

Hospice ramps up programming ? this time for family caregivers

By Brock Weir

Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill launched a new area in care on Friday, expanding their service to address the needs of family caregivers throughout the community.

The new program, ?Sharing the Care,? will help family givers with ?practical? tasks ranging from light housekeeping and meal preparation to yard work to running errands from grocery shopping to prescription pick-ups.

According to Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill (Hospice), one in four Canadians are caring for a loved one at home, and more than half of these caregivers are between the ages of 45 and 65. The ?most surprising? statistic, they say, is that almost half of these caregivers are caring for more than one family member at the same time.

?We have always provided services to caregivers, but we wanted to try something unique and try to find a program that would be helpful,? says Heidi Bonner, Executive Director of Hospice. ?You can have support groups and those kinds of things, which we offer, but we wanted something that would be helpful in a different way. We literally sat around and asked what would be beneficial for caregivers. There are always tasks that your own home and tasks that your loved one would have. Sometimes they are hard to get to, so we wanted to free up a bit of quality time by helping out with the day-to-day as much as we could.?

The launch of ?Sharing the Care? in the lead-up to the holiday season is something Ms. Bonner says is entirely coincidental ? well, perhaps a lucky coincidence.

Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill has been providing support for those diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses, as well as their caregivers and the bereaved, for over 30 years. All their programs are offered free of charge, with support provided by fully-trained and professionally coordinated volunteers.

In the lead-up to Friday's announcement, Ms. Bonner said many of their volunteers are very interested in helping out with the new tasks that will be addressed through ?Sharing the Care? as they often get calls for that kind of support.

?In the past, we haven't been able to offer much because our support was more psycho-social focused and now we have to broaden that a little bit with the practical help,? she says. ?We definitely had requests before for this type of thing, but it has been difficult for us to provide assistance.?

As excited as their current volunteers are about the expansion, there is always a need for more hands on deck. Volunteers, she says, are usually called upon for support two to four hours per week. Hospice provides the valuable training and core concepts for volunteers who step forward.

?They learn interaction and communication skills and how to help families and that sort of thing, practical skills that would be relevant to their role,? says Ms. Bonner. ?They require a police check and a reference check as part of the basic volunteer steps and we would be happy to have volunteers help out in all areas.

?We're finding driving in particular is a bit tough [for our clients]. A lot of people are having trouble getting around. We all have piles of paper as well, so helping to organize and get through things [would be valuable as well], along with the visiting and companioning part.?

At this point, ?Sharing the Care? is considered a six month pilot, but Hospice King-Aurora-Richmond Hill says they will do what they can to keep it going well beyond this initial roll out. There will be an assessment at the beginning and a check-in throughout with both clients and volunteers to measure successes along with future needs and goals.

For more information, visit www.hospicekingaurora.ca or call 905-727-6815.