

SENIORS LIVING

Local woman honoured for her longtime seniors' health advocacy

Georgetown's Eunice McGowan was recently honoured by the Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) for her role as one of the founding members of this organization.

The OCSA, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2012, is recognized as the voice of home and community support.

In the late 1980s, McGowan headed a provincial organization that provided support to over 400 agencies helping seniors and those with disabilities. Recognizing that overlapping services were being offered by multiple agencies, she teamed up with two other provincial organizations to streamline those services.

Armed with less than \$2,000 in grant money from the provincial government and the assurance that "it couldn't be done", the desire by McGowan and others to create a better system won out and the OCSA was born. Today it represents hundreds of community support agencies with over 25,000 staff and 100,000 volunteers across Ontario.

Coming from a background as both a psychiatric nurse and a social worker,

McGowan was always motivated by a desire to help others but her passion for helping to improve the lives of seniors came from what she faced on a day-to-day basis in her work. She witnessed the separation of many patients from their spouses, families and communities when they were moved into long-term care facilities outside their own community. This fuelled her passion to develop better services and options for seniors in Halton Hills, currently recognized as an underserved area in Halton Region.

For the past 20 years McGowan has concentrated her efforts on helping to facilitate change at the local level. Working with the Bennett Health Care Centre where she is a board member, and with the local grassroots organization CARE (Care, Advocacy, Research for Elders,) she has presented her vision to all levels of government. Her goal is to help develop the Bennett Village a totally integrated continuum of care which will offer independent seniors living, supportive housing, (also known as assisted living), long-term care, adult day programs, and



EUNICE MCGOWAN

health clinics. It would also serve as a hub for the Supports for Daily Living program, (SDL), which the Mississauga Halton Local Health Integration Network currently funds in other parts of Halton.

SDL is available to seniors whether they are in individual houses, apart-

ments, or supportive housing. It enables seniors to live independently for longer, which research has shown enhances their quality of life. SDL and supportive housing lower health care costs by reducing admissions to hospital and long term care.

McGowan says that locating all of these options in close proximity under one administration has been proven to save money and provide improved quality of care. It makes flexible, seamless transitions possible between different levels of care, including movement out of long term care back home after successful rehabilitation, restoration or respite. The Bennett Village Project would fill existing gaps in services in Halton Hills as well as being a model for other communities.

As a country, we are poorly prepared to deal with our aging population. In less than 20 years seniors will form more than 25% of our population. McGowan wants to ensure that here in Halton Hills, we are ready to provide the services needed for this expanding population.

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