looking for a platform that could really bring some normalcy or bring some information and support in that time. And I didn't find anything. In addition to some community, I was in my thirties and I didn't really know how many peers or friends that were going through this, and so I knew there had to be other people out there, but it was difficult to connect.

Wasn't big at connecting on Facebook. So anyway, went through and my mom ended up passing in 2021, and so it was after that I said we need to do something to support family caregivers. I've now been through this situation twice and I just haven't found a resource that can support me.

And so I'm gonna go through and build a platform that really brings collaboration. People who say they wanna help, we need to make it easy for them to help. Easy way to find resources and a easy way to connect with other people going through it. And I was actually put in touch with Shruti who was going through it in that moment.

And we just connected and said, we need to build this. And Shruti you should tell your story because it's, you're going through it now.

Candace Dellacona: Yeah. Thank you.

Dr. Shruti Roy: Yeah.

As Nicole said, I am actually currently a caregiver now. I became a caregiver last year when my dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. And they live about three blocks away from me, my mom and my dad. And I knew that my mom. She was strong. She can do most of the daily activities to help him out with whatever he would need.

But a few weeks after he got diagnosed with Parkinson's, my mom broke her hip and was hospitalized and then she had a bunch of complications after that. And so I became the primary caregiver for both of my parents and I still am today while also raising three kids. I am there in the sandwich generation living it every day right now.

But, I've been practicing medicine for many years. And even though I had the background of medicine and having worked in hospitals and, worked with discharging patients, when it was time for my mom's discharge, I was very lost. I was having a hard time navigating the healthcare system.

I was having trouble managing my emotions around everything that was going on as well. And I remember when I walked into her hospital room and they told me that she was ready to be discharged, going home, I was just in shock and was like, I have nothing at home for her. I need a wheelchair, a wheelchair ramp, a shower bench, et cetera.

And it just, it was very, very overwhelming even for me as a physician.

Candace Dellacona: So you both said so much there, but I think what's so interesting in the commonality that the three of us, and probably many of our audience members share, is that here we are, three smart women. With resources, education, a background. Pretty capable individuals as I'm sure all of our audience members are, and the feeling of overwhelm.

And I think one of the things that you just said, Nicole, was like trying to organize the chaos and Shruti, here you are as this trained physician feeling the same feelings that Nicole and I have felt. It sort of makes me feel better, if I'm honest. Because no it, it's not just me and it's, not a short fall of our abilities.

And so the two of you, really spearheading the combination of technology and caregiving resources is truly remarkable Hero Generation in general.

Let's get in to talk about what it is exactly. We've talked about that it's a platform, but tell us about the sort of three main pillars, if you will, the organization of the platform and how it can help maybe our caregivers who are dying to hear more about it.

Nicole àBeckett: Yeah, we've all been there where somebody has said, what can I do to help? And in that moment, maybe you're driving and you're talking to them and you can't think of anything. Or when you do think of something, you're in the shower. And it's just, for me and many people that we've talked to, it's just there's no easy way or there hasn't been to bring in that help. Yet so many people, whether they're family, their friends, they wanna share in that journey. That's what eases the burden so much is when you can offload just, to-dos. And so what we really wanted to do with hero generation was make that easy.

So what we've created in the three pillars that you mentioned, the first pillar is really that collaboration piece.

And so within hero generation, you can invite team members, whether they're family, whether they're friends. To be part of the care team. And then you can go and create a to-do list and you can either assign things to specific people or you can leave them unassigned and you just tell them, go in and take things off my list.

Assign yourself, whatever you can do. And so really it just makes it easy when someone says, what can I do to help? It's say, just go into hero generation and take something off my to-do list, or I'll send you something through hero generation. And what we also have in there is what's called the loved one's profile.

So then it's one thing to say, Hey, to my brother who is really, really wanting to be part of it with my mom? What can I do to help? Can you take mom to her doctor's appointment? Well then I know the next question is gonna be, where's the doctor? What do I tell him? What needs to be done? So we created a space called the Loved One's profile, and that's where you can store all that information, their insurance, their doctor's name, the pharmacy, the medications, all the information that's pertinent to supporting the loved one.

It's all there in one place. And we say that that's important for people, even if you're. Parent or your loved one doesn't have an acute need. It's just a great place to store information for that. That time when you do need it and then you're not scrambling and it just adds stress. I have my kids' profile in there, we're really trying to support the sandwich generation caregivers.

You can have your maybe aging parent who might need more support, and then your children where you just wanna keep where their immunization records are, right. Without having to, where was the portal again? What was my long, uh, I don't remember. So that's the collaboration piece to really make it easy to bring people into the journey.

There's also a section where you can keep notes again, so you're not saying to my brother, I sent that to you in a text message or it's in shared note. Where's the notes now? Where. It's all in one place In Hero Generation, we just, death caregiving is often death by a thousand cuts. It's one thing on top of another, and then you, the primary caregiver end up just saying, it's okay, forget it. I'll just do it myself. And that's when we become overwhelmed because we just can't offload things. And so we really wanted that piece to be the collaboration piece to be, it was really, really important to be able to share. Share the journey and share the load in caregiving. And then the other two pillars, of course, are, our resources.

So we have a huge resource guide for tons of different conditions that you can find. And then in addition, we have expert led videos. So whether they're physicians, healthcare professionals, legal professionals. Mental health professionals, you can go through on your own time, find something that answers that question that you may have at, 3:00 AM when you're up and you can't sleep, or when you're on your lunch break or so, and you just, you're not gonna call the doctor.

You're not gonna call somebody. You can look through that on your own. And we have a AI digital caregiving assistant. So this is somebody, it's called Ask Andrea, somebody you can interact with more. So you can ask questions really specific to your situation, tailored to, maybe your location, your geography, your loved one's condition.

My mom was just diagnosed with dementia. I live in Los Angeles. What do I do? What resources are available to me? And she'll give you those exact, specific answers back. And then, what we really love is that we've also wrapped her in a very empathetic voice. So knowing what caregivers need to hear.

So she'll always say, I'm sorry, sorry to hear about this diagnosis. Or, I know this is a challenging time. It's okay, you're doing a good job. All these things that caregivers need to hear.

And then the final piece is community. And we wanted to give caregivers an opportunity to connect with other caregivers, and so we've aggregated events that are happening all across the country.

Maybe it's with the Alzheimer's Association, maybe it's with Parkinson's Foundation, maybe it's with MS Society. Maybe it's with aging caregivers or sandwich generation caregivers. Whatever the topic, we've got so many events there that people can find something that maybe speaks to them, go on, you can either just listen, you can participate, but you just know that there are other people out there who are going through this situation and doesn't feel as lonely. You get resources from them, et cetera. So we wanted to really build something that was comprehensive to support the holistic really, health and journey of the caregiver.

Candace Dellacona: it's such a remarkable package that you've put together that has hit every single piece of the caregiving journey and experience that it's unbelievable that nobody had thought of it before you, because there is nothing else like this. And I'm gonna say that to our audience again.

There is not, I've never, I'm in this space. I do a podcast about being a sandwich generation member and surviving, and I talk to sandwich generation members all day every day. And I'm sort of laughing and Shruti, you probably feel the same. I have three kids also, and I'm sure when my husband listens to this podcast, he's gonna laugh about the insurance card issue because do you know how many with three cards, who has the cards?

Where is this card? So just having that accessibility is phenomenal. The other thing, in terms of like resources and maybe I'll have you speak to this Shruti, is you brought up the fact that your father has Parkinson's, which is the very unique condition, which is different than someone having cancer.

So can you talk to the resources, Shruti, as it relates to medical conditions and what you try to input on the platform for those users?

Dr. Shruti Roy: Yes, of course. One of the major things that we do is have content. We have articles that are very disease specific. What's different from all the other organizations, because of course, Parkinson's Foundation has an amazing website, but what we do is really tailor our content to caregivers. So you can find out all you want about Parkinson's on many different websites, but this is really, are you a caregiver to somebody with Parkinson's?

Here's what you need to know. And so it's really tailored with specific goals, a plan. Very precise plan for what you're going to face as a caregiver for somebody with Parkinson's. And then, gives you all the things that you should be thinking about. So there's so much that caregivers don't know that they don't know.

And so these content articles really hone in on things that you're like, oh yeah, I didn't think of that at all. I love our caregiver specific and disease specific articles. And then of course we also are bringing in very high level webinars from organizations like Parkinson's Foundation that are more geared towards caregivers as well.

And all of those, like Nicole said, are aggregated into our platform. So we're very, very keyed in on the caregiver aspect of all these diseases.

Candace Dellacona: Which is so unique because you're right. I think that if any one of us did a Google search for Parkinson's, it speaks to what the condition is and what the patient goes through, which obviously is. Of utmost importance, but it is a different role that the caregiver is filling because we're trying to help the person with Parkinson's and understanding our role is so important.

So it is amazing that you have been able to find those resources for those of us providing the care to make it easier for our loved one with that particular condition. I think, we are also starved for resources and it can be overwhelming. So, to Nicole's point, like in the middle of the night when you're fretting about, wait a minute, what does this mean?

How am I going to deal with discharge tomorrow? That piece is there for you when you're ready to receive it. The other thing that I thought of when you were talking about the to-do list, for example, I think one of the things that a lot of caregivers struggle with is asking for the help and accepting the help.

So you're really creating almost like a buffer, which I love, where, you're not, you don't feel like you're putting someone on the spot and you're allowing them to choose things. Or you can put it on like, Hey guys, who's available? So it gets everybody in the position that they're most comfortable in.

Who thought of that piece, if you don't mind me asking? Who was the brainchild behind that?

Nicole àBeckett: Yeah, I mean I, like I said, I've been in tech for so long and we use so many project management softwares that I was like, I just need a project management software for caregiving. And I think being women, we love organization and I love color coding. I love checking things off. I mean, I will write a list and I, that brings me so much joy just to like.

Mark something off the list. A written list, right. Let alone being able to see it like marking as done. That was, I think, really important to me. Particularly, with my mom, it was just, I felt like at the end, after my mom had passed, I felt like I was in a washing machine for the longest time, and then I finally got let out.

Was out of that tumble, tumble, tumble. 'cause there's just so much being thrown at you. I just wanted one place to organize it. And so yeah, the to-do list, and again, like I said, I had a lot of family who always wanted to help. I just didn't have a way to, to wrangle it, and so, yeah, the to-do list was probably like, if we have nothing else, we need to just have a list that we share.

Candace Dellacona: And also the meds. What you think about and Shruti as a physician it's a lot easier for you. You are, a trained physician with an idea about the pharmacological impacts. So you could read a prescription and be like, this is definitely not something you need twice a day.

But Nicole and I might go, is this twice a day? So medication tracking is just a home run.

Nicole àBeckett: And I would even say, sorry to interject, but in my situation with my mom, I started so much healthcare is now being put onto the home and the family caregivers. And with my mom I was like injecting, doing a subcutaneous pump. Which for people who have never don't know what that is, it's it's, like an insulin pump or, so this is for some different medication.

But I was administering that. I am not a doctor, I am not a nurse. I am nothing. I watched a nurse do it. I took a video of her doing it and then, so it was really important for us in the medication to be able to upload videos, to be able to upload pictures because we know that there's so much more complexity in what we're doing at home now.

It just, whatever we can do to relieve that stress for the caregiver, knowing you have a guide, knowing you have a place where it's like, okay. I know where I can go to get this. It's, just taking one more thing off their plate and that was really important to us.

Candace Dellacona: When you think of technology and all of the possibilities, it, you're right, it does make it easier. But to your point, a lot of it is shifting to us, us lay people. I would love to live three blocks away from you Shruti so that I can call you and ask these questions.

But having a platform like this and the videos and the expert sort of guidance is just such an incredible resource. And also, there is a movement for our generation, right? Where maybe our grandparents were more likely to go into a nursing home. And the movement of aging in place is very real and there are benefits to it, which I'm sure, Shruti can talk about and I would love for you to do so in terms of having a better quality of life. And generally speaking, the quality of life is better when you're home and you're with your loved ones.

Dr. Shruti Roy: Yep. It shows that you will live longer, you will live happier. Especially if you are in the sandwich generation, there are children around. We know already the data shows that grandparents who are around their grandchildren are also likely to live longer and live happier lives as well.

So there's a lot of benefits to having a community, having family around and also having your own routine that you've lived for so many years. Instead of having to change it up and suddenly start over in a new place at an older age. So for sure there's a push for that. There's a push for out of hospital stays, getting discharged sooner than you would've 20, 30 years ago for sure as well.

So a lot more medicine is being done at home instead of in the hospital. A lot more rehab is being done at home as well.

Candace Dellacona: It's absolutely true and I think, when you think about even the way the Medicare rules work, which I'm sure you're familiar with, when I started practicing as an attorney and I started out really doing primarily just elder law, there was a pretty close to a guarantee that if you were in a rehab facility, you get your full 20 days and you probably have a pretty good chance of getting the 80 days to follow up for the copay days to get that rehab and get into a routine.

And that is not common anymore. To your point, Shruti, where they're really looking to make those discharges earlier and earlier. So having, Hero Generation as this almost like, guide to how to do it well and provide the resources. I love the Ai Andrea option and the empathy that you've infused in that.

And to your point about community Shruti, it's so lonely being a caregiver. We're supposed to feel, like it's an honor, but it's also, and I talk to sandwich generation member caregivers all the time. I see it on the message boards that they feel so lonely and they are starved for other people to talk about what they're going through.

Can you talk a little bit about what you are hoping to achieve in creating those community events through the platform?

Dr. Shruti Roy: So I think that we really want people to talk about their journeys, be open with their journeys and not be kind of ashamed. So I recently wrote this article about my mom who was a caregiver to her parents and my dad's parents, so her in-laws. And not once did I hear a complaint from her or a sigh, or a little moment of stress, nothing.

She hid everything. And now that I'm a caregiver, I'm like, how did you do that? And I never realized what you were doing and how you were feeling. And she'll tell me like, that's how it was.

You just kind of suck it up and you just do it and you don't complain. And at first, when I became a caregiver, that's kind of how I was doing it.

I didn't want my husband to know, I didn't want my kids to see me crying or stressed. And then something flipped and I'm like, they should see the real story. We all, if we don't do that, then we're covering up a major problem. Which is that caregivers need support. And so I started being a lot more open about it, in front of my children, in front of my parents even and definitely in front of my husband.

And I think that's what we need to do. So we need to connect with other caregivers, tell our stories, be honest, because that's the only way we can bring about the change in support that caregivers need.

Candace Dellacona: It's so true and there is so much value in sharing the story. A, to exchange resources, which is what you're doing for sure, and providing the platform for that. But there is so much value and not feeling alone and knowing that other people have gone through it or are going through it. And so I love the fact that you call it Hero Generation.

Can we talk a little bit about the origin and the name and what you hope to convey by naming the platform Hero?

Nicole àBeckett: I love telling this story, especially, it's so appropriate when we're in specifically talking about sandwich generation. So my dad is originally from Philadelphia and he, Philly proud. I grew up in LA. We grew up in Los Angeles, but he would always talk about hoagies. And so I wanted to some way honor my dad and I was first thinking like Hoagie Generation as I'm like that sounds very hokey.

And then I was like, wait a minute, in New York, sandwiches are called heroes. And so it just, everything just made sense immediately. Hero Generation. A lot of times our loved ones, most of the time they're our heroes. At the same time, caregivers are the heroes to them. It just, everything just came together.

And it's really originally a play on sandwich generation, but there's just so much meaning behind it, and we want caregivers to understand that they are doing heroic work. It's something that we just, we have to do. It's just the thing we have to do, but the work really is heroic and we want them to feel that sense of pride and sense of empowerment as well.

Candace Dellacona: How cool is that? And the other thing I'll point out for you, and you probably have thought about it, but you know the way in which we're trying to care for the older generation, it's just an act of love, right? We're showing our love and one of the best ways to raise good humans as sandwich generation members, we're raising our kids simultaneously, is to model behavior.

And so I think. You probably have hit the nail on the head that our kids also look at us like heroes when we treat their grandparents or their, aunts and uncles with the kindness and the love and the support that they need as they become older and vulnerable too. So that is like the greatest name ever.

Nicole àBeckett: I love it. Thank you. That yes, yes, that is it's very true.

Candace Dellacona: Let's talk about how people can access Hero Generation. What does that look like? I know what's gonna happen. I'm gonna get a ton of emails and people are gonna say, how do I get this? Where do I start?

Nicole àBeckett: Yeah, I love it. Hopefully we make it as easy as possible for them. You just have to go to our website, herogen.co. It is absolutely free to sign up. There's no credit card required, so you just click, get started and it'll ask you a few questions, onboarding questions about your loved one, and it'll plop you into our dashboard.

And then, we have a video taking you through how to use all the features and you get two weeks for free. And then you can choose to continue on the free platform or the free subscription, which allows you to maintain the loved one's profile. So again, like we said, we hope that every family in America can use the loved one's profile.

Just keep, important information stored in one place so that you're not scrambling when there's a emergency or so. So we wanted to keep that part free in perpetuity for everybody. If you wanna continue with the paid subscription that it's only 17.99 a month per loved one, so very accessible, and that allows you to access the to-do list, the task and calendar management, the Ask Andrea, resources, notes, messaging, the full platform.

So it's pretty straightforward. herogen.co. You can just go and run through it. And then of course, if anybody has questions, we're always open, hello@herogeneration.co. It's all on our website, but we love interacting, and supporting caregivers. Especially at this stage we're wanting to interact with caregivers directly to understand. We're still pretty early days in the platform, so if there are features, if there's something that you know, you think of that caregivers are going through now that, we may not think of, we want all of that feedback.

So we really would love to interact with whomever wants to chat with us.

Candace Dellacona: I just wanna point out to everyone listening that it's incredible gesture and as they say in New York, almost like a mitzvah, a good act, that you would provide the basic platform for free. That really is a testament to the two of you and your mission driven goal with hero gen and for less than a dinner

Nicole àBeckett: Oh yeah.

Candace Dellacona: in New York City for a year. To have this level of support is really remarkable. And I just think that. You really have hit a nerve and I'm so excited to have had you on and gotten to know the two of you.

I think from the bottom of my heart, if I can speak for the other SanGen members out there and caregivers, thank you for figuring out the need and providing the platform with all of these incredible resources.

I know that you've already helped so many people and you will continue to do so. Thank you so much for being here, and thank you for coming up with this idea.

Nicole àBeckett: Oh, thank you for saying that Candace, and I know you're a lawyer, but we're gonna hire you as our PR person because.

Candace Dellacona: Listen, it takes a village, right? It really does. And I just admire both of you so much for putting your big brains to such good use. And your parents were for you, Nicole, and are for you. So, so lucky to have you Shruti and really you're showing your children so much as well.

Dr. Shruti Roy: Thank you.

Nicole àBeckett: Yeah. Amazing, thanks Candace.