

Communities gearing up for annual Hike for Hospice events

Communities across Canada are gearing up for Hike for Hospice, a cross-country event that gets people moving to help support hospice care.

On May 31, Margaret Bahen Hospice and Doane House Hospice will host their annual Hike for Hospice event at Newmarket's Fairy Lake.

Everyone is invited to participate in memory or honour of a loved one, or to simply support York Region families.

According to Andrea Interior, Manager of Philanthropy for Better Living Health, which manages both the residential Margaret Bahen Hospice and the community care-focused Doane House Hospice, hundreds of local families are impacted by the organizations each year ? but the ways they can have that impact are contingent on community support.

?Over 236 families per year are touched through Margaret Bahen Hospice in terms of the residents we have come through, and some of them will be with us for days, some for weeks, and then there are some who are with us for a few months,? she says. ?This year, we have set an \$85,000 fundraising goal.

?In terms of what we do fundraising for, we actually have a funding gap of \$850,000 per year that we need to raise through events like this, through grants, through donations in general that come to just the two hospices themselves. That allows us to run other benefits and values to families for the Hospice. Of course, nurses and the operating costs are covered by the Ministry, but funding of things such as food ? that's one of the things we are very careful to provide. We've got multiple volunteers that come in daily and will just cook and bake. There's always food in the fridge, there's always coffee on, there's baked goods around the clock because we have families that come in 24/7 and a lot of them stay with their loved ones as well. As a caregiver, you're caring more about the resident and not yourself, so this is one of the things we make sure to provide?they say it's always lovely to have a hot bowl of soup that is always on, or a place where they can go into the kitchen at a long dining table with family members?

?Our recreational therapists, our art therapists, those are all paid through donations, and these are pieces we bring in that make our hospice feel like a home, so it doesn't feel like an institution. It's outside of what you would get at palliative care at the hospital, and it really seems to be the differences that go above and beyond for families that use our services.?

It's often these personal touches that go above and beyond for families caring for loved ones at end-of-life that keep families engaged in the Hospice and supporting it through events like Hike for Hospice.

?It's very close-to-heart for people and that's why they walk in honour of a loved one, but that means we just want to get more of those families to come out to the event as well,? says Interior. ?We are hoping to have I think 150 to 200 people this year come out for the walk. We're just over 100 for participants, but then, of course, there's staff and volunteers and other people that are involved. We are hoping to reach that goal, but that's always weather-dependent because it's an outdoor event.?

For those who might want to participate but have not been directly touched by hospice care, Interior says that the types of care offered by both Hospices is ?an essential part of our healthcare system.?

?It really is part of that end-of-life journey that supports people, but we need the community to be more aware of what this is, hopefully before they really need those services,? she says, adding Hospice care also provides support services for those who are left behind. ?Doane House has been around for over 30 years in York Region, helping with treatment, advanced care planning, and then the grief of it as well that happens for the loved ones that are really left behind, to allow for them to have that support as well.

?We're hoping this [event] is also an opportunity for people to learn about these kinds of staples in our community, whether it is our wellness program, caregiver support, or the kind of grief and bereavement [services. Margaret Bahen] makes a space in a very

difficult time for people's lives, usually the most difficult time, and makes it feel like home. People hike because their loved ones want that to keep going, they want to give back. Hospice, of course, is something they don't have to pay for and, in just speaking with the families, that is always very shocking because there's just a lot of the population who didn't know what Hospice was until you had a loved one in hospice.?

For more on this year's Hike, visit www.myhospice.ca/hikeforhospice.

By Brock Weir