

Alzheimer Society of Grey-Bruce Responds to Changing Face of Health Care

By Andrea J. Stenberg

Being Executive Director of the Alzheimer Society Grey-Bruce involves keeping many balls in the air, doing lots work in little time, all while keeping calm and focused. Deborah Barker manages to do all this with a smile on her face.

In her ten years with the Alzheimer Society Grey-Bruce, Deborah has seen many changes. When she first started, she did all the fund development, all the education and Board support, working only 18 hours a week. Now working full time with six staff, Deborah has seen the Alzheimer Society grow to meet the needs of the community.

And the changes are still coming. The Alzheimer Society must respond to changes in the health care system. The creation of Local Health Integrated Networks (LHINs) means the Society must change with it. Grey-Bruce is located in LHIN 2, which covers an area from Tobermory to London. In that region there are 6.5 Alzheimer Society chapters. These groups are working to ensure the needs of their clients are considered in any decisions the LHIN makes. To achieve this, Deborah has invited the LHIN decision-makers to meet with the Grey-Bruce chapter directly.

She is also working to set up a meeting with the seven Executive Directors and Boards of the Alzheimer Society chapters in LHIN 2. They will meet to compare the programs and services they offer. They are also pulling together statistics about the number of clients with dementia and are creating projections for the future to support their requests of the LHIN. While it is a monumental task organizing so many people from such a large area, the task is helped by the culture of cooperation amongst the seven chapters. "What I love about the Alzheimer Society is that everyone shares," says Deborah. "We share ideas by email and at meetings."

Within Grey-Bruce, Deborah is working on partnerships with other organizations. The Grey-

Bruce Dementia Network has produced a directory of services and programs for people with dementia and their families. The goal is to get the directory on the internet and keep it current so people can access the information no matter where they are in the community.

An off-shoot of the Grey-Bruce Dementia Network is the Geriatric Education Cooperative. Its goal is to bring education opportunities to Grey-Bruce. This encourages more staff to attend as they don't have to travel to Toronto. The first event, on understanding behaviour, was held in October with 115 in attendance. Grant money left over from the government's Alzheimer Strategy was used to fund the workshop. If the Cooperative is to continue, it will need to find other sources of funding.

Much of what Deborah works on is writing grant applications. Currently she is looking for funding to enhance the Safely Home- Alzheimer Wandering Registry Program. This program allows people with dementia to register with police in the event that they wander. As part of the Safely Home Program, the Alzheimer Society was able to do 22 enrollment sessions a year ago. They also conducted emergency preparedness workshops for Long Term Care facilities in case of a wandering event. The goal is to conduct these workshops for retirement homes and hospitals and continue the enrollment of individuals who are still living at home.

For more information about the Alzheimer Society and how you can help, please contact Deborah Barker at 376-7230 or 1-800-265-9013.

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