

Alzheimer Society builds on engagement with new community programs

January was Alzheimer Awareness Month across Canada, and the Alzheimer Society of York Region is aiming to keep this momentum going not just in February but throughout the year as they launch new Active Living programs to keep clients engaged.

The programs, according to Jaime Cruz, Public Education and Community Programs Manager for the Alzheimer Society of York Region, are designed for individuals living with dementia, their care partners, family and friends to be able to engage in social and physical activities in the community and break free of isolation.

“Oftentimes people are still continuing to isolate because of the fear of others recognizing that they may have some difficulties,” says Cruz. “This program is for people to come and engage in programs without a stigma over their head, where everybody can come and laugh and support each other, engaging in programs like tai chi, creative programs, a horse therapy program. There is no expectation from anybody except to come, have a good time, and to engage with other people who are experiencing similar situations.”

The Alzheimer Society of York Region, she adds, is “constantly looking” at expanding reach to make sure that all corners of York Region are served, from Georgina to Markham and collectively breaking the confines of isolation and stigma, whether through in-person or virtual platforms.

“We’ve really looked at how to best meet the needs of individuals and that is why we continue to offer quite a variety of different virtual programs,” says Cruz. “Somebody may not drive, so we want to be able to continue to support an individual the virtual way as well as in-person. It is by connecting with me and I will be more than happy to share the variety of different programs, where they are located, and how to get registered.

“Sometimes it is just having a conversation on the phone or in-person to hear what that care partner is experiencing, what it is they are needing, listening to what those needs are, explaining the variety of different services that are available – really listening to them. Oftentimes care partners don’t know how to express themselves, or to other family or friends, because the other individuals in their lives might not know how to respond. What we want to do is create that comfort. Sometimes it is just that introduction, sharing what we have available and allowing them to take a first step to what their comfort is, finding what the person who is living with dementia’s comfort is, what their routine is like. We really try to look at an individual’s capabilities and then it is about suggesting what program may be a great fit for the family, for the care partner, and for the individual living with a dementia based on getting a description of both of their likes.

An ultimate goal is to ensure York Region is a safe environment, where the stigma associated with a dementia diagnosis has been eliminated.

Another way they have tried to break down that stigma this year is the launch of public webinars.

Up next, on February 11 from 7 – 8 p.m. and on February 14 from 1 – 2 p.m., the series will continue with “Financial Planning for Families Impacted by Dementia.” Led by industry experts, this webinar will cover qualifying medical expenses; the Disability Tax Credit; and the responsibilities of powers of attorney and executors. A further financial webinar, Strategic Charitable Giving, will take place February 12 from 7 – 8 p.m.

Later this month, on February 20, Sabrina DeToma, Doctor of Audiology at Salus Hearing and Tinnitus Centre will present Hearing Loss & Dementia to “highlight the importance of visiting an audiologist as well as the connection of hearing loss and the onset of dementia.”

“Sometimes individuals feel that hearing loss is a normal part of aging, which it can be, but what the audiologist is going to be sharing is with the deterioration of hearing, how it actually can affect the part of the brain that can increase an individual’s risk of an

onset of a dementia because of not using a certain part of your brain, individuals start to isolate,? says Cruz.

For more information, including registration, contact Jaime Cruz at 905-726-3477 or email jcruz@alzheimer-york.com.

By Brock Weir