

A Light in the Midst of Darkness

What Would You Do If Your Mother Went Missing?

In February 2015, Gavin Lawrence's 78-year-old mother — who has dementia — disappeared from her DC condo. Gavin — who lives in Chicago — credits Iona nurse practitioner Fiona Druy and social worker Catherine Paitz with getting him through that crisis and many other challenges.

“Mom was a trailblazer,” says Gavin. A native of Guyana, she was the first in her family to come to the U.S. where she earned her PhD, raised Gavin on her own, and taught literature and African-American history at Howard University. “She’s always been independent,” he says.

That became more challenging when she had heart surgery in

“I wish I had known about Iona 10 years ago when I suspected something was wrong. Together, we could have addressed my mother’s issues sooner.”

—Gavin Lawrence

1995, a minor stroke in 2000, and, over time, developed dementia. In 2008, she took early retirement from Howard.

At the same time, Gavin was struggling to care for her from his home in Chicago, where he also was raising two children. In addition, his work as a stage actor takes him all over the country. (You may have seen him in “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” at Arena Stage).

In November, Gavin and several relatives decided it would be best for his mother to return to Guyana, where her sister and a live-in nurse could care for her. That turned out to be “miserable for everyone,” says Gavin. His mother stopped eating and lost weight. She was unhappy, frustrated, and angry. “She thought she had been kidnapped,” Gavin says.



Gavin Lawrence is a long distance caregiver for his 78-year-old mother. After facing a crisis, he depended on Iona for guidance and support.

So the family moved her back to DC and, with Iona’s help, began looking for safe housing options. Still, that conversation always ended with her saying she wasn’t moving.

Then came the call every family member who has a loved one with dementia fears. His mother was missing. After a frantic search,

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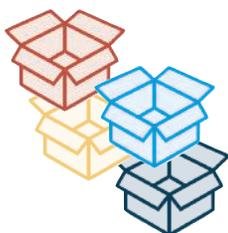
You Can Tackle Home Clutter in Five Easy Steps

Though downsizing might be the right option for you or your older relative, the idea of sorting through a lifetime's accumulation can make it hard. Add in those sentimental memories attached to your things and the whole process can seem downright impossible. But with these tips, decluttering your home or helping someone else downsize can be a little easier.



1. **Take your time.** Don't expect to finish during one weekend. Set realistic goals (like clearing a table, cabinet, or room), and you'll be able to see your headway.

2. **Work room by room.** Massive jobs broken into smaller segments will seem more manageable. Plus, by taking a room-by-room approach, you'll be able to see your progress on day one.



3. **Use the Four-Box Method.** A great way to prep for a move is to go through each item in every room and place it in one of these categories: trash, donate, keep, or relocate.

4. **Accept help** if it is offered, but don't be afraid to control the type you receive. Family and friends can be very helpful in decluttering or emptying a family home, but there are some parts of the process where their presence might be more unnerving than useful. Think ahead and plan specific tasks for them that won't require your decisions.



5. **Take a break.** If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or defeated, take a deep breath and come back to your clutter in an hour (or day). You can always get rid of something later, but you can't retrieve something hastily discarded in a state of emotional stress. And remember, even one bag of trash or a box of donated goods is a success! ✓



Want to learn even more practical advice on how to declutter? This summer, Iona's Take Charge/Age Well Academy is offering multiple workshops with experts on that very topic! Call (202) 895-9420 to learn more and sign-up for the class.

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relatives found her near American University, disoriented and alone.

In the weeks that followed, Gavin was plagued by questions such as: "Do I want her happy — or safe" and feelings of guilt that grew out of the fact that, in his culture, most elders live with their adult children until they die.

Throughout the experience, it was Iona's staff that helped him to navigate these emotional and practical issues. "They have been nothing short of angels," he says. "They spoke directly and frankly with my

mother about the benefits of assisted living in a way that reinforced what I needed to do," says Gavin, who moved his mother into a senior living community in June. "Until the move, Catherine and Fiona visited my mother in her condo twice a week. They were professional and personal, compassionate, and honest. They were the one little light in the midst of a lot of darkness."

If you or someone you know needs help navigating eldercare issues, call Iona at (202) 895-9448, and ask for our Helpline. ✓

Special to the VOICE by Janice L. Kaplan

Mark Trusted His Neighbor...Find out What Happened Next

Imagine having your trust broken by someone close, maybe even a neighbor. Now consider if you had no family support and significant memory loss. Where would you turn?

For Mark, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, Iona Senior Services — and more specifically, social worker Christine Kenny — was the answer. Funded through the D.C. Office on Aging, Christine is able to provide support to vulnerable older adults across the city who have mild memory loss and live alone. She provides money management support, making sure that clients pay their bills on time, are managing their personal funds, and are not being exploited.

Mark, who has visual impairment that makes reading mail particularly challenging, also depends on Christine to regularly open and sort his bills. When a routine review of Mark's bank statement showed multiple ATM uses on the same day, Christine knew something was wrong. "Mark's mobility is impaired; he couldn't possibly have gone to two ATMs in the same day," says Christine.

Immediately, Christine jumped into action. After speaking with Mark, she uncovered that a neighbor, who Mark had shared his card and PIN information

with for assistance in emergencies, was withdrawing additional money without Mark's knowledge. All told, the neighbor may have made more than \$200 worth of unauthorized withdrawals, which is nearly 30% of Mark's tight monthly income.

Fortunately, Mark had Iona as his safety net. Besides referring the case to the Adult Protective Services, Christine has also offered other options like personally accompanying Mark to the bank. "There are a lot of seniors who don't have trusted family members or friends that can help them. And for people with memory loss, financial aptitude is often the first ability that becomes impaired," Christine says. "As a social worker, I'm able to provide assistance or resources so they can remain in their home or community. Adding the money management program to Iona's services has been so important." 



Iona social worker Christine Kenny provides city-wide support to people with mild memory loss who live alone.

These Shoes Were Meant For Walking

In early March, Iona was contacted by Karen Widmayer, daughter of Dr. S. H. Friedman, who owned Public Shoe Store in Arlington. After more than 70 years in business, Public Shoe Store was closing its doors. And, now, Karen was looking for a trusted nonprofit to take their bounty of orthopedic shoes. Iona, of course, jumped at the opportunity.

Thanks to this unusual gift, Iona's social workers and care managers have been able to provide new shoes to any client in-need, totally free of charge.

To help distribute the shoes, Iona hosted a special "pop-up" shoe market at Regency House, the only low-income public housing option for older adults in Ward 3. With 85 pairs of shoes in tow, we were able to find perfect fits for more than 50 residents. Says Joan Curry, who received a pair of loafers, "My



Volunteer Teresa Savarino helped distribute orthopedic shoes to Regency House residents at a special pop-up market.

goodness, these are comfortable. If I could do the happy dance, I would!"

All told, Iona received close to 300 pairs of shoes, valued at more than \$45,000. In addition to our clients, Iona has shared this generous donation with other senior services agencies in the District. We will continue to share our bounty as supplies last. 

Iona Team Effort Restores Hope: “It Was a Relief”

Carolyn Sauls had lost all faith. After more than a year of investigating and back-and-forth calls between Medicaid and a medical supply company, she was no closer to having a working motorized wheelchair — a necessity after Ms. Sauls’ stroke in 2001. Instead, she was getting by with one literally held together with pins and tape.

So, when an Iona volunteer asked Ms. Sauls during a routine home delivered meals visit if there was anything else she needed, Ms. Sauls replied with a laugh and joked about needing a replacement for her wheelchair. “By the time Iona came along, I had given up hope,” Ms. Sauls said. “I thought nothing could be done.”

Less than a month later, Iona proved Ms. Sauls wrong — but in the best possible way.

Up until that point, Ms. Sauls had been battling Medicaid in a complicated struggle that included the shocking news that a medical supply company had fraudulently used her name to receive payment from Medicaid. Two weeks later, the company did send Ms. Sauls a wheelchair.

“They must have gotten afraid,” says Ms. Sauls. “But, the wheelchair they sent was probably a send-back because it wasn’t in good condition. It leaned to the side, and I need something to keep me upright.”

When Ms. Sauls tried to get someone to repair the chair, she was repeatedly turned down. The breaking point was when Ms. Sauls was told that she would have to wait at least four years before she could receive a replacement from Medicaid. On top of that, she would need a wheelchair supply company to say in writing that her wheelchair was beyond repair.

“It was very discouraging. I felt like nobody would come to help me,” says Ms. Sauls.

Iona changed her mind.

The same day Ms. Sauls mentioned her chair to the volunteer, staff members from the development, nutrition, and administrative teams were working together to problem-solve. Within hours, we had a



Carolyn Sauls is thankful to Iona for helping her secure a motorized scooter — for free.

lead — there were two motorized wheelchairs in Iona’s medical supply loan closet, which provides donated used equipment to anyone in need for as long as it is needed. However, both required new batteries, and there was no guarantee that the chairs would work.

But, then, the stars aligned. A week later, the development team received a call from Bonnie Washington, who wanted to donate a scooter — which functions similarly to a motorized wheelchair — to our loan closet. Immediately, we knew it was meant to be.

“I couldn’t believe it when Iona called me about the scooter,” says Ms. Sauls. “I really wanted to jump for joy.”

On March 14, Ms. Sauls received the scooter — completely free of charge. Iona had given her hope again. “I was really, really happy,” says Ms. Sauls. “I felt so wonderful to know that this scooter was mine — I felt like a kid. It was a gift from the Lord.” **V**

Do you have medical equipment in good condition? Consider making a donation to Iona’s Loan Closet for the benefit of the community. Contact Ann Keeler at (202) 895-9416 to learn more about the items we accept and to make a donation.

The Gallery at Iona: Meet Our Artists!

Special Guest Artists Valerie Watson, painter, and Norma Brooks, folk artist, share their inspiration and creative processes. Enjoy their artworks on display in the Gallery at Iona through October 4.

Q: What is your artistic process?

Norma: I like colors. I like richness, and I like transformation — taking found objects and finding ways to make them into something completely different or embellish what I have. I love to pair colors and patterns that you might not necessarily think go together. And, often, my projects don't turn out the way that I had envisioned them. I've learned to appreciate those errors and mistakes. They are now the best parts.



"Backyard Jungle," watercolor by Valerie Watson

Valerie: Since high school, I've been working in watercolor. And now I am over 60 years old, and it is still my best friend. I am inspired by spontaneous moments that are visually exciting for me to watch. It is unrehearsed, just life happening. I usually snap a photo so that I can see all the nuances. The

lights and the darks are mapped out for me, and the photo gives me the details that made me interested in the subject in the first place. Watercolor can be frightening, but at this stage, I feel that I have an understanding of the medium. It's learning to control it and then you can really dance on the paper.

Q: Has your process changed as you've aged?

Norma: It has changed. I feel freer; I can exhale and it's ok. I don't have to play it safe, and I don't have to stay within the line. The more I create, the more I want to color outside the lines. Try something riskier, and that will make it more artistic and make it more me.

Valerie: I've been very consistent when it comes to my subjects. But, I do find myself looking for the next

challenge in a different way. As an artist, I want to go into new territories. I want to make myself do stuff that leaves me sweating. I don't just look for a subject now, I think, "Wow, what if I did this?"



Covered Basket by Norma Brooks

Q: What do you hope to evoke from visitors with your exhibition in the Gallery?

Norma: Just a smile. Or a breathless "wow." It is a gift to share my art with others, and if I can bring happiness to them, then I am successful.

Valerie: I hope that visitors will get the experience of seeing the evolution in my work. I have a few older pieces that reflected my daily life. They are narrower in subject because I hadn't explored yet. My newer work is much looser. I hope visitors see where I started, and where I am now. **V**

Want to hear more from our featured artists?

Gallery Talk & Tour with our Special Guest Artists

Saturday, June 25, 2016, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm.
RSVP by calling (202) 895-9407.

Meet the Artists Reception

Friday, September 23, 2016, 5:00-7:00 pm.
Featuring live music and delicious refreshments.
RSVP by calling (202) 895-9407.

Special thanks to Sunrise on Connecticut Avenue for their generous support of Iona's art events.



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Donor Satisfaction Survey: Thank You for Your Responses

Are we doing a good job with our donors? Yes! This winter, Iona conducted a donor satisfaction survey, with the pro bono help of Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, courtesy of John Goodman, the chair of Iona's Board of Associates. The results are in and we've learned that 86% of our donors are very happy with Iona, and have no issues. Among the 14% of respondents who said they had a significant issue, the top issues were problems with parking, lack of information about how donations are used and about Iona's advocacy efforts, as well as several operational issues. We take the feedback seriously and will be taking appropriate action.