

Volunteers must fill several roles

Hospice workers help families cope

By DONNA KELL
Herald Staff

"Out, out brief candle! Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage." — Shakespeare's Macbeth.

As an English literature graduate and a professional caregiver, Donna McClure of the North Halton Hospice recognizes the tragedy in the last hour of the dying.

And as a human being, she shares the pain. "It's a sharing process. Many of our patients are facing death... you learn from the experience. It's a bit like watching a Shakespearean tragedy." The North Halton Hospice and its eight to 10 volunteers engage in "volunteer visiting" of the terminally ill and their families.

They act as "liaison" or "a bridge" between the family, the medical profession and volunteer groups that can help, says Gerry Murphy, Georgetown resident and Hospice volunteer.

Volunteers function in several roles. They are caregivers, counselling the patient and the family through a terminal illness (quite often cancer, according to Mrs. Murphy); they are friends, helping the patient by just being there to hold hands or to listen.

"There is definitely a need. The family, as a rule, are so caught up in the (terminal) illness that they need someone to sit back and maybe be objective about it all," said Mrs. Murphy.

And the Hospice enters the family home at a time when some friends and relatives disappear.

"People tend to back off. Friends back off. They don't do it consciously, they're just sort of overwhelmed," said Mrs. McClure, the hospice's co-ordinator and a former member of the Victorian Order of Nurses.

And as an objective third party, Hospice volunteers can see things family members may be too



Gerry Murphy

distracted to notice.

"The volunteer has to be very sensitive. You don't know what they're going through. Very often they can't express what they're feeling," said Mrs. McClure.

Mrs. Murphy gives the example of a woman dying of cancer who had a communication problem with her son. Cancer had infected the woman's brain, and she was projecting uncharacteristic hostility, said Mrs. Murphy. As a volunteer, Mrs. Murphy smoothed things over with the angry mother and the tearful son, but the incident was not forgotten.

"Who knows what would have happened if I had not been there?" she reflects. "That boy was really hurt." While there is much instinct or

"intuitive" action involved in being a Hospice volunteer, training for the position begins with practical knowledge. Volunteer candidates are taken to hospitals, funeral homes and crematoriums and attend lectures on dealing with grief. Volunteers are given time to discover their own feelings about terminal illness, said Mrs. Murphy.

Mrs. Murphy's decision to volunteer for the 10-year-old Hospice service came after years of reading articles about the Hospice, once based in Georgetown. When she read about one person who had died alone, she decided to become a part of the Hospice force. "I thought no one should have to die alone," she said.

But Mrs. Murphy came to realize that death is not what Hospice is all about.

"Death is a small part of it. Everyone copes with their death differently. I guess it's better not to dwell on the death aspect of things. We want to help a family 'live' more fully," she said.

Families often welcome the presence of Hospice volunteers. It can give them a break from round-the-clock vigils in a patient's room, and can give them a chance to discuss their fears with someone objective.

But volunteers don't impose their own vision of death or afterlife on patients, said Mrs. Murphy. "People die the way they live. As a volunteer, we enter their lives where they're at."

Mrs. Murphy first began volunteering with a vision to change people, to feel she was active in helping people but has since gained a new philosophy.

"You don't set out to do anything. There's nothing you can do. You just have to 'be'. You just have to wait for the person to need," she said.

But the need is reciprocal, said Mrs. McClure. "It's a mutual understanding that you come to

terms with. It's a mutually growing experience," she said.

Volunteers enter a family's life, sharing their griefs and laughter. For Mrs. Murphy, this is a "real honor."

"Someone has allowed you to enter their home. This intimacy and closeness is a real privilege," she said.

As an added dimension to their tasks of caregiving, shopping or even helping the grieving family through funeral arrangements, the Hospice volunteers offer modern medicine's answers to curing the physical pain of the terminally ill.

Volunteers urge patients to participate in meditation exercises called "relaxation and visualization." Subjects are told to close their eyes, relax and focus on peaceful music or a pleasant object.

"In a relaxed state, the pain can be less intrusive and the anxiety is relieved. Response to pain control therapy is often better following the exercises," said Mrs. McClure.

And Mrs. Murphy uses a unique massage therapy called therapeutic touch, a therapy using energy from the body to lessen pain in specific body areas.

In the midst of all this death and dying, Mrs. McClure and Mrs. Murphy have retained both their sense of humor and their love for fellow beings. But they have gained a new sense of life, and death, they want to share with everyone.

"You have to accept it. You have to say 'I'm here today, I'm going to make the most of it,'" says Mrs. McClure.

"You can't control the fact that you're going to die, but you can control the way you react to it."

The North Halton Hospice is located in the Acton Social Services and Information Centre at 19 Willow Street, and serves Halton Hills and Milton. For more information about the Hospice call 853-3310.

Comparing apples and...



Georgetown Cubs and Scouts were out in force last weekend as the annual Apple Day drive was on. Andrew Fuller was at the Georgetown Market Place bright and early on Saturday offering some delicious red apples to shoppers. (Herald photo)



Hans VanBuskirk (left) and David King had their hands full Thursday as they carted away a plump pumpkin bought at Park School. The pumpkin sales were part of the Park Parents' Association annual barbecue, to raise money for school projects. That's Eric King behind supervising the proceedings. (Herald photo)

Adult classes pave way to brighter future

Amid the wood chips, sawdust and hammering sounds filling Room 128 at Georgetown District High School, adult students are learning to build dreams later in life.

The dream building is a part of the program available at GDHS this year, and the students in Room 128 are adults, going back for a second try, to learn woodworking skills.

Leo Williams of Georgetown works full-time afternoon shift at a local grocery store. The woodworking course is something special he does for himself.

"You take a lot of pride from it. I always liked wood work, but I didn't know how to make anything," he said. Now Mr. Williams puts hammer to nail, plane to wood surface, and, voila, he is a craftsman.

Jane McQuarrie's story is similar. She works full-time at home and wanted a diversion. "I took wood-working in Grade 9. I guess this introductory course will further my skills," she said. Mrs. McQuarrie is engaged in building a suggestion box

for the Halton Hills Library, where she used to work.

For introductory students, these adults are racing through the lessons with flying colors. George Clement of west Halton Hills is a retiree who enjoys woodworking as a hobby. But what a hobby! Mr. Clement is working toward completing cabinets for himself and his wife.

When asked if he was going to finish the cabinets with a varnish, Mr. Clement confessed that his wife is a wood painter, and that his work will end in the wood shop.

There are 17 students in the wood-working class taught by Georgetown's Dave Lawrence. And he is one proud teacher.

"They're doing really well," he said. "It's great considering this is

the first all-adult tech class at Georgetown."

There are also other courses available to returning adults. Automotive, electrical, drafting and machine shop courses will be added to the roster as soon as next September, said Mr. Lawrence. Technical courses, like woodworking, were added to the list of academic courses already available to students.

The courses are free of charge and offer "hands-on" experience, said

Mr. Lawrence. He added that for those obtaining a diploma, the half-year course which runs for two hours, is worth two credits.

Mr. Lawrence sees the program as eventually integrating younger and older students, and says he will "encourage the course to be with regular students." The next wood-working course begins in January, 1989, and will run for one semester.

Those interested in joining up can call Georgetown District High School at 877-6066.

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