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AGM 2011: Talking Hospice

We know that the richness in our hospice resides in its volunteers and so this year we planned an Annual General Meeting that would tap directly into this richness rather than seeking inspiration from outside our community. It is exciting to be opening up a conversation about what we do well and where we should be heading as we move into our next 30 years!

This past year volunteers have once again provided exquisite care for our clients: people facing advancing illness or the death of a loved one. I feel privileged to work with amazing people here at hospice, starting with our wonderful staff: the creative and organized Dee Pope who keeps us all on track, Shelley Kuecks whose reputation for loving care and connection with clients opens the doors for many, and Kathy Skovgaard who inspires and warmly holds new trainees and experienced volunteers alike. I must also mention the volunteer office staff: Laurie Paterlini, who gives our books her meticulous attention, Pat Lamont who patiently tracks down and records volunteer hours so that our funders recognize the value of the services provided and Joan Milne and Dedie Tyson, who warmly welcome people to our office and keep information flowing. I know that some of the wonderful volunteer team will be singled out in other reports.

Together staff and volunteers aim to provide a warm greeting for people from the first moment they pick up the phone or walk in our doors. We hold people in their fear and sorrow as well as through anger, despair, bewilderment and yes, through joy all feelings that can arise through a healing process that may continue to the end of life or in the case of a bereaved survivor, into a new life. We aim to provide a seamless service to clients, with staff and volunteers working closely to provide the best possible support for clients, as well as working with our partners at the hospital and in the community. As you will see from the Client Services Co-ordinator's Report we have steadily increased the number of people that we have served and added new services, including

Cowichan Valley Hospice
Caring for Cowichan families through advancing illness and grief
Since 1981



this year for the first time a group for grieving youth. This ongoing group is the result of collaboration with the Community Options Society.

This past summer we were offered an opportunity to have 6 teams of students studying in the Leadership Masters program at Royal Rhodes review some of our program, practises and challenges as presented by Dee Pope, Kathy Skovgaard and Shelley Kuecks, and President Sandra Sarsfield. The teams responded with enthusiasm for our organization and its work and with some ideas about how to make things even better. There was a collective concern about our multifaceted funding that needs to be raised from scratch each year and a suggestion that we should look at hiring someone whose main focus could be on fund raising. There was encouragement to improve our communications with volunteers and with our community stakeholders, there was encouragement to clarify our vision and mission with our team as we move ahead towards long term goals.

We have moved ahead on several of these recommendations, starting with our September Strategic Planning session that included staff and team leaders. I am very pleased to introduce Jo Wright who joined our team as Community Relations Officer just a month ago. Jo brings a wealth of fund raising and community development experience, and as you will find out this evening, also some surprising talents we didn't expect! As you will hear in the Volunteer Coordinator's report, this past year we introduced some new ways of improving communications with volunteers.

Through a variety of speaking and presentation opportunities we have also increased community awareness of hospice services. Some of these opportunities were: an information session with a local cancer support group, an orientation for staff at a federal government agency who experience vicarious traumatization in their work, a community workshop on grief at Chemainus Health Day, a facilitated discussion on community capacity for end of life care through the Community Health Network, participation in a symposium on End of Life Care at the Shawnigan Lake Eco-Village, a presentation about hospice programs and grief support as an aspect of end of life care as part of VIHA Practise support modules on End of Life care for local physicians, as well as presentations to students and service clubs.

We also work on building relationships and doing advocacy in support of better end of life care across Vancouver Island. One exciting highlight of this

work over the past year was the formation of the Vancouver Island Federation of Hospices, as a voice to advocate for all the community hospices on the island, and for their clients. A meeting with VIHA representatives resulted in a contract for island hospices to provide education to our clients and to the community at large on new approaches to representation agreements and health directives resulting from October 1, 2011 changes in provincial legislation.

At this AGM we want to learn more about what makes the work of hospice compelling for you through all of the challenges this work can present. This applies both to those who do direct work with clients as well as those who support the core client work in a variety of ways, including office administration, garden care, fund raising, participating in events, maintaining volunteer stats, and making financial donations. I believe that we are a varied and effective team. So what do we do well? What makes Hospice work 'juicy' for you? How can we make it juicier? Where should we be heading in the future? I look forward to hearing more through our conversation tonight!

Gretchen Hartley, M.S.W.,
Executive Director
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