

FALL/WINTER 2024

INSIGHT



STORIES OF LOVE AND LIFE AT STEDMAN COMMUNITY HOSPICE



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Horticultural Therapy

an extension of resident care

As part of our goal to provide whole-person care to our residents and families, Stedman Community Hospice and St. Joseph's Lifecare Centre Brantford are committed to integrating alternative therapies to compliment the more traditional systems of care.

Our Horticultural Therapy Program was first introduced in the spring of 2011 with the creation of our beautiful therapy garden and as the gardens continue to develop so does the horticulture therapy program.

The Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association defines Horticultural Therapy (HT) as a formal practice that uses plants, horticultural activities and the garden landscape to promote well-being for participants.

THE BENEFITS OF HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Horticultural Therapy offers a variety of benefits that span the domains of wellness which include, physical, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental and occupational, ultimately fostering whole-person care. Some examples of activities incorporated in HT include flower arranging, planting seeds, pressing flowers, creating mandalas and providing scent therapy, effective in triggering memory.

By giving participants a choice around what plant materials are used, we promote cognitive and intellectual stimulation. The activities also encourage curiosity and engagement and foster new learning for individuals of all ages.

Benefits include mood improvement through exposure to sunshine and the absorption of vitamin D, and the mental clarity that comes from exposure to fresh air and physical activity. Some participants report being able to relieve anger or aggression through the expenditure of energy that comes from maintaining a garden.

HT allows for self-expression which can be particularly significant for individuals who find it difficult to express their feelings verbally. HT programming helps individuals build hope, social networks, and confidence which, in turn, instills a sense of pride in their work or creations. Simply stated, it helps participants find joy.

Not only do our residents and their families benefit from the immersive experience, the gardens also have a dramatic impact on the staff, volunteers, students and community members who frequent the grounds. The sensory experience of being in a garden, and the harvesting of plants, assist in grounding individuals to their surroundings.

In a palliative care setting, the preservation of quality



of life is paramount. Stedman will soon offer horticultural programming as a regular component of support groups for grief and bereavement, providing care for caregivers as well as patients living with progressive life-limiting illnesses.

OUR GARDEN HELPERS

Our secret sauce for building and maintaining an oasis like ours is a stellar team that includes a dedicated Registered Horticultural Therapist, an HT intern, and an army of hard-working volunteers.

Everyone has a story, including many of our garden volunteers. Often, individuals who have journeyed alongside a loved one at our Hospice come back to donate their time, skills and compassion. For many, volunteering in the gardens is part of their own grief journey. It offers a safe, stable and consistent community during a significant period of transition and loss. There is a special connection and deep sense of understanding that bonds our team of garden volunteers.

Volunteers with Brantford Garden Club have been instrumental in establishing a cut flower and vegetable garden on our grounds. The wide variety of vegetables



An example of expressive art being incorporated into our horticultural and art therapy programming, mandala are created using a variety of dried plants from our garden. Many find the creative process very calming, and creating mandalas as art therapy can be a wonderful activity for meditation, emotional expression, and self-soothing.

harvested by volunteers are used to create soups and salads for our residents. During the growing season, bouquets of freshly cut flowers adorn the common areas of the Hospice.

Additionally, we are blessed to have the support of many community partners. We are grateful to RBC Dominion Securities, Enbridge Gas, Walter's Greenhouse and Garden Supply, ASK Farms - My Koi Water Gardens and Dragonfly Landscape Supply for their continuing donation of time, hands-on labour and supplies.

Ongoing maintenance and supportive programming are funded by donations received from individuals and granting organizations.

Most recently, Peavey Mart hosted a fundraiser where members of the community could purchase from a wish list of garden tools and supplies to help us ensure the replacement of worn equipment. This incredible support is one way we ensure our two acres of gardens are regularly maintained.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Our HT program is helping to build capacity in our community. Stedman is leading the charge in mentoring up-and-coming HTs with the launch of our first Horticultural Therapy Certification course that will run from October 2024 – February 2025. The course will offer expansive learning and immersive study opportunities to allow participants to apply aspects of HT as a component of high-quality person-centred care.

When visiting our gardens be sure to check out the specially designed labyrinth which has been intentionally placed to encourage a practice of gratitude for all that sustains us in our lives. Along the pathway, visitors will notice words from the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address which serve as a constant reminder of the Indigenous lands on which we provide care and services.



The pathway of the garden's labyrinth incorporates words from the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, honouring the Indigenous lands on which we provide care.

Wright Family discovers there is more than one way to heal



Gary Wright was convinced he was going to win his battle with cancer. His wife, Heidi, and his daughters Schae and Skylar say he maintained that belief almost to the very end. Even after arriving at Stedman Community Hospice, he arranged for physiotherapy for the purpose of building his strength in order to go home.

“Although I knew he was dying before he did, just hearing Dad say so convincingly that he was going to live had me believing that he might just do that, despite what I knew,” says Schae.

Gary was all about jumping into life with both feet. Before brain cancer put an end to his active schedule, the custom homebuilder seldom sat still. He poured his energy into his family and his business, coached baseball, played bass in a band, and generally helped out wherever it was needed.

Gary certainly wasn't going the leave this world willingly. His wife shared that he did not wish to know his original diagnosis and prognosis because it allowed him to maintain

a positive mindset for the journey ahead.

“That was tough,” says Heidi.

“When I was told his cancer was terminal, I couldn't tell anyone because I'd be risking that it would get back to him and he would have been devastated,” she shared.

“I couldn't even tell the girls. You do that for the person you love.”

With the help of a social worker at London Health Sciences and later the supportive care team at Stedman Community Hospice, Heidi began to process and come to terms with the fact that her husband likely wouldn't make it to his next birthday. He was 57.

Schae and Skylar eventually pieced together the gravity of their father's situation. Heidi says it was Dr. McNeil, Gary's palliative care physician and the Hospice's medical director who took the bold step of confronting Gary with the truth, that there would be no more MRIs and tests.

“It was hard for him to hear that. He still disagreed with her, but he was respectful and began to absorb the news,”

says Heidi.

For his wife, that frank conversation between Gary and his doctor was a necessary, important step that paved the way for other important conversations she had delayed until he was ready to accept that his health wasn't going to improve.

"Gary's acceptance allowed us to ask him questions about his final wishes, and to create memories with the girls before he died, memories they will always treasure," says Heidi.

As part of the Hospice's Legacy programming, the supportive care team worked with the Wright family to create interlocking hand molds as well as a recording of Gary's voice that was sewn into three teddy bears which his family can hear at the press of a button, keepsakes to help the family process their grief. On the Wrights' wedding anniversary, Gary had a traditional father-daughter dance with each of his girls from his Hospice room.

The family expressed how well their family was cared for by both staff and volunteers.

"They made all of us feel comfortable and wanted. The care for Gary was incredible, effortless, kind, thoughtful. Twice-daily care was never rushed; options for meals were plentiful, and offers to go outside or to the common room were given frequently," says Heidi.

"The gardens are the most magical place to be. Many mornings while Gary



"Although he wasn't physically healed, he felt he was spiritually healed."

slept I'd slip out with a coffee and sit in the quiet, reflecting. I did that a great deal and was generally moved to tears. Tears for fear, sadness, anger but also gratitude for the care Gary so needed that I couldn't provide myself," Heidi shared.

"The volunteers were so generous with making sure there was ice water, coffee, tea and snacks available for families to enjoy. I hope to be back to volunteer when I feel I'm up to it,"

says Heidi.

Although Gary didn't get to go home permanently, through the Brant Paramedics Wish program, Hospice staff and paramedics were able to take Gary home for a day, where he enjoyed family time, ordered in his favourite Chinese take-out, and cuddled his beloved cats. Gary was the first person to receive a wish through the new program.

Heidi shared that although Gary wasn't healed in the way he had hoped, throughout his cancer journey he had worked hard spiritually, returning to church, doing morning devotionals, and participating in his church's men's group.

Before he passed away on July 23, he told his family about a dream he had, where he was being taken by the hand into a place he could only describe as Heaven.

"Although he wasn't physically healed, he felt he was spiritually healed, and that gave him the peace to go," says Skylar.

"Just knowing that is a great comfort to us," Heidi added.

Heidi says she has had the occasion to visit the Hospice since her husband passed away.

"I thought I'd feel fear when I walked through the doors but instead I feel peace, as I feel Gary's presence. And I think of the staff as our family now. I miss them all."



Your story is our story.

If you and your family have been impacted by the care you've received at Stedman Community Hospice, through our in-patient hospice or through our outreach program, please consider sharing your story with us.

Please email nbillard@sjlc.ca or call **519-751-7096, ext 2476** for more information.

Elaine Wilson's dedication to service and learning was a gift to her family and community

Elaine Wilson knew the halls and walls of Stedman Community Hospice long before she came through the doors as a patient. After raising her children with enough love and care to support an entire village, when the time came to retire, Elaine turned her attention to giving back to the community. Stedman Community Hospice was one of several organizations fortunate enough to benefit from Elaine's nurturing hand.

In addition to being a great mentor to her children and 10 grandchildren, in her 45-year career she had earned a second master's degree and ran Brantford General Hospital's dietary internship program, where she guided hundreds of new professionals.

Daughters Tracy MacMillan and Leslie Butler shared that education was very important to their mother.

Their mother was someone who never did anything halfway and she generously shared her gifts with her family and students, seeing it as her life's purpose.

"She was a gift. She was intelligent, focused, and meticulously detailed in everything she did for her family," says Leslie.

Retired Volunteer Engagement Co-ordinator Cheryl Corner smiles when she reflects on Elaine's first few days as a kitchen volunteer at the Hospice.

"I worked for Elaine during my years at BGH and she knew Canada's Food Guide like the back of her hand. Now our roles have been reversed and I had the job of explaining to Elaine that the approach to food is quite different at a hospice, that meals are primarily made for the patient's pleasure and the need for nutrition is secondary," says Cheryl.

"I could imagine what a learning curve that would be for someone whose focus had always been on developing nutritionally balanced meal plans and teaching others to do the same," she added.

Cheryl stated that Elaine's vast knowledge of infection prevention and control practices was invaluable to the Hospice's team of volunteers.



Elaine Wilson delighted in hosting large family gatherings, especially around the holidays.

"She became our kitchen's health and safety expert," says Cheryl.

"She knew the number of days that every type of food could be stored and refrigerated, and she was so generous and patient in extending her knowledge to all of us. We went to her about all those things. She was an absolute asset," says Cheryl.

"For Elaine, preparing meals for her family was an extension of her love for them," says Cheryl. When her husband became a patient at the Hospice, she was able to let others care and provide for him, giving her peace and time to be present in those last moments together. This was a gift she had once helped others to have with their loved ones."

Elaine always strove for excellence and was focused on service to her family and community when undertaking tasks. When the pandemic had been declared and Elaine's active volunteer schedule was no longer, her family began to notice changes.

"She was a very independent, competent individual and suddenly she was having difficulty with new skill learning and problem-solving," Tracy shared.

Recipes that Elaine had used all her life suddenly weren't turning out right and this became a source of frustration for her.

"We were raised to care unconditionally, and we stepped up to do a whole lot for Mom long before she was diagnosed, because that's what you do – you help. Through that care we were able to stop and recognize that something was quite different here," says Tracy.

In 2022, several months after the first symptoms presented, Elaine was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia, an aggressive form of dementia that causes memory decline and visual-spatial awareness issues.

"In the beginning, she could reflect and see the changes in herself as they were occurring and that was heartbreaking for her, and heartbreaking for us," says Leslie.

"Perhaps the most difficult thing for Mom was coming to terms with her inability to no longer be able to serve others. She always saw herself as a helper and until now, she believed she would return to a life of service when the pandemic ended."

Elaine came to Stedman Community Hospice on October 3, 2023 and died on October 23.

"She was so at peace with coming to the Hospice. She smiled when we told her where she was going. It was like going home," says Leslie.

"There wasn't a single person among the volunteers and staff who didn't come to see her. They all had stories to share, and they all expressed such gratitude for the training and guidance



Elaine thoroughly enjoyed her career in health care as manager of Brantford General Hospital's dietary internship program.

our mother had given them. Even former staff and volunteers came in to see her when they discovered she was here."

"All three of us, my brother Neil and myself and Tracy, had all been very involved in her daily care, and with Mom arriving at the Hospice, everyone here is so loving, so willing and so capable, it released us of the responsibility of providing care, and allowed us to simply sit with Mom, read to Mom, and celebrate being a family," Leslie shared.

Tracy added "Knowing and

understanding that we were surrounded by people who have such competence, skills and compassion to deal with the whole person, the whole family, was a release. We had taken on not only the care, but medical decision making, but when she was there, we knew that we no longer needed to do that, because we too were experiencing the comfort, the care and the competence. We recognized that it was now okay to let others truly, truly be responsible for that, so we could just be family."

YOUR GIFTS MAKE THE CARE POSSIBLE.

"You truly are an unbelievable team. Thank you for devoting your lives to caring for and helping to carry families through the hardest parts of theirs."

Andrew Smyth

"One of the best things that Brantford ever did was Stedman Community Hospice. We are so blessed to have you."

Carm Ricotta Longo

"I honestly don't know what I would have done without the special care you provided to my husband and father in their final journey. Thank you."

Joanne Patterson

THANK YOU

There's Something About Elsie

ELSIE HANKINSON September 7, 1927 - August 17, 2024

One of Stedman Community Hospice's greatest supporters, Elsie Hankinson passed away on August 17, 2024 at the age of 96, leaving an incredible legacy that will be felt by the community for generations to come.

In 2004, Elsie and her husband Lorne donated \$1 million to Stedman Community Hospice to kickstart a campaign to fund the building of our hospice, named Hankinson House in their honour. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony to open Hankinson House, Elsie remarked that it was not something she ever dreamed she would have the ability to do in her lifetime. Thanks to a \$5.3 million lottery win, the Hankinsons, who were already great community supporters, blessed a number of charities with larger financial gifts.

Elsie was a teacher. Growing up in the small town of Bothwell, Ontario, money was scarce for Elsie's family and attending university was by no means a certainty. A cousin who was living with Elsie's family saw she had a natural instinct for teaching. In witnessing Elsie's nurturing countenance on a daily basis, her cousin was moved to provide the funds for Elsie to attend Teacher's College, setting her up for what would become a distinguished 30-year teaching career.

After Lorne's death in 2011, Elsie continued to serve her community, dedicating much time and effort to her faith community and to the activities of St. Pius Church, of which she was a



founding member. She continued to be actively involved in the Lorne and Elsie Hankinson Foundation, a trust they established following their lottery win. The trust saw to a number of charities receiving financial assistance, with Elsie continuing to contribute to causes close to her heart, namely healthcare, education, housing and support for those with special needs.

Elsie's extraordinary gifts of faith, caring, tenderness and generosity of spirit will long be remembered by the community she so humbly served. The compassionate care provided inside the building that bears her name will have a lasting impact in the community for decades to come.

Thank you, Mrs. Hankinson.

Programs and services of Stedman Community Hospice are made possible by donor support.

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