

# *Celebrating Success*

## **Sunnyside Overnight Stay Program Helps Rejuvenate Caregivers**

*Respite combines needed break for caregivers with active programming for their loved ones*



*Shirley Coulliard, Caregiver*

When Shirley Coulliard's husband Paul was diagnosed with dementia in 2005, they knew his life would severely change. What they didn't realize, was how much it would change Shirley's life in the process.

"They say dementia is a disease of memory loss. But in reality, the hardest part is the loss of freedom - the freedom to start your day the way you want to and when you want to, the freedom to play sports and participate in social activities. As a caregiver, as Paul lost his freedoms, I lost mine as well," shared Shirley.

Paul has Vascular Dementia, one of the most common forms of dementia, ranking only second to Alzheimer's Disease. Vascular Dementia is caused by chronic, reduced blood flow to the brain—usually as the result of a stroke or series of strokes.

As his dementia progressed, Shirley needed more and more help to manage Paul's needs. She received a number of home care services through the Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre (WWCCAC). These were particularly beneficial at bedtime when Paul had the most trouble. He was desperately holding onto his independence and Shirley did everything she could to help him, while protecting his independence and dignity. They began attending a dining program a couple of nights a week at Sunnyside in Kitchener, and eventually started using their overnight stay program.

Through funding from the Waterloo Wellington LHIN's Aging at Home program, the Region of Waterloo Sunnyside Seniors' Services was able to expand their respite program to seven days a week, allowing caregivers like Shirley an extended break. The program provides participants with a therapeutic, social and recreational experience geared to the specific needs of memory impaired adults. Referrals to the program are made through the WWCCAC.

"The part of the whole dementia journey which I most appreciate, is having Sunnyside to come to," said Shirley. "When the overnight stay services were expanded to seven days a week, I was able to drop Paul off for a week at a time. This allowed me to run errands and participate in community activities again, but it allowed for my body to be rejuvenated. Being able to let-go of your responsibility for even a short-time and know that your loved one is being taken care of takes so much off of your shoulders."

The program, along with other community supports, allowed Shirley to keep Paul at home with her for as long as possible. A month ago, she made the difficult decision to place him in a long-term care home. His 6 foot, 185 pound frame, was becoming too much for her to handle alone at home. Shirley visits him every day for dinner at Pinehaven Nursing Home in Waterloo and says good night.

“The other day I drove him to our house and showed him how close our bedrooms are to each other, even though they are not in the same building,” said Shirley.

Shirley now shares all she has learned in a caregiver group at Sunnyside. “I hope to help others with my six years of caregiving experience. My understanding went from zero when we began this journey to 100 and beyond. Through our monthly caregiver meetings at Sunnyside, we grow in strength from leaning on one another. It teaches us to handle dementia, the ‘worst disease’, with dignity and humour.”

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