

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



Support while seeking a diagnosis

In the last issue of *Connections*, we looked at takeaways from Alzheimer’s Disease International’s World Alzheimer’s Report 2021, which paints a grim picture of the state of receiving a diagnosis and accessing health care for people living with dementia around the globe. The report estimates that as many as 75 per cent of people living with dementia are not yet diagnosed.

If you are seeking a diagnosis, or you support someone who is, there are actions you can take and resources you can access through the Alzheimer Society of B.C. You can:

- Start keeping a journal to document changes in function and ability and learn about how to get tested for dementia at alzbc.org/diagnosis.

- Access the “Getting a diagnosis toolkit,” a guide to help prepare for a conversation with a health-care provider about a possible dementia diagnosis at alzbc.org/DiagnosisToolkit.
- Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline. Society staff members provide support to anyone with questions or concerns about dementia, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis. They educate and support families through the process of accessing dementia support programs and services. Staff are also able to provide resources to support care planning, including drafting wills, powers of attorney and representation agreements. See page 2 for contact details.

It’s time to Walk!

To learn about how to support people affected by dementia in your community through the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer’s* on May 29, visit walkforalzheimers.ca

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Getting active how and where you can this season

We are now entering our third pandemic spring – and we continue to see COVID-19’s impact on the lives of so many people affected by dementia. Many people are struggling to access primary care because of the ongoing pressures facing our health-care system. With brighter days ahead this season, we will continue resuming in-person programming and events in line with provincial health guidelines, but we also want our community to know we will continue to offer virtual options for all support and education. We’re here to support you.

This issue of *Connections* looks at ways to stay active and engaged, including tips to help navigate seeking a dementia diagnosis. We also share research on the benefits of horticultural therapy, alongside ideas from a horticultural therapy practitioner on how to reap the benefits of gardening at any stage of the dementia journey. Additionally, we’ll hear from a caregiver in Clearwater who helped keep his partner and others living with dementia meaningfully engaged through a unique project on the care home grounds.

Finally, it wouldn’t be springtime without sharing the latest on our flagship fundraiser, the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer’s*. We are excited to once again host events around the province that bring communities together and raise funds to enable essential dementia support and education. Judi Wild-Hutter, who is being honoured at this year’s *Walk* in Comox, shares her story of caring for her husband, and we introduce Jordan Penner, one of the many volunteer organizers who make this critical event possible. We are grateful for their support and hope to see you at an event in a community near you on May 29!



Jen Lyle
Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of B.C.



First Link[®]
DEMENTIA HELPLINE

Questions about dementia or memory loss?

English: 1-800-936-6033
Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003

English: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Nurturing creativity on the journey

Thirty years ago, Judi Wild-Hutter left the corporate world in Edmonton to pursue her dream of painting by the ocean on Vancouver Island. But without knowledge of sales or marketing, or the support of her former clients, it wasn't the fairy tale she had envisioned. She was on the verge of packing up and returning to Alberta when Lorne appeared in her life.

“He was my knight in shining armour,” Judi says of her husband, the president of the Cumberland Chamber of Commerce when they first met. “He taught me about the business end of the art world. My art began to flourish. We did shows and even enjoyed bus tours full of tourists that came right to our home studio and gallery. Lorne was a great salesman and my work appeared in numerous galleries. My dreams were becoming a reality, and I had Lorne, a new, loving husband by my side.”

In 2007, Judi and Lorne moved to the Lower Mainland to care for Judi's mother. It was during this period that Judi's mom noticed things were amiss with Lorne's memory and judgment. On their return to the Island, Judi began pressing their family doctor for an assessment. The score on Lorne's yearly, customary cognitive test remained high with no concerns or need for further testing. As time went by, Lorne's test scores gradually decreased. He was referred to a specialist and diagnosed with vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease four years ago, more than a decade after Judi first recognized the signs.

“I have watched Lorne slowly disappear,” Judi says. “The longest goodbye, such a sad and stressful journey for me. It is a rollercoaster ride with a multitude of emotions. There is sadness, love, sympathy, compassion as well as toxic emotions like denial at first, then resentment, guilt, anger, sometimes even hate – not at Lorne, but at the disease that has stolen our golden years together.”



Judi Wild-Hutter and her husband Lorne.

Judi is coping by accessing educational webinars and support services, including the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s First Link® Dementia Helpline, support from family, an adult day program and Island Health. While it was hard at first as an independent introvert to reach out, it's getting easier as she realizes how much the support is helping. She urges other caregivers to reach out right away. “You don't have to travel this journey alone,” she says.

Just as she ensures she's nurturing her own creativity, she does the same for Lorne, a gifted musician, who is encouraged to play for others at his adult day program, at the same time enjoying the social aspect of the program, which has always been an important part of his life. Judi has set up a music room for him at home with an electronic piano. Lorne also enjoys playing the guitar and the accordion.

“It's so beautiful,” she says. “He's brilliant.”

Who are you walking for?

Judi is being honoured at the Comox *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* on May 29. Join Judi and walk to end stigma and raise funds to support people affected by dementia. Register and start fundraising at walkforalzheimers.ca

Connect through horticultural therapy

Horticultural therapy uses nature and plant materials to improve well-being, and research has shown it offers many benefits to people living with dementia. It offers an opportunity for physical engagement, multi-sensory stimulation and stress reduction. Horticultural therapy can also provide a sense of responsibility and achievement, as people living with dementia care for and cultivate plants with their own hands. A 2019 study, published in the *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*, explored the effects of horticultural therapy on people living with dementia, specifically looking at how it positively influenced responsive behaviours, cognitive functioning and time spent engaged rather than inactive.

What type of study was it?

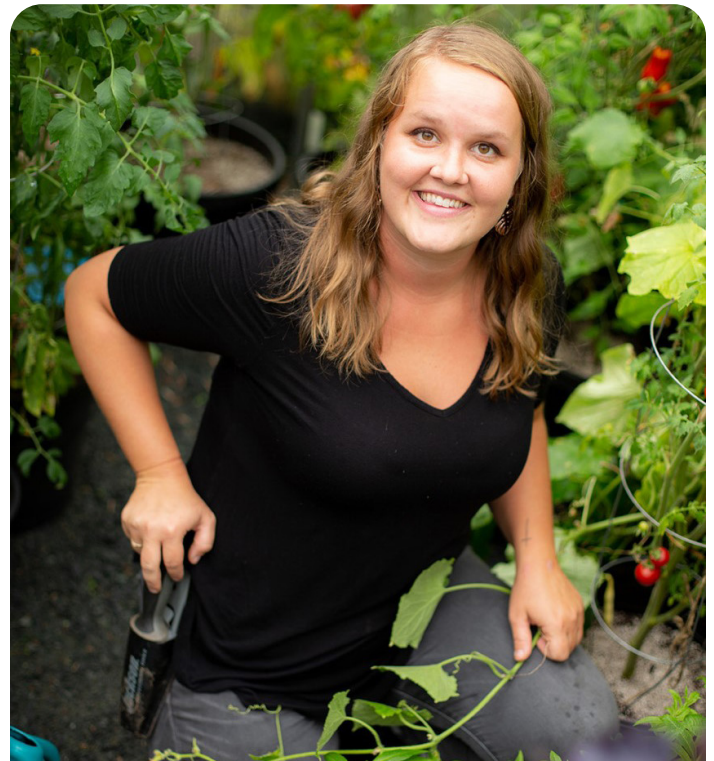
The researchers conducted a systematic review and a meta-analysis, which involves reviewing existing studies to identify an overall trend. They analyzed 23 studies from nine different countries that looked at horticultural therapy used in long-term care homes.

What did they find?

Horticultural therapy invites people living with dementia to watch, touch and become close to the natural world, which can help them reconnect with the past and arouse interest in life. The selected studies found that being in a natural environment helped people living with dementia feel relaxed and joyful while it also relieved emotional tension. Horticultural therapy can be incorporated into daily activity schedules, and by creating a welcoming environment for both people living with dementia and caregivers, it can boost quality of life, provide emotional stability and alleviate negative emotions. The physical and social interaction involved can also help maintain cognitive function. Read more at alzbc.org/horticulture-study.

Interview with a horticultural therapy practitioner

To better understand how horticultural therapy can improve quality of life for people living with dementia and caregivers, we interviewed Bianca van der Stoel, a horticultural therapy practitioner who is passionate about providing person-centred care.



Bianca van der Stoel is a horticultural therapist who works with people living with dementia.

How did your journey with horticultural therapy begin?

I started as a recreational therapist working with people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. The centre where I worked only had outside spaces that were unappealing and overstimulating, which can be confusing for people living with dementia. I became passionate about advocating for their right to see the trees and the sky,

and to have low stimulating experiences in nature, outside of their typical environments. This led me to horticultural therapy and I feel I've found the path I was looking for, to give others successful and meaningful experiences in nature.

What are the benefits of horticultural therapy?

It offers a sense of contribution and control over one's environment. You can choose what to plant, or what you want to see on your windowsill. It is also a good alternative to traditional exercise – it targets standing endurance, flexibility, gross and fine motor movement. The sensory and cognitive stimulation is helpful, particularly for late-stage dementia. Programs can target under-exercised parts of the brain. Horticultural therapy is always beneficial, regardless of one's level of ability, mood or behaviours.

How can horticultural therapy improve quality of life for caregivers?

I believe horticultural therapy is dual-focused: it not only helps people living with dementia but it creates a safe space for socializing. It can encourage caregivers and staff in long-term care homes to engage and start conversations. Horticultural therapy also promotes access to nature for caregivers and health-care staff members who can experience high levels of burnout.

What do you do to create activities with a person-centred approach?

I like to use leisure, family and living history so that I can tailor what plants people use. I even consider socializing preferences. For example, if they prefer working solo, I can set up a windowsill garden that allows for self-initiated leisure.

Tips on creating a green space at home

Plant a DIY herb garden.

- Purchase stem herbs, like cilantro, mint or thyme, from a local market or grocery store. These plants are weather-resistant and can withstand colder houses.
- Strip the bottom leaves and place in water for one to two weeks to allow roots to grow.
- Using planter pots, or even plastic cups, transplant the herbs into soil.

Create your own green space.

- Houseplants, like spider or goldfish plants, are easy to purchase and propagate. If you have friends with these plants, ask them to share cuttings with you!
- These plants are easy to care for and allow you to observe life growing in your home.

Make DIY lavender or herb bags.

- Purchase dried lavender or herbs on the stem from a local market or grocery store.
- Carefully strip and harvest the lavender or herbs by hand. This repetitive motion is manageable for people living with dementia.
- Place the stripped leaves into muslin bags, and smell for a stimulating sensory experience!



Care home chicken coop reconnects residents to the past



Daniel Boudreau holds one of the new chickens during a visit with his wife Lynda.

Forest View Place, a long-term care home in Clearwater, B.C., demonstrates what person-centred care can look like through recreational activities, most notably through the recent construction of an accessible chicken coop and enclosure to raise mature hens.

“The residents are so excited,” says Nicole Weber, recreation coordinator for Forest View Place.

Between baking and their breakfast club, residents go through many eggs, but they gain much more than farm-fresh eggs from raising hens.

“80 to 90 per cent of our residents had chickens growing up,” Nicole explains. “It brings back those memories.” The chicken coop, which was built in 2021, offers residents a chance to engage with reminiscence and animal therapy. The chickens have been a positive addition to the community, especially while residents in long-term care homes have had limited visitors during the pandemic.

For now-retired local carpenter Daniel Boudreau, who designed the chicken coop, it was a great opportunity for him to visit his wife Lynda, a resident of Forest View Place. Daniel was mindful of making the chicken coop sustainable as well as accessible for residents. The chickens have a large green space to run around that also allows residents to enter the enclosure. The house is designed to be interactive, with strings for residents to pull that open windows for a peek inside. The nesting boxes are also at hip height, making it easier to collect eggs.

“This wouldn’t have been possible without the community support,” Daniel says. As a small town with a strong community, many friends, family and suppliers came together to make this project a reality. The chicken coop has been unofficially named “Lynda’s coop,” after Daniel’s wife, who was diagnosed with young onset dementia in 2017.

Before their project launched, Nicole connected with a long-term care home in Castlegar that had already begun raising chickens. With this understanding of how residents interacted with the animals, organizers were able to apply an informed, person-centred approach to the Forest View Place chicken coop.

This story is adapted, with permission, from coverage of the project in the Clearwater Times.

Education for care partners

Considering the transition to long-term care is among topics that have been covered in our weekly webinars. Access the archive at alzbc.org/webinars.



JOIN US FOR THE IG WEALTH MANAGEMENT WALK FOR ALZHEIMER'S

The *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* is the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s flagship fundraiser and takes place on Sunday, May 29. The event is a way to honour and remember people in our lives who have been affected by dementia.

Two in every three British Columbians have a personal connection to dementia. Together, we can ensure people affected by dementia have access to Alzheimer Society of B.C. support services and education. Who will you walk for?

To register and fundraise today, visit walkforalzheimers.ca.

Meet your new Abbotsford Walk chair, Jordan!

This is Jordan Penner's first year volunteering for the Alzheimer Society of B.C., and he is excited to serve as a co-chair of the 2022 *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* organizing committee in Abbotsford.

For Jordan, this position is an opportunity to give back to his community. Growing up with a great-grandmother who lived with dementia, he learned the value of advocacy, education and support from her caregivers. He also volunteered at his local hospital and met others living with dementia. "I saw the importance of giving people living with dementia dignity and respect," Jordan says.

When he isn't volunteering, Jordan works as a research assistant and studies computational chemistry at the University of the Fraser Valley. He enjoys playing jazz on his saxophone, rock climbing and hiking. Jordan is also a planning committee member for a local children's summer camp, which has taught him a lot about teamwork and relying on the support of others to plan events.

Jordan looks forward to seeing the event planning come to fruition. "I am most excited to connect with different groups in my community and meet new people along the way," he says.

Jordan encourages others to consider volunteering for the Society. "The people here are incredibly warm and welcoming," Jordan says. "They will support you in any way possible." To Jordan, the impact the volunteer work will have on his community and the benefits for people living with dementia are worth every minute.



Jordan Penner, *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* Abbotsford Co-Chair.

About Connections

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- Call 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- Mail to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.
300-828 West 8th Avenue,
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

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