

Expanding Social Engagement for seniors is priority for CHATS

As we approach a full year of living in the midst of a global pandemic, Community & Home Assistance to Seniors (CHATS) is putting increased emphasis on expanding social engagement for seniors.

Expanding Social Engagement for Seniors is a new program launched by CHATS this winter to help older residents stay connected and keep minds active.

Launched in conjunction with the Alzheimer Society of York Region, York Region EMS, the York Regional Police, March of Dimes, Human Endeavour and CareFirst, the Expanding Social Engagement for Seniors program includes kits packed with a variety of products, from crossword puzzles and games to our new group of daily essentials such as face masks and alcohol wipes.

In addition to these products, the kits contain information about local resources.

“Most importantly, it is designed to help people feel they are connected and that there are resources out there they can call on at any time to support them if they should need it,” says Christina Bisanz, CEO of CHATS, which serves both York Region and South Simcoe. “This is a project we launched just after the holiday season and these kits have been, and are being, delivered throughout the area to a number of elderly people in the community.”

This is just one initiative being carried out by CHATS throughout the winter.

It has been a busy season for the organization, having recently taken part in Aurora's Christmas Dream Dinner, which provided special turkey dinners to people in need within the community and beyond.

Key in CHATS' role in this were their own frontline workers who support older adults across many municipalities. In just one example, on December 22, personal support workers Samanta Breen and Karen Fredrick finished an overnight shift at an area seniors' residence when they heard someone calling for help. The PSWs walked the floor listening at each door until they could pinpoint the sound, says Ms. Bisanz.

“The person's voice was getting very faint, and she was unable to answer the door (the tenant not being a CHATS' client, the PSWs did not have a key to get in),” said Ms. Bisanz. “Another PSW, Gregy Biolley, called 911 and waited in the lobby door until first responders arrived. Meanwhile, Samanta and Karen kept reassuring the tenant that help was on the way. By the time the first responders arrived the tenant was no longer responding. Police broke the door open and found the tenant unconscious. EMS transported the tenant to hospital.”

“We are very proud of how swiftly and purposefully our PSWs responded when they felt someone needed help. Their training and professionalism shone through. PSWs are not always acknowledged for what they do and how they help, but they are certainly among the heroes in healthcare.”

The pandemic has caused us to redefine how we define our frontline workers, and CHATS' volunteers have been front and centre from the very beginning and continue to be.

In addition to delivering the Expanding Social Engagement kits, they have been very active on the phones with their telephone reassurance programs and Meals on Wheels programs to help older residents stay connected and healthy in body, mind and spirit.

“We're still looking for volunteers to help with telephone calls, people that might have some experience or expertise in online programming would be helpful,” says Ms. Bisanz. “If they have some ideas to bring that we can put online that would be great. We are still looking for volunteers for Meals on Wheels delivery and we have really increased the number of clients now receiving Meals on Wheels. As people are more reluctant to go out, we certainly want to facilitate their ability to stay in their homes. Those

meals have become even more important as sort of food security and good nutritional options and they are delivered right to their doors in a contactless way. If anybody is interested in volunteering activities for CHATS, we certainly encourage them to give us a call and see what opportunities exist in their respective areas.

?We're still a way from going back to the way things were and we probably won't be exactly back to the way things were and our clients, they have been patient but it has been difficult. It has been difficult for the seniors and it has been difficult for their family members to continue to keep them safe at home. People are getting anxious and are looking for the time when they can come back together and that is all going to be very dependent on a successful course of having people be vaccinated and not only to protect themselves but to protect the elderly in our community. We're very hopeful that vaccination program will continue to roll out and will continue to roll out quickly, and will also be getting to not only the frontline workers in the community, the PSWs, the drivers, the recreation programs, those who are doing front-facing work with the elderly need to be on the priority list for vaccination as well as the seniors just as much as some of the other priority population. We are hopeful there will be a recognition of the importance of also protecting those frontline essential workers and those seniors who are at home but definitely at higher risk.?

For more, including how to get involved, visit chats.on.ca.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter