

Unlocking memory with music

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Trudy Wolfe, 84, hops to her feet to dance as soon the iconic polka "Roll Out the Barrel" begins playing. Wolfe joins as many as 20 women, most in their 80s, every Wednesday afternoon for the women's adult day program run by Etobicoke Services for Seniors (ESS) at its Horner Avenue location.

"I like everything. I like the exercises," Wolfe said. "I like dancing. I like the music. It's fun."

ESS offers adult day programs for cognitively impaired seniors, most with dementia and in their 80s, some with mobility issues, four days a week at its Alderwood location: two coed, one women, one men. On Thursdays, people with Acquired Brain Injury attend the program.

Across Canada, an estimated 564,000 people live with dementia. That number is expected to rise sharply to nearly one million, an increase of 66 per cent, by 2031, the Alzheimer Society Canada states.

More than 300 clients a year attend ESS's adult day programs at its four Etobicoke and one Weston site.

"We try to create a natural environment that is non-medical, noninstitutional to address the needs of clients' spirit, mind and body. We look at best practices and apply it to our therapy program," Catherine Grenaway, ESS's director of client services, said of its adult day programs, which offers individual

care plans. "It allows caregivers to run to the doctor's, get groceries done, the simple tasks we all take for granted that can be near impossible to do (when caring for someone with dementia)." Families may contact ESS directly about the programs at agency@essupportservices.ca or call 416-243-0127. ESS or the Community Care Access Centre performs client assessments.

The fee is \$24 a day. Fee reductions may be available based on income assessments. Donors also help defer some clients' program fees.

"Fees are no barrier to service," Grenaway said.

Clients' personal care needs, including medication assistance, are offered along with breakfast, lunch and two snacks, gentle exercises, socialization, activities, story reading, and music therapy.

This day, the program focused on music therapy.

Business executive Kevin Jameson, founder, president and chair of the Dementia Society of America, flew in from Doylestown, PA to meet the women and see ESS's music therapy at work.

Recently, Jameson donated \$1,000 to expand ESS's music therapy program.

The Dementia Society of America believes dementia education, information and programs can enhance the lives of people living with the spectrum of dementias, as well as that of their caregivers, and the

community. Jameson's first wife, Ginny, died from dementia. The couple had been together 32 years.

He is a keen believer in music therapy's benefits among people with dementia.

"Music transcends," Jameson said. "Music uses different parts of the brain to help people with cognitive reserve. It's no different than going to a country where you don't speak the language and trying to figure it out. The language of people with dementia may be impaired, but there are other kinds of language, like music, touch, smiles."

The Alzheimer's Association in the U.S. estimates more than five million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. One in three American seniors will die with Alzheimer's or another dementia, it states.

Perhaps the most-startling statistic: every 66 seconds, someone in the U.S. develops Alzheimer's, the association states.

Rather than shock Jameson, the statistics spur him to action to help more people with dementia and their families.

"We are where cancer was 50 years ago. Fifty years ago, it was the C-word. Now, it's the D-word," Jameson said. "There is a lot of taboo. There is a lot of stigma. People are afraid if they mention it, they think they're going to get it. On the flip side, there is maintaining and doing what you can for your own brain health. It's a two-sided story."

Peggy Peacock, ESS's

day program co-ordinator at its Alderwood site, will soon be taking training, paid by Jameson, to further adapt a 13-DVD set, titled "Pathways, Making Connections by Singing: a Comprehensive Singing Program for Memory Care", to ESS's day programs.

Currently, ESS splits its one 13-DVD Pathway set among its five sites. Jameson has offered to purchase them another set, which includes activity books and online training. It retails for \$699.

While Wolfe felt moved to jump to her feet to the polka, two Italian women led enthusiastic singing, feet tapping, to "That's Amore", another song on Pathways' Journeys Europe DVD.

"Some clients are very,

very quiet. With a little music on the DVD or singing, they start singing and coming out with lyrics, even if they have difficulty speaking a sentence that makes sense," Peacock said. "Music encourages speaking, singing, dancing and connecting, not just with our staff, but with other clients. We know music releases endorphins, and unlocks memory."



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