

Hike for Hope & Hill raises more than \$70,000 for local hospice care

Families, friends and volunteers who have experienced hospice care firsthand braved last Sunday's wet weather and laced up for Hike for Hope & Hill ? a joint fundraiser for Aurora's Hope House and Richmond Hill's Hill House Hospices.

Hosted in person on Sunday, May 1 and continuing virtually through May 31, participants have helped the organizations raise more than 70 per cent of their \$100,000 fundraising goal.

Hill House Hospice provides end-of-life residential care and support. Hope House, on the other hand, is a community hospice, providing numerous programs to help individuals and families get through the end-of-life process and the grief that is left behind.

The May 1 hike was the first time many volunteers who have been working tirelessly, albeit remotely, since the start of the global pandemic to provide seamless care to the community had come face to face, and, for organizers, the excitement was overwhelming.

?It was absolutely amazing,? says Hill House Executive Director Michelle Hambly. ?It was so great to see how engaged the volunteers were, how excited they were, and how many came out in support. Not the greatest weather, so we appreciate everyone coming out, but it was such a great day.?

These sentiments are shared by Hope House Executive Director Heidi Bonner, who adds: ?The clients that have benefited from our support were so willing and excited to give back to the organization and the Hope House clients who attended. They have not seen each other in person as we have been doing virtual programs. For those that attended, and I am thinking of our Bereavement Group in particular, a group of them attended and to see each other in person for the first time was so exciting for them ? and to help our hospices with raising funds for the programs and services was, I think, really exciting for them.?

Events like these give both hospices the chance to welcome new people and provide education on what each organization does.

When all the chips are counted at the end of this month, Hill House will use their share of the funds to support general operations and therapy programs for residents, including music therapy, aroma therapy, massage therapy and more. Hope House, on the other hand, will support existing programs, including their Bereavement groups which Ms. Bonner says have grown considerably over the last two years.

?We are going to help support these groups as well as on the wellness side of things where we're always reaching out and offering wellness programs to our community,? says Ms. Bonner. ?The funds will directly support our community members.?

But the event isn't over yet. Throughout the balance of May, both Hospices are encouraging their clients and their families, those who have suffered the loss of a loved one, and members of the community at large to participate simply by getting outside and being active in nature, whether it is stretching and yoga, participating in a wellness group, or, as the name of the fundraiser suggests, taking a hike.

?It is just being active and focusing on self-care,? says Ms. Hambly. ?We have an abundance of appreciation and support to the community not only for their support during the day, but also their ongoing support which has enabled us to stay open always, even during the last two years of the pandemic, to keep hospice programs rolling as well as our residential hospice.?

Adds Ms. Bonner, ?The Hike is on until May 31 and we're encouraging the community to support us in any way they can.?

To keep that momentum going and to take part, visit hikeforhopeandhill.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter