

Revelstoke Hospice Society Volunteers: helping people travel through one of life's universal journeys...

Talking about death and dying can be difficult, and accepting the death of oneself or a family member that much more painful. Fortunately, there are services available to help with this process.

The Revelstoke Hospice Society, a charitable organization with trained and passionate volunteers including Phyllis Floyd, Vivian Mitchell and Gwen Battersby (picture to right), offers companionship, information, and emotional support to the terminally ill and their families.

The goal of hospice care is to help the client live the fullest life possible, while also helping all those involved come to terms with the illness.



In 1993, volunteers Vivian Mitchell, Gwen Battersby, Sherrian VanGoor, Shirley Tomlinson, Linda Nixon and Jennifer Healey “held a lot of little meetings” in a process that laid the foundation for the Revelstoke Hospice Society (RHS). 17 years later this organization is still almost wholly based on volunteerism, and includes an Executive Director and Board, 12 volunteers who spend time with the clients and additional volunteers who help with fundraising and administration.

For Vivian Mitchell and Gwen Battersby the decision to get involved with hospice seemed like a natural choice after retiring from nursing. “I think of it as a continuation of my career as a nurse; I think of it as being there for someone in a time that is difficult,” said Mitchell, who is also the volunteer coordinator. “Both of us have lost our parents,” added Battersby. “It gives you a bit of empathy and maturity about who you are.”

Phyllis Floyd decided to get involved with hospice after her retirement about ten years ago, particularly after she lost her own son. “After the death of my son I wanted to learn more about life and death,” she said.

Every client is different and Mitchell tries to match volunteers with clients based on experience and comfort levels, and interests. After that it’s about sensing the needs of the individual clients. “I really let the client take the lead,” said Mitchell. “Sometimes just being silent and sitting there is the best thing. They don’t always want to talk either.”

Battersby agrees. “You don’t impose your own views; you do a lot of listening.” “I listen, reassure, share worries and concerns, hold a hand, or just sit quietly,” said Floyd.

Although there is a designated residential palliative care room at Queen Victoria hospital, many clients are at home under the care of a family member and community care nursing. Volunteers assist the caregivers by giving them “time off” for themselves or to do errands. Volunteers usually stay with the clients for about two hours, and may visit up to several times a week.

Last year RHS volunteers spent about 300 hours with 18 clients. The number of clients has increased significantly over the past couple of years and is expected to grow even more as the percentage of aged population increases. RHS offers their services to anyone who is dying, regardless of age. All volunteers initially go through a training session of about 25 hours, and receive ongoing enrichments thereafter. Held every two years, a training session for potential volunteers is scheduled for this spring.

Mitchell, Battersby and Floyd bring an unquantifiable amount of passion and sincerity to their clients and in return, feel valued and fulfilled. “I like to do it; I feel good,” said Battersby.

The Revelstoke Hospice Society is currently seeking a board member to start in April. For more information about RHS or if you are interested in volunteering in any capacity, please visit www.revelstokehospicesociety.com or call 250-837-5523. Confidentiality is strictly enforced.