

## NOTES from KAREN

Over the past 10 years I have had the privilege of building our MV Hospice volunteer pool and establish the volunteer role throughout Madawaska Valley. And yes it has been 10 years since the initial work was done to plan the volunteer training program. Many of you have been with us almost that long. I have been astounded by the wide range of skills, the generosity, the willingness and compassion of those who have taken the volunteer training and have given of themselves to our community. Our volunteers and what they have done has given MV Hospice the highly positive reputation it currently has.

2020 is going to long be remembered as the COVID physical distancing year. I have learned a lot this past year. Now I often forget that I am wearing a mask and I know I can communicate acceptance and compassion with my eyes the same way I see fear or loneliness in a patients eyes. And I have learned that volunteers can be very creative. They can be present and listen over the telephone. They can visit outside instead of in the home. And the volunteers heart remains steadfast to our program providing support and being ambassadors when they cannot physically provide assistance. With the arrival of the COVID 19 vaccination our outlook for 2021 is much improved. And so it is with renewed interest that MV Hospice is looking at preparing our volunteers to face the new reality of how we can provide similar and improved volunteer support to Madawaska Valley.

Our first and most crucial task is to build stronger community teams and by community teams I also include bereavement teams, Valley Manor, TT, Hospice and Champlain Gardens (New name for Water Tower Lodge). To do this we need to DEVELOP A SHARED VISION. Normally I would like to get together in a room and brainstorm. Everyone throwing our ideas of their vision of how our community teams would look and how they can be organized and led. Perhaps in the COVID world we can start an e mail and reply all as we share our ideas. Those without e mail we can print the conversation after a week and mail it out for you to add your thoughts.

The second step is to refresh our hospice education program. For those that attended training 5 to 9 years ago why not see what the On line Hospice Palliative Care Ontario Volunteer Training Program is like. A refresher may be just what you are looking for to renew interest and confidence in volunteering. Contact Lisa at [hubersl@sfmhosp.com](mailto:hubersl@sfmhosp.com) and she can set it up for you.

The third step would be to develop our Team Leader role and recruit and empower more Team Leaders. We have a very large pool of volunteers who have worked in many professions in leadership capacities. The skill required of a Team Leader is to: "Organize things within a group." We are planning a Team Leader Training Session in March to help you gain confidence and capability in the role. If you are good at organizing let me know [wagnerk@sfmhosp.com](mailto:wagnerk@sfmhosp.com). Don't be surprised if I give you a call I can see many volunteers with terrific leadership skills. As always I look forward to seeing what the future holds for us.

*Karen*

## IN PRAISE OF MV HOSPICE VOLUNTEERS

"I just so much appreciate all of you at MV Hospice. All the volunteers are just wonderful. We are very grateful to hospice not only for my husband but for all of us. We are most lucky to have the hospice in our town." Annice Pratt

"Our family cannot thank you enough for caring. We really appreciate your services and like the idea that you will be staying in touch with me after my husband's death. " A.C.

"All of you at hospice are wonderful people. I feel so grateful for all you have done for me and my family. We should all be so grateful for your service in our community." P.L.

## In order to move forward we need to look back and remember why we chose to volunteer with MV Hospice Palliative Care—Volunteers Remember....

### She lifted my hand and kissed it

What a wonderful feeling of gratitude I experienced while visiting a lady in the hospital! She appeared unresponsive. Knowing she was nearing the end of life I held her hand and told her I'd pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. (a prayer said nearing the end of life) As I began praying she lifted my hand and kissed it. With tears in my eyes I continued. This has been an unforgettable experience. I say thank you every day for the awe-inspiring experiences hospice volunteering has given me.

*Shirley Etmanskie*



### We walk each other home

I should be old enough by now to know that things often don't work out the way I imagine. Most of the time, I am pleasantly surprised that they don't. When I took my volunteer training in November 2019 with Madawaska Valley Hospice Palliative Care, I had no intention of becoming a volunteer at the hospice. I thought it would be very interesting and I could use what I learned when I do become a volunteer for a long term care home. I was imagining myself volunteering for the home where my father and mother-in-law resided for more than two years, helping feed, keep company with, and wheel around in the garden the many clients who reside there. But no, not volunteering at the hospice.

I know the main reason I did not want to volunteer at the hospice was because I was afraid. Will I know what to do when someone dies? Will I know how to answer questions from a family member? How comfortable will I be with being present with people facing their death or the death of a family member.

Still, I decided to join the Therapeutic Touch Team and was ready to volunteer in people's homes. When Covid came all of my imagining fell through and I found myself trying a shift in the hospice apartment instead. To my surprise and delight, I realized that I loved it. It felt so easy being there for other people. I felt comfortable assisting in providing physical care for the clients. There was nothing special to say, except answer to the needs of the moment. I enjoyed being able to contribute, if only a presence to the amazing transition that death represents for individuals and their families. I quickly came to understand that one of the rewards, beside supporting people, was the peace and joy I feel when all other preoccupations fall away and I am left with the essential: the moment.

But the rewards do not end there. I find myself being part of a greater whole comprised of staff and other volunteers working towards a common goal, learning to be of service in our communities. I had missed that feeling since being retired without even being aware of the loss. As expressed by Ram Dass, "we walk each other home" in the so many ways that are necessary for our individual and collective well being. I might still end up wheeling people around in the garden of a long term care home but meanwhile, may I continue being surprised by the gifts we give each other as clients, volunteers and staff of MVHPC. *Diane Veilleux*

### She was beautiful

Sitting at the bedside of an elderly lady a few days before her death, I became part of her life for a very short time. During these few hours I cared for her by holding her hand, combing her hair, arranging her blankets, offered her ice chips and moistened her lips. As I held her hand and watched her sleep it reminded me of how I used to love being with my babies as they slept. She was beautiful. Did my small contribution make a difference in her life. I believe it did.

*Anne-Marie Moore*

# Volunteers Remember

## We as volunteers meet them where they are

Volunteering for Hospice is different from any other volunteering I have done. I think the main reason is that there are no commonalities amongst the situations. I am called upon to sit with someone whose life is ending. I discovered I had certain expectations of someone who is dying. For example, I always thought people in the last year of their lives would be cold all the time. But in this home, I was dressed up really warmly in a vest and sweater, and she was in her nightgown perfectly warm. I checked! I couldn't believe it! We both laughed. I always thought people would have given up coffee long ago. But she loved her coffee, and asked me for cup after cup. So I was taught again to take each person as they come.

I visited another lady who had Alzheimers. I expected that she wouldn't remember me each week, and that was true. I introduced myself every week as if it were the first time. But this didn't stop me from being so surprised when I found out that her newfound friend in the home was actually her neighbour in her small town for the last 25 years. And that the picture she told me was of her father was actually her husband. We can't have expectations. We take people as they are at that moment, and try and make the hour a happy one.

I once commented to a lady in hospice that I was so impressed at how cheerful and gracious she was, even though she was in pain. Her whole face lit up. Unwittingly, I had said something that was supremely important to her.

I remember sitting in the dining room in the Hospice, listening to a grieving son telling me the whole story of his father's illness. It was important to him to talk about it and for someone to listen. But I remember another time, when a brother would not let the sister and I talk about the coming death of their brother. He shut the whole conversation down.

Every person faces death differently, and we as volunteers meet them where they are. Rachel McCrea



## The warmth of the human voice filling the room



"Music and Rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul". (Plato) This is one of many quotes about the power of music. Throughout my life music has always had an impact. It helped me learn, supported me through tough times and of course through times of celebration. Fortunately music could accompany me into my volunteer role in hospice.

Sitting with someone who is completing their journey here on earth can be full of uncertainty. I've been fortunate in many of my visits to get to know a person and their family, and to learn that music is a language that is also an important part of their lives. I have many wonderful memories of singing to someone as they transition. My mother and father included.

Another lady who was close to me allowed me the honour to be with her and her daughter in her final days. Her last day at WTL the daughter, minister and I celebrated her life by singing all the old favourites. Hymns, world war songs, Christmas carols. The warmth of the human voice filling the room. All the while we massaged her arms and legs. She allowed us the privilege to say goodbye with our shared love of music.

"We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again some sunny day" (Vera Lynne)

Eileen Leslie (MacIntyre)

