

A Web of Caring

In 1997, Sona Mehring was devastated to learn that a close friend had delivered a premature baby and that both the baby and the mother were in critical condition. Ready to help in any way possible, Mehring was given the task of updating family and friends about the situation. Mehring utilized her background in web design to develop a website to communicate information to a wide circle of family and friends without disturbing the mother's need for rest or placing additional demands on hospital staff.

"I wanted to provide a space for my friend to update her support network and for her support network to provide love and encouragement," says Mehring. "The Internet was the perfect medium for that."

Sadly, after a nine-day struggle against tremendous odds, Baby Brigid died in surgery. But Mehring's revolutionary communication tool, CaringBridge, was born out of this tragedy.

Today, CaringBridge is a charitable nonprofit providing free, private websites that connect family and friends to share information, love and support during a serious health event, care and recovery.

A CaringBridge website saves time and energy by centralizing communication during a serious health event. This eases the burden of updating family and friends and keeps the focus on caring for the patient.

The websites can be an important tool for patients and families to reduce isolation and stress in a difficult time, giving them a much-needed outlet for sharing their feelings and receiving support. Rather than individually contacting each member of their support system, a CaringBridge site allows patients and their caregivers to update everyone concerned with just one journal entry.

With the help of a CaringBridge site, authors are able to expand their support network. “On the first day I created my CaringBridge website, I received 120 hits,” says Sara Pallen, a woman in remission from leukemia who authored a site. “I never could have communicated with 120 people in one day without this website.”

A CaringBridge site also helps patients build therapeutic connections with their support networks, allowing family and friends to send messages of love and encouragement through the patient’s guestbook. Many authors of CaringBridge sites say that the large volume of well-wishes and compassion they receive through the guestbook helps them experience emotional healing and improved quality of life.

Karen Cooley, a CaringBridge author, has personally felt the cathartic benefits of writing on a CaringBridge site. “CaringBridge has been a real comfort to me,” says Cooley. “It lets me talk to people in a way and get encouragement.”

More than a decade after the first CaringBridge site was created, the organization has grown to host more than 160,000 personal sites that connect over half-a-million people daily.