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VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH CANCER

Almost 12 million Canadians volunteer each year to support local community organizations. The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County and Wellspring Cancer Support Network have the privilege of working with volunteers who lend their time to both hospice programs and Wellspring cancer support programs.

In April 2008, Wellspring support programs for people living with cancer were introduced at The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County. These programs have been successful in bringing cancer support resources to the Windsor and Essex County areas. All of the programs are professionally led and supported by volunteers.

The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County has different volunteer roles in their residential homes and in the community. Including, patient care, reception, meal preparation, house-keeping, gardening, visiting and respite relief in the patients' home and/or in hospital, phone support, transportation drivers and the Wellness Centre at Hospice.

It took me quite awhile to choose an organization to volunteer with after my retirement and because of my health care back ground I felt that I could be of service to Hospice. When asked if I could help out with the Wellspring Yoga support program I was delighted as I am familiar with Yoga and felt it would be a good initiation into volunteering and in my comfort zone. I have learned so much more since I made that decision.

I am so impressed with not only the Wellspring program, but with the teacher and especially with the participants. The teacher has an empathetic & professional understanding of what these people live through every day because of their diagnosis and is able to direct them towards a more gentle and relaxed way of living with the illness. She teaches them to acknowledge & accept the inevitable anxiety & worry...to be mindful of it...and then to let it go through deep relaxing postures and breathing control. She also encourages them to practice at home and to integrate these skills into their everyday life. The teacher is also very aware of how each person may be feeling on each day and assesses the level of activity that is required. The class is then adapted to fit the needs of everyone. She is a true Yogi whom I suspect practices what she teaches. The community can only benefit from this alternative yet professional approach to wellness through the Wellspring programs offered at Hospice.

But the participants are amazing! Everyone participates to the full extent of their abilities and they are all so pleasant and I am amazed by the determination and enthusiasm they come to class with. It is through watching them that I leave the class with such a great feeling of satisfaction and peace. I am learning so much about living today from them. It is not so much about what I can offer them from my experiences anymore and it is true that volunteering is a two way street where everyone benefits.

*Penny J. Pula
Hospice volunteer-Wellspring Yoga program*

Our hospice volunteers in our Wellspring Programs play a key role. Their presence in programs brings comfort and support to patients, caregivers as well to the group leader. They possess a high level of empathy, understanding, accountability, dedication and commitment. A gift truly appreciated not only by our participants and group leaders but by our agency staff.

Linda Sabatini, Service Co-ordinator

The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County provides support to patients facing life threatening illnesses and their caregivers from the point of pre-diagnosis through to the palliative stages.

Wellspring is a network of centres that provide a range of programs and services to meet the emotional, social, psychological and educational needs of people living with cancer, and those who care for them. They are available free of charge to people living with any type of cancer, and at any stage of treatment or survivorship.

If you would like more information about The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County Inc. and Wellspring programs or becoming a volunteer please contact Linda Sabatini, Service Co-ordinator.

Antonia Berlinger, of Wellspring Cancer Support Network, or Linda Sabatini, The Hospice of Windsor and Essex County Inc. or a hospice volunteer are available for interviews at your request.

For more information, please visit www.wellspring.ca or telephone 1-877-499-9904.

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