

Hope House Hospice celebrates 40 years of caring for community



As the 1980s approached, Jane Reid, Barbara Marshall Houlding, and Salley Blaney identified an important need in their community, King Township, and set out to close the gap.

The result was the establishment of Hospice King in 1983, a York Region first.

Subsequently rebranded as Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill to reflect the communities in which they served, and now known as Hope House Hospice, the Aurora-based organization is preparing to mark its 40th anniversary of delivering end-of-life care and counselling in the community.

Hope House Hospice started life at King's All Saints Anglican Church and immediately hit the ground running. Focused on at-home care, their programs have evolved over the last five decades to include myriad counselling programs and community outreach.

All of this will be underscored Wednesday, May 10, at Aurora's Royal Venetian Mansion with Celebrating 40 Years of Hope. Their first in-person fundraiser for the organization since the start of the global pandemic, Celebrating 40 Years of Hope will be a time to celebrate their successes and look ahead to their future.

?This is a celebration of the wonderful support that has been provided over many years by many people,? says Hope House Executive Director Heidi Bonner. ?We want to highlight the fact that we have been able to provide really quality care throughout the very difficult years of the pandemic that are still happening, that we continue to provide help to those who are diagnosed with illness, to those who are dealing with the death of a loved one, and are able to support our community throughout these difficult days.

?We are celebrating the history of the organization, which started 40 years ago when three women got together and decided that it was really important to support people to be able to die at home. At that time, most deaths were happening in hospitals so they had experience themselves ? the very special aspects of hospice ? and decided that they would like to have it in their community. They started Hospice King, which at that time provided support in the home for those end-of-life, and there was a volunteer pool of nurses and family physicians that helped support at-home death.

?Over the years, building on supporting the bereavements ? the families and caregivers of those hospice clients ? we've now

expanded even more with our wellness programs and support to those children and teens for bereavement. I think the celebration [of a] grassroots organization, which is now flourishing and providing programs that really do address the needs of the community.?

Since Hope House's establishment 40 years ago, Bonner says there has been a ?transition? in hospice care to support people earlier on in their disease trajectory. Supporting people from the time of diagnosis, throughout the illness, and even continued supports if they go through remission, has been their primary mandate.

?One of our programs, the Picking Up the Pieces Post-Cancer Support Program, was developed to address the needs that our clients who were coming to us who weren't necessarily dying but were going through a difficult time after experiencing cancer and finishing treatments,? says Bonner. ?We developed a program that addressed those needs to help them find their new normal. That is an example of a program that was developed to address the needs of the community.

?On the bereavement side in the past, we have had groups that are specific to losses. We have had a Bereavement Group supporting those who were experiencing death of a loved one by suicide. During the pandemic we had a COVID Loss-specific group, which was very successful and then sort of branching off and supporting children and teens as well ? again, realizing that our young people need some support after the loss of a loved one, developing programs to help address their needs, to help support them, and to provide a place for them to go that's safe and they can talk about whatever the need to talk about when it comes to losing a loved one.?

Over time, wellness programs also developed with a focus on wellbeing and strategies to cope with stress and illness. These initiatives have ?flourished,? says Bonner, and are regularly attended by people diagnosed with illness, as well as their caregivers and families.

?Our staff team and our team of 100-plus volunteers are incredibly compassionate, innovative, and really supportive of the community,? says Bonner. ?We would not be doing what we're doing without them.?

Death is a 100 per cent certainty and there needs to be a way to ?normalize? that, adds Bonner when asked what makes Hope House's structure and programs endure. This entails encouraging people to ?seek support and reach out to community organizations like Hope House? which are there for them.

?Part of our struggle is there are so many people in our community who don't necessarily know what we do and think of hospice as a place to go and die, but Hope House Community Hospice is filled with really, really great people who provide amazing programs to help people through their difficult times and all offered at no cost,? says Bonner. ?Ideally it would be great if people could find support through their own family, but connecting with others who are experiencing a similar journey, I think, is really important and it does help to normalize and give them a place to talk about their experience and with death of a loved one or dealing with a serious illness. We have been told so many times, ?I don't know what I would do without Hope House.' It's pretty simple things that we do, but they seem to make a major impact on the community and on people's journeys through illness and loss.?

For more information about Hope House Hospice, visit www.hopehousehospice.com. Details on the anniversary event can be found at www.hopehousehospice.com/40years.

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