

“He always knows when it’s Tuesday”

VON Adult Day Program gives purpose to Nova Scotians living with dementia

CONTRIBUTED

Cooking, painting, doing a puzzle—for participants in VON’s Adult Day Program (ADP), these simple pleasures are more than just a way to pass the time.

Over two-thirds of attendees have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia. For them, attending a program like this, close to home, can make a world of difference to their physical and mental health. For attendees at risk of dementia, the right programming can even help improve or delay signs and symptoms of its onset.

The Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia states that more than 16,000 Nova Scotians are living with dementia, a number that is expected to almost double by 2050. Dementia has a profound impact not only on the person who receives the diagnosis, but also on their family, their caregivers and the healthcare system. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, seniors with dementia spend more time in the emergency department, have higher hospitalization rates and are more prone to hospital harm (urinary tract infections, dehydration, pneumonia, falls and delirium) than other Canadians.

Marion’s husband, Roger, was diagnosed with dementia 10 years ago.

“Friends, family members and

even his children didn’t come around much anymore. They (his children) say it’s too hard for them to deal with. He became more and more withdrawn. His world was suddenly reduced to the four walls of our home.”

Isolation is a significant risk factor for dementia, and it can speed its progression after diagnosis. Social isolation and the inability to take part in previously enjoyed activities can cause a downward spiral of depression and loneliness, which worsens cognitive impairment. Taking part in meaningful activities, connecting with others and feeling a sense of purpose—all part of attending an Adult Day Program—can improve mood, wellbeing and quality of life.

“We’re at a point where Roger can’t remember many things, but he always knows when it’s getting close to Tuesday,” Marion says with a smile.

Roger attends VON’s ADP twice per week, for full days.

“The staff quickly realized his desire to be useful,” Marion says. “They ask for his help with small tasks like cleaning the white board or clearing away the tray tables. He tells me all about it when he gets home, and he is so proud of himself. It’s like attending the program has become his ‘job.’”

VON’s Adult Day Programs also greatly improve the lives of family caregivers for people with dementia, who report devoting more time and experiencing



VON’s enhanced Adult Day Programs (ADP) give clients who require additional assistance the opportunity to take part in social and recreational activities. PHOTO CREDIT: VON

more stress than other caregivers. Last year, VON’s ADPs provided over 133,000 respite hours to caregivers across Nova Scotia. Marion is Roger’s sole caregiver, and when Roger attends VON’s ADP, she is able to relax, catch up on housework or visit with friends.

“I don’t worry about him when he’s there. I know I can count on VON. I couldn’t imagine what our lives would be like without them.”

Adult Day Programs typically operate using a “social” model, rather than a “medical” model. Supported by the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, VON recently began

piloting an enhanced Adult Day Program in Truro and Stellarton, serving individuals who require additional assistance with things like medication, toileting and feeding. Previously, they may have had to rely on one-on-one, in-home respite. The enhanced ADP gives these clients the opportunity to get out of their house, meet others and participate in social and recreational activities.

With donor support, VON—a registered charity—can make it possible for more Nova Scotians to access life-changing services like Adult Day Programs.

Marion cannot imagine their

lives without the ADP. “It’s given Roger a purpose,” she says. “I really believe that without it, he would have withdrawn into himself and quite possibly lost the will to go on.”

VON Nova Scotia is a registered charity that provides home nursing care and community support services across the province. VON is currently in the midst of a \$4-million capital campaign to fund VON Connect, a digital health solution that will help the organization provide more care and services to Nova Scotians. To find out more, visit von.ca/von-connect.