

Lacing up for Alzheimer Walk supports valuable community programs

Most people have been impacted by someone's journey with dementia.

It can be an isolating time for those living with it and their caregivers alike, but some of the barriers of isolation are set to come down this month as the community rallies for the annual IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's.

The chief annual fundraiser for the Alzheimer Society of York Region, the walk is set to take place Saturday, May 24, at Lake Wilcox Park in Richmond Hill.

"This is a vital walk because whatever money that is raised in York Region stays in York Region," says Andrea Ubell, Director of Programs and Client Services for the Alzheimer Society, who has participated in the run since its inception more than 30 years ago. "We're seeing growing numbers of people living with dementia. We're seeing growing numbers of people wanting to remain in the community, but also having to remain in the community because we don't have the long-term care beds, or even the community supports."

One program that will benefit from the funds raised later this month is At Home R&R.

A program that gives caregivers a couple of hours of relief per week, it was partially funded to allow service for about 30 people a year, but with these supports they hope to expand the initiative. Active Living, which was launched late last year by the Society, will also be a key beneficiary of funds.

"We're trying to combat isolation? isolation is horrible for everyone's health and particularly for people with dementia and their care partners, their family members, who feel that they become isolated because of the disease," says Ubell, noting the program offers everything from nature walks to music programs.

Another initiative in the spotlight is Minds in Motion, a partnership between the Society and Kleinburg's McMichael Art Collection, a program to keep minds active among those who are in the earlier stages of the disease process. Active Living, meanwhile, strives to keep clients' bodies active as well.

"Minds in Motion is a three-hour program that combines cognitive, social and physical, and last year we were in five different locations across York Region with about 37 sessions and 368 people attending those," Ubell explains. "We also did virtual programming, so we had about 2,000 people coming. The Art Well program is very special and at McMichael we had about seven sessions with 60 people attending where they would do art, but they would also take in the gallery."

Additional programs include The Creative Workshop, which takes place in Stouffville, and a sort of "Diner's Club" involving select restaurants across the community.

"Some are used to going out to date nights and it is harder and harder to do that when you have dementia and your friend groups change," she notes. "We were at 10 different locations and I would say there were about 132 different meals with 15-20 people who show up each time and they have really created a tight-knit community."

A tight-knit community always rises to the occasion when the Alzheimer Society hosts its walk.

To register or sponsor a participant or team, visit alzheimer.ca/york/en.

"When you walk, you're sending a message of hope to Canadians living with dementia, and thousands more who care for them," say organizers. "When you fundraise, you're promising them that help will always be available."

?Memories make us who we are. When you walk, you honour those who have passed and support our work to help people who have dementia now, live well. Across the country, Alzheimer Societies offer programs and services that can help individuals and families touched by dementia in many different ways. IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's is not only a great opportunity for communities to rally around this increasingly prevalent disease, but a fun way to raise awareness and much-needed funds that can make a world of difference in the lives of Canadians affected.?

By Brock Weir