

How do you measure a year? Margaret Bahen Hospice, it's in the number of families touched



By Brock Weir

Heather R.'s family was emotionally drained when their mother was admitted to hospice care.

Her cancer had spread quicker than any of her doctors anticipated and it was a stressful time for all concerned. But their spirits were lifted as soon as they walked through the doors of Margaret Bahen Hospice, York Region's newest 10-bed residential hospice, which opened one year ago in Newmarket.

Located adjacent to Southlake Regional Health Centre, the hospice embraced their family in kindness, allowing their matriarch to spend her last days living on her own terms.

Heather shared her family's moving story last week as the Margaret Bahen Hospice formally marked its first anniversary of care.

"Mum enjoyed having everyone around for visits, especially her four grandchildren," Heather told the audience of volunteers, donors, supports and dignitaries at the anniversary celebration. "We are a large and energetic family and it meant so much to her to have all 14 of us visiting during Christmas without having to worry about bothering a roommate. She also appreciated having her own space to decorate the way she pleased and watch what television programs she wanted. She enjoyed being treated like a queen when she was at Margaret Bahen.

"It's hard to put into words how much our experience at Margaret Bahen meant to my family. It gave us a sense of calm and ease in the face of a cruel, indiscriminate illness. It gave my mother a sense of dignity and peace and allowed her to enjoy her family in a way we never would have thought possible either at home or in a hospital room. We're forever grateful for the team at Margaret Bahen and consider them a part of our large, energetic, loud family."

This was music to the ears of Sonya Murray, Executive Director of Margaret Bahen.

Founded on the legacy of Margaret and John Bahen, the hospice has gone from strength to strength over the last 12 months. Now part of Better Living Health & Community Services, it provides 24 hour palliative care services to individuals with life-limiting illness in a home-like environment, at no cost to the resident.

A year of success can be measured in many different ways, said Ms. Murray. It might be measured by the 152 residents and families served since its opening, in the 150 volunteers that have given of their time within its walls, in the 10,000 collective volunteer hours the hospice itself has received, or in the 21,900 homemade cookies that have been eaten in the hospital's comfortable kitchen over the past 12 months – all valid statistics.

"They are impressive numbers and certain to paint a picture of what happens here [but] it's the hospice moments that really capture what we do," said Ms. Murray. "It is having Christmas in November. It is playing the guitar while a mother holds her daughter in her arms and dances with her for the very last time. It is our nurse Lisa and her family gifting us with the Tree of Life that has a hand-knitted heart for each of the families served. It is Trish, our Director of Care, bringing a pony into the hospice to cheer up a resident who had spent a lifetime on horses. It is family supporting families at our harvest table. It is our PSW Holly sitting at the table explaining death to an eleven-year-old who is about to lose a family member over milk and cookies. It's Debbie, our Director

of Development, spending hours holding a six-year-old whose mother has just died, and it is our PSW Mark running in on his break to get one of our residents chips and watching a late night sports game with him. It is about family.

?365 days isn't all that we've accomplished and I can't properly quantify it. What we value here are all those moments that make up the 365 days. What we value here is the quality of life. On our first year anniversary, we're thankful for the opportunity to be a part of these moments. It is a true privilege to join this journey with the individuals and families who have chosen Margaret Bahen hospice to be their final home.?

These sentiments were echoed by Deputy Premier Christine Elliott, the MPP for Newmarket-Aurora who also serves as Ontario's Minister of Health & Long-Term Care.

?Since Margaret Bahen opened last year, 152 residents and families have experienced the comfort, compassion, quality and life care that the hospice provides,? said Ms. Elliott. ?I have had the opportunity to spend a few hours here to understand completely everything that is being done here and it is a beautiful building, of course, but it is what goes on inside here and the compassion people show, the extent to which you try to make people smile, and make days comfortable and happy and make families feel they are in good hands and that they're being well-cared for. That is truly remarkable and this hospice is an absolute treasure for this Region.?