



Meet our *Volunteers*

In their own words: Volunteer Stories from the Alzheimer Society of Oxford

Volunteers are the roots of strong communities! We spoke to our volunteers about why they felt inspired to volunteer and we were delighted with their responses. Learn more about some of our volunteers.

Why I Volunteer



Andrew Szasz

I chose the Alzheimer Society for a number of reasons... but the main driver was my previous volunteer experience with our local chapter over 20 years ago, and wanting to explore new opportunities with them now that I had some personal and career experience to shore up my value to them. I started when I was in my early twenties, but there was a significant gap while I raised a family with my wife. I've been on the board for 6 years now.

I've had many moments that mean a lot to me now, but the first Walk For Memories that I spent volunteering with both of my children (daughter Paige and son Thomas) was the highlight. The main impact on me has been the awareness of the urgent need to advocate for the strategic planning that will be required for Canada to deal with the increasing impacts of dementia on our communities.

If anyone is sitting on the fence wondering if they should get involved, please take a leap of faith and come in and learn more about what you can do... we have a fantastic society in Oxford County made up of a wonderful team of staff and volunteers working together for the benefit of our community, you'll love being a part of it!



Betty Brown

Hello, I am Betty Brown. I have been volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford for nearly two years as an office assistant. In the summer of 2007, I was forced to retire from my managerial position in financial services which I had held for nearly 30 years. After two weeks of retirement, it became evident that I needed to volunteer somewhere to occupy my time. So for nearly seven years, I volunteered at the Southgate Senior Centre as receptionist/office clerk. In the spring of 2014, the decision was made to broaden my horizons and search for new places to volunteer. After several interviews at different agencies, the decision was made to select the Alzheimer Society of Oxford as my number one place to spend my many hours of spare time. Since being involved with the Society I have become much more aware of the early signs of dementia and have become astounded by the number of people it affects in Oxford County.

Since being involved, my most memorable moments have been preparing for and helping with the annual Walk For Alzheimer's in January as well as assisting with special events such as luncheons.

Having volunteered for a few agencies, I have found the staff at the Alzheimer Society to be the most organized, friendliest, and the most appreciative people with which to be associated. It has been a pleasure to know every one of the staff and makes one appreciate the many hours of work they devote to organizing events and helping people afflicted with this terrible disease.



Bev McDonald

Volunteering gives Bev McDonald a purpose. It's one of the reasons she has spent nearly two decades devoting her time to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford.

"You want to do something fulfilling and you want to give back to your community," she said.

Ever since she retired, Bev has given her time to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, beginning as an office volunteer and later becoming a volunteer companion. Now, about 18 years later, she's returned to her roots and volunteers in the Society office every Friday.

"(It's) a sense of well-being and satisfaction that you've made a difference. Even if you're just doing menial things, you're helping out someone else on staff that doesn't have to do it. It frees them up," said Bev.

She does anything and everything that needs to be done, from photocopying to answering the phone to unloading the dishwasher.

"You get to meet some wonderful people," Bev said. "They're very good to their volunteers. They go out of their way to make volunteers feel appreciated."

Bev grew up in a home that valued giving back. She thinks the desire to volunteer must have been instilled in her as a child.

"I suppose it comes from your family, you know? My mom was a volunteer and my husband's been involved in the community as well," she said.

Bev volunteered with another local non-profit when her children were young, and she's also involved in volunteering roles at her church.

After seeing the impact of Alzheimer's disease on her grandmother and a close friend, she felt the Alzheimer Society of Oxford would be the perfect place to donate her time.

"Those people have (so much) compassion for their clients and the families. The support is there. I would not hesitate to recommend it to anyone. The Society is a wonderful help," she said.

It's the kind of support that is crucial for those who are walking a journey with dementia.

"I just don't know where this community would be, the families that are going through what they're going through, how they would handle it if they didn't have these resources and the people that care so much there," she said.

The work of staff at the Alzheimer Society is what motivates Bev to spend each Friday working diligently at the office.

"That's why I do it, just to free them up to do what they need to do."

Why I Volunteer



Danielle Hodgson

I have been working in Long Term Care for about 7 years and I see daily the effect of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. I decided to volunteer with Alzheimer Society as a Volunteer Companion so that I could help out caregivers and bring a smile to my companions face. I have had a few different companions over the years and each one has brought a lot of joy to my life.

I've had a lot of great experience volunteering with Alzheimer's Society but a highlight for me has been with my current match. We have great conversation every time we are together and I can tell he enjoys sharing his stories with me and I enjoy listening. It has been nice for me to meet families and make a connection with my companion. It's very rewarding to know that I've brightened someone's day and helped out.

I think people just need to know that volunteering with the Alzheimer Society is great because the staff are very supportive and genuinely care about their volunteers and clients. I would say that if you're looking to volunteer somewhere you should consider the Alzheimer Society because the impact you will make might just change someone's life for the better.



Grace Forget

I believe that people living with dementia and their caregivers deserve the best supports possible. Being on the board gives me a way to be part of providing them support.

By volunteering for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, I have become much more aware of the complexities involved in the effective management of the Alzheimer Society. If I could say anything to anyone out there who is considering volunteering, I'd say: Don't be hesitant to be involved with people living with dementia.



James Prole

I have been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford for approximately 3 years. I started to volunteer as I have been involved with various organizations and when I moved to Woodstock, after retiring, I found that I needed something to do. By going to a seminar on Alzheimer's disease I learned a lot and I decided that this is what I wanted to volunteer my time with.

I am now a Volunteer Companion. I find this very rewarding as there are many people suffering from Alzheimer's, and their caregivers need time for themselves. A couple of hours a week make a difference in their lives and it feels great to know that you can help someone.

While volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford I have informed people about Alzheimer's and they have had family members tested, some have tested okay but a few have been diagnosed with a form of dementia.

Why I Volunteer



Linda Vandevyvere

Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I chose to volunteer in Oxford because we had benefited from the services of the Alzheimer Society when we were travelling on the journey with my mother who passed away in 2001. My husband and I have helped with the Walk For Alzheimer's for 20 years, I think, and I have been a volunteer companion for the past 3 years.

Every visit has a moment, like trying to comfort and distract my companion when she is feeling like everyone has forgotten that she has gifts and value and wants to contribute. I find it very rewarding, and a bit of a challenge to come up with something different each week, but we enjoy each other's company every week.

I find there is great value in helping someone during the most difficult time of their life. I find I am very much appreciated, which is very rewarding.



Dennis Kellner

When Dennis Kellner talks about his years of volunteering with the Alzheimer Society, there's one word that comes up again and again: rewarding. Dennis gives two hours of his time each week to the Volunteer Companion Program. He meets with his current match - his seventh since he started in 2006 - every Tuesday. It's time well spent.

"The relationship that you build with your friend, they kind of look forward to you coming each week," he says. He also knows how much caregivers appreciate having a small break.

Dennis started volunteering with the Alzheimer Society after he retired. He wanted to try something new. He didn't have any personal experience with Alzheimer's or dementia before he started. However, volunteers are given extensive training and have ongoing support from the Alzheimer Society. He's learned a lot since he started. Every match has been different, he says, and it's important to treat everyone as an individual. With his previous match, he saw them change over the course of their time together as the disease progressed.

"It's quite an experience," he says. "It's actually like you're stepping into another world, to see how people deal with things."

He's learned to go with the flow and deal with challenges as they come. Dennis likes that the Volunteer Companion Program gives him the chance to meet new people. "That's an adventure," he says. He also appreciates the flexibility of the Program, which allows him to select the volunteer hours that work for him. If you've got spare time and want to help other people, Dennis has a message for you: "Go to the Alzheimer Society and see what they have to offer."

Chances are, you'll find it rewarding too.



Dianne Hodges

Maybe you spotted her on the green at the Alzheimer Society Golf Tournament. You might have strolled beside her at the Walk or rubbed elbows at the Gala.

If you've been part of an Alzheimer Society of Oxford event, there's a good chance you've run into long-time volunteer Dianne Hodges.

Dianne has been involved since the Alzheimer Society was merely an idea. Nearly 30 years ago, regional agencies saw a growing need to provide services to those living with dementia. Dianne sat on the committee that was created to figure out a way forward. She had begun to encounter the disease in her job co-ordinating day programming for seniors at VON Oxford.

"Because I was dealing with people with the disease on a day-to-day basis, I knew how important it was for the families to have the support that they needed, and the information and the education," she says. "As a community, we had to grow that Society and provide the services."

Dianne has remained heavily involved as a volunteer since the Society's creation. She also served as its interim Executive Director for a year and a half.

It's been rewarding, she says, to see people living with dementia and their family members getting the help they need to cope with the disease. She believes educating people about Alzheimer's has been a major step forward.

Dianne found her time serving on the Alzheimer Society's board of directors particularly meaningful. She enjoyed being part of an organization that was growing and constantly searching for new ways to serve the community.

"It's well known Oxford has an amazingly workable, insightful Society, always planning ahead and looking at new services to provide," Dianne says. When representing the Society at conventions, it was exciting to know that the Alzheimer Society of Oxford's ideas were "sort of ahead of the game."

No matter what role she's played, Dianne has enjoyed spending time with other volunteers and staff. She says prospective volunteers should know they'll get to choose a role that suits their interests and they'll be given the training to get the job done. Volunteers are always warmly welcomed and thanked for their time, which can mean a lot, Dianne adds.

"It's been an extremely positive experience and I hope that I will be able to volunteer for many, many, many more years in whatever capacity they need."



Dorothy Kellner

What started as a yearly fundraising walk turned into a weekly volunteer commitment for Dorothy Kellner.

"I always went to the Walk for Alzheimer's. A lady who was a volunteer companion, who I got to know, said 'you should really be a volunteer companion.' And I said 'what's that all about?' So when I retired I went and took the course," Dorothy explained.

She loves spending time with her match, a local woman with Alzheimer's disease.

"We usually go for a drive, out in the country, because she was raised on a farm and I was too! We enjoy seeing the different seasons, the crops, animals, seeing the changes," she said.

And though Dorothy is offering her match companionship and a regular outing, the volunteer position is fun for her, too.

"It's really rewarding, I really enjoy it," she said. "I feel like I get more out of it than I give."

But Dorothy knows how much the Volunteer Companion Program means to family members who are caring for a loved one with dementia.

"It gives the caregiver time to go away. I often think, I spend two hours a week volunteering, and that's just two hours of my time. But it's the only two hours when the caregiver isn't tied down," she said.

For Dorothy, it's rewarding to know that she's giving someone the gift of time.

"It's a way to give back, and something to do in retirement that means something."



Elaine Hughes

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Jane Green

Volunteering is a way of life for the Green family. And when Jane Green's daughter Shelley became the executive director of the Alzheimer Society, she didn't hesitate before jumping in to help the organization as a volunteer.

"We just like to give of ourselves. We're givers and we like to contribute to society in that way," said Jane.

One of her main roles is to keep the gardens at 575 Peel St. looking bright and beautiful. She's one of two volunteer gardeners.

"It's a very good place to volunteer. When I'm out doing the gardening, all the employees that walk by say 'Can I get you some water? Do you need anything?' I bring my own drink and I'm just fine, but they always say 'oh, thanks for doing this. It looks so good,'" Jane said. Usually she tends to the gardens once a week, plus additional hours in the spring and fall for planting and cleanup.

"If there's anything special coming up, I'll go and tweak everything. Make sure the dandelions are picked off - that's a full time job right there," she joked.

Jane prepares the flower beds, buys the flowers, and coordinates the planting, but there are a myriad of other little tasks that come with the gardening role. She works hard to keep the Alzheimer Society's landscaping free of garbage, cigarette butts and any animal surprises. Keeping the weeds at bay - especially between the memorial bricks - is another focus.

"That's a tedious job, but that's very important, to respect the names of the people who are there on the bricks," Jane said. She enjoys the time spent in the sunshine. "I like being outdoors and I get to pet the dogs that go by," she said with a chuckle.

Jane also volunteers with the Alzheimer Society in other ways. She often bakes goodies or serves at receptions, like the open house for the new building, and takes charge of flower arrangements for special events.

"I'm just a general helper. Sometimes if I'm going to Costco or someplace, Shelley will say 'can you shop for Alzheimer's?' I pick up coffee and cream and those sorts of things," Jane said, noting that's more of an occasional role.

"Just kind of a general Girl Friday," she said. "If they need me they know I'm available."

She hopes that more people might consider dedicating a few hours a week to an organization like the Alzheimer Society.

"There are many different kinds of roles that can be done," Jane said.

She believes in the power of volunteering.

"Without volunteers, I don't know where a lot of organizations would be," Jane said.

"It makes you feel like you're contributing to society, that's an important thing I think. We get a lot of benefits in this country, so it's nice to be able to give back a wee bit."



Ken Craven

Every year in January, you can find Ken Craven at the Woodstock Walk for Alzheimer's.

For more than 20 years he's been a fixture at the event, usually counting donations and pledges at the money table, but also chipping in with set-up and tear down work.

"It's enjoyable and it's nice to see the people come in and have put out an effort (to fundraise)," Craven said. "No matter how much or how little money they're bringing in, you like to encourage them that they've really made a difference."

Craven's seen a lot of changes at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford since he began volunteering at the Walk for Alzheimer's more than 20 years ago.

"I've watched the Society grow and blossom and it's been great to see," he said. "It's really grown in what it's been able to offer the county in terms of services. Certainly the prominence of the Society has been raised considerably."

In addition to his volunteer role at the Walks, Craven's dental practice holds a Coffee Break for their office building each September.

"The cause is near and dear to my heart because I've had relatives who have suffered with Alzheimer's and dementia," he said.

That includes Craven's father. But the diagnosis came years after Craven started as a volunteer with the organization – so he knew where to turn for help.

"The Alzheimer Society provided support to me when I was dealing with that," he said.

"You want the public to be aware of it, and know they're not alone. So many people will be caring for a parent and they'll think 'now what do I do?' The Alzheimer Society is a great resource."

The organization can be a crucial lifeline for local residents, especially those looking after a loved one with dementia.

"It's hard to know what to do, and it's hard to get any relief at all. Certainly the Society helps those caregivers," Craven said.

But the Alzheimer Society is also a great place to donate your time and talents, he said.

"I've been other places where you're trying to help, but you're probably getting in the way more than you're helping," he said with a chuckle. "Everything is so well organized at the Alzheimer Society. You can come in and they'll have a job for you and you don't just have to stand around wondering 'how can I help?'"

Volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford has also been fulfilling, Craven said.

"It's very rewarding, it really is."



Lisa Wright

Lisa Wright isn't sure how she would have navigated her mother's journey with dementia without the Alzheimer Society of Oxford.

"We went to all the classes on Tuesday nights. I wouldn't have survived without (family support worker) Judi Restemeyer, laughing and crying," she said.

It was the sense of support and camaraderie at those meetings that stands out to Lisa.

"To sit with other people who were going through all the same stuff was tremendous," she said.

Lisa's mom was diagnosed in the early 2000s. She called the Alzheimer Society to get some help. A few years later, Lisa decided that she wanted to pay forward all the help she received.

"I wanted to do something to give back," she said.

Lisa is a whiz in the kitchen, so she helps the organization by baking for special events or fundraisers.

"That's easy. I just love baking," she said.

Lisa proves that opportunities to volunteer at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford are endless. Baking fits her life, her schedule, and taps into a hobby she loves.

"I've volunteered taking money at the Walk before, but mainly it's baking," she said.

It's a great way to support and sustain the organization that guided her family through a challenging time.

"The help and support that you get is life changing," Lisa said. "It really is."



Pauline Malan

There was no turning back once Pauline Malan got a taste for volunteering with the Alzheimer Society.

For the past two decades, Pauline has been working hard to make sure every Alzheimer Society luncheon goes off without a hitch.

She ensures every place is set and every candle lit. She's a friendly face when patrons arrive, and she's there cleaning up once they're on their way.

"I help wherever I'm needed," she says, whether it's feeding a massive crowd at the Walk for Alzheimer's or preparing for an in-office event.

Hearing other people share their experiences with dementia at the luncheons is a highlight of Pauline's volunteering. She enjoys the chance to constantly meet and learn from new people.

The kindness of the Alzheimer Society staff also keeps Pauline coming back year after year. She has great admiration for the work they do and appreciates how friendly everyone is.

Executive Director Shelley Green, Pauline says, "is so informative. She is so level."

"And she always, always, always thanks you for being there, for helping out, which makes you feel good."

Pauline started volunteering after making a donation to the Alzheimer Society in memory of her uncle. Both her uncle and her aunt had Alzheimer's, but were undiagnosed.

Pauline's aunt didn't recognize her the last time she visited before she passed away. She was strapped to a chair at a nursing home to prevent her from wandering to other rooms.

Unfortunately, programs to help people living with Alzheimer's weren't widely available at the time. Now, it's a different story, Pauline says.

"What a difference it makes when you can go to a place, and they can help you, and they can talk to you about it."

For her part, Pauline plans to keep things moving at Alzheimer Society luncheons, doing vital work behind the scenes to help ensure people in her community can get the help they need.



Phyllis Norrie

When Phyllis Norrie learned of the support her friends were receiving at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, she saw an opportunity to help.

“A friend’s husband was going to the Alzheimer Society, and I think that’s probably why I got involved. I knew her, and I thought ‘that sounds like something I could do,’” she said.

The Ingersoll woman became a volunteer companion, spending time each week with a local resident who has dementia. These volunteers are absolutely priceless, because they offer caregivers a few hours to themselves.

For many, it’s the only free time they have to do errands, work, or even just unwind with a friend.

Phyllis has been matched with three people so far.

“I like the companionship, and I like helping the family out – and my match, too. It’s rewarding. You learn a lot being with them,” she said.

Phyllis spends time chatting with her “match” and they often go out for lunch together.

“You learn so much every day. You learn how to cope with a lot of different things,” she said. “You’re helping so many people, and that’s rewarding for yourself and for them.”

And that’s not all Phyllis does for the Alzheimer Society, either. She offers her support with events like the Walk and other fundraisers.

“You help in the office with serving and social-type events,” executive director Shelley Green added.

It’s a wonderful organization at which to donate time and energy.

“They’re all very friendly,” Phyllis said of Society staff. “Everybody is very helpful, if you have any problems or questions they’re right there to answer you.”

Phyllis believes so strongly in the cause that she even tries to recruit her friends as volunteers!

“I think I brought five ladies with me to the training session. (Not all) have stayed, but...I keep trying that all the time. I’m always telling people,” she said with a chuckle.

“I just say ‘there’s a need, and it’s only a couple hours of week.’ You’re just giving families some peace of mind for a little bit – giving them some freedom.”



Ruth Storey

Something magical is happening with the Intergenerational Singers - and it's not just the Disney tunes.

Young or old, music aficionado or amateur, everyone walks out of practice with a smile on their face, including choir conductor Ruth Storey.

Ruth has been leading the Intergenerational Singers for the past two-and-a-half years. The choir brings together students and adults living with dementia, as well as Langdon Villa residents, to sing together. They meet weekly to connect with music, memories and each other.

"The whole purpose of this is to reconnect memories through music, to have that interaction between the young and the older people ... It's a lot of fun," says Ruth.

Ruth was an elementary school music teacher and church music director before she took on the role. To hit the ground running with the Intergenerational Singers, she took a weekend course that taught her about selecting music for people in long-term care facilities.

Ruth also learned in the course that music is our last memory to leave. She tries to pick songs that might help people with dementia connect with their past.

"You may not be able to find the words, but you can hum it, you can whistle it ... I think it's important to keep that music memory alive."

At the Intergenerational Singers, it's a message that goes far beyond academic theory.

Recently, while practicing Whistle While You Work with the choir, a participant with Alzheimer's who had a hard time singing along was able to whistle incredibly for the group. A little boy stood up to join him; they'll be whistling together at the concert.

"Little things like that make a really special moment," Ruth says.

While Ruth lauds the physical, beneficial and mental benefits of the choir, she also knows that music simply makes people happy. It's something all generations can relate to.

The choir has been growing in popularity over the past couple years. The current session - one of two each year - has 40 people, up from about 25 in the past.

Ruth says she has the organization team, which sets up binders with music for each participant, to thank for keeping things running so smoothly.

Although Ruth has been honoured to hold the conductor position, she's considering stepping aside after this session. She wants others to have a chance to take up the helm.

"I've really enjoyed it. It's been a wonderful experience."



Sandy Smith

You don't have to have any special skills to be a Volunteer Companion at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. Sandy Smith has learned you just have to be a compassionate person with two hours a week to spare. "You will get all the support you need, and the rewards are huge," said Sandy, who has been a volunteer companion for a decade.

Sandy has been matched with a variety of people during her years volunteering with the program, and said the activities she's shared with her matches vary from playing cards to building a bird house. It all depends on what the client likes to do, and how they're feeling on the day of the visit.

Her current match likes to talk, and Sandy is content to let her match carry the conversation.

"I really say very little," said Sandy.

A previous match liked to go on outings and would often be waiting outside the door with a big smile as Sandy arrived for their visit.

"What we do depends on the client," said Sandy, adding the Alzheimer Society does a thorough interview with the clients and their families to find out what the client likes to do. There is also a treasure trove of games and activities available at the Alzheimer Society to spark a client's interest.

"You play it by what they are capable of and are interested in," she said. "You roll with wherever they are when you get there."

Sandy started her volunteer companion work more than 10 years ago when she received a telephone call asking if she would be interested in volunteering. "I thought, if I don't have two hours a week to give to something like this, something is wrong. It's not a big time commitment and the payback is ten-fold.

"I feel I'm getting an immense amount of satisfaction in knowing I'm truly helping this family. I feel like I'm helping, and it's rewarding, and I feel appreciated."

Extensive training by the Alzheimer Society gave Sandy the information she needed to be able to be effective as a volunteer companion. She learned about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, communication strategies, activity ideas and program strategies.

As a volunteer companion, Sandy also receives ongoing support and education through regular contact with the Volunteer Companion Program coordinator and monthly support meetings.

Sandy's volunteer contribution to the Alzheimer Society also includes her annual involvement in the Walk for Alzheimer's. For several years, Sandy has volunteered to be at a registration table where Walk participants arrive to hand in their pledge money. Sandy said her reward is the fun she finds in watching the fundraising event unfold and to hear the stories of each of the participants she speaks to.

"The human factor is really interesting," she said.

Why I Volunteer



Noreen Holbrough

I sort of fell into volunteering when my husband, a client, sang in an Intergenerational choir in London. When he wished to start a choir in Oxford, it seemed a logical place for me, mainly due to my recognizing the value and importance of music and my fairly strong organizational skills.

My main area of volunteering is with the Intergenerational Singers. Along with another volunteer, I have held two bridge parties as a Coffee Break fundraiser. I also assisted at the Walk For Alzheimer's this year.

The joy on people's faces when they are singing is such a satisfaction. Volunteering has been a big part of my life forever. The Alzheimer Society is so appreciative of everything its volunteers do so it makes it easy to continue. Those of us affected by Alzheimer disease should be willing to promote the value of the Society and its programs.

Any volunteer work, large or small is appreciated by the Society, by clients, and will be rewarding to the volunteer. None of us can ever learn too much about Alzheimer's. I encourage people to attend any of the Societies education sessions and talk with any employee about how you can help.



Philip Vandermolen

As the primary caregiver of my mother who lives with dementia, I knew I would benefit from the knowledge and experience I would find at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. I found the staff to be compassionate, understanding and knowledgeable as they directed me to the path which would best benefit my mother's care. One of the first things I noticed was the positive energy in the office. It was at this point I knew I wanted to give back to this organization.

Throughout my first year, I have volunteered with Sheena in the fundraising department, at the spring golf tournament, the Walk For Alzheimer's in Ingersoll and Woodstock and most recently worked with Beth to promote the "Finding Your Way" program throughout Oxford County. My most memorable moment has to be volunteering at the Walks. They were so well run and I had a chance to meet many other volunteers who carried that same positive energy.

I think the biggest impact volunteering has had on me is in my mom's care. The Alzheimer Society has not only directed me in getting a proper diagnosis and other medical care but also helped me understand the disease more so that I can be more understanding and sensitive to my mother's needs.

If you are looking to volunteer in the community and are unsure of where to start, may I suggest a visit to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, you will not be disappointed. This organization is very grateful for all their volunteers and is thankful for any time you have to give.

Why I Volunteer



Rob Van De Cappelle

I have a family member with Alzheimer's and I needed to seek the support of the Alzheimer's Society and when I did, it not only helped my family member but it helped me stay sane. I wanted to ensure that the next time someone needed that help, they had a place to go to assist them.

I am currently a member of the Board of Directors and I have been involved with the Coffee Break fundraiser for a couple years. This last year I had a "Coffee Break" at a London Knights game. The beverage of choice may not have been coffee but we had our "Break", created memories and had a blast.

I volunteer wanted to ensure these services and programs are around for the next time someone like me needs them. By helping out with Coffee Breaks and being a member of the Board of Directors, I feel I am "giving back" or "paying it forward" in my own little way. It makes me feel like I am part of a bigger "movement" that not only makes me feel a little more part of the community but I also think it makes the community stronger.

Is there anything you'd like to say to help encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I have tried to lead my life under the impression that you are either part of the problem or part of the solution. If you want to be part of the solution then get out and give back a little. It will be returned to you tenfold. It doesn't take much, an hour here or quick visit there. We all need help; it's the people who ask for it combined with the people who provide it who really make the world go around!!



Sandy Smith

I volunteer with the Alzheimer Society, because I've seen first-hand the effects that dementia can have on families and if I can play even a small part in relieving some of the stress, then my volunteer hours are well-spent.

I am currently part of the Volunteer Companion Program, but I also assist at the annual Walk for Alzheimer's. There have been many memorable moments during my visits with my 'matches', but one that stands out right now is the big smile of recognition and the welcoming hug that I got from my current 'match' when I returned after a month away.

Being a Volunteer Companion puts me in awe of the caregivers who struggle daily with the disease and it has given me a greater awareness of the need for funds for research and for a national strategy to deal with ever higher numbers of diagnoses.

A couple of hours a week of a volunteer's time is nothing compared to the hundreds of hours the caregivers and families put in. My initial reaction when I was asked to consider being part of the Volunteer Companion Program was "it would be very selfish to say I can't give up two hours a week of my time and who knows if I might be on the receiving end of this program some day. I want someone to be there for me, so I should be there for them today."



Barbara Helsdon

Volunteering since 1990.

Barbara has volunteered in various capacities with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford spanning many years.

"There are many reasons why I make time to volunteer. I like to help people in any way that I can, to be kind and caring and to give back to those who have helped me and to my community. I have met some wonderful people through volunteering and have become friends with many.

"I chose the Alzheimer Society of Oxford to volunteer mainly because my mother had Alzheimer's and I know firsthand the effect on a family. The Alzheimer Society provides so many helpful programs and services by a wonderful team that is always so supportive, knowledgeable, and dedicated. As a volunteer, I like the orientation and support provided to volunteers. Sincere appreciation is shown in so many ways making me feel valued and part of the team.

"What do I enjoy the most is a difficult question for me to answer. There isn't anything I haven't enjoyed! As a board member, I enjoy the discussions, brainstorming and the challenges of the decision-making process, and fundraising. Working with other talented board members is fun. It has stimulated me to use some of the qualities required when I worked! One of the most rewarding, gratifying volunteer experiences was as a Volunteer Companion. I made a connection with a family that has lasted through time.

"I get great personal gratification from doing whatever I can, in any capacity to help the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. Over the years it has been so rewarding to see how the Society has grown and developed, providing programs and services throughout the county. I have been a volunteer for many years and will continue to do so for as long as I can.

"For someone who is thinking of accessing programs and services offered by the Alzheimer Society, I always strongly encourage them to contact the office and to talk to someone about what is available. I describe how helpful and supportive everyone is and describe briefly some of the programs available. If they are reluctant, I have given the name of someone to contact (with their permission) who has benefited from the services and programs offered. If appropriate I follow up to see how they are doing. I tell them how fortunate we are to have such an exceptional Alzheimer Society in Oxford County!"

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, Barbara was asked if she's found herself continuing to volunteer her time in some way within her community or close network of friends or family. "I have offered to pick up groceries or drugstore items for neighbours when I have been going out, phoned family, friends, and neighbours, and sent emails. I have tried to keep in touch with as many people as I can. Unfortunately, I am in the age bracket that is being encouraged to stay home and self-isolate! So, for once in my life I am trying to do as I am told! I am fortunate to live in a community that is supportive and have neighbours that look out for one another."

Barbara, we applaud your hard work, support, and dedication to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford spanning so many years! We thank you for the many, many ways you've impacted our client's lives and helped to influence our Society!



Debbie Smits

Volunteer Since 2013.

"I choose to volunteer at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford because I have seen how difficult it is for people with Alzheimer's and also for caregivers and family. The Alzheimer Society is able to provide much-needed support, guidance and education."

Currently, Debbie volunteers to assist with administrative tasks at our office location. Debbie, along with additional reception volunteers, spends one day/week answering phone calls, using the computer to complete tasks and provide assistance with various projects. Debbie's warmth and friendly personality ensure a welcoming environment for all who walk through the door to access support, programs, and services.

"I enjoy all the wonderful staff and other volunteers that work for the Society. We all share the same goal "making people's lives better". We just do it in our own special way."

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, Debbie was asked if she's found herself continuing to volunteer her time in some way within her community or close network of friends or family. "I've found it difficult to volunteer in a time like this, but I still try and help. I check in on my neighbour and pick up her groceries when needed, I donate to the food bank and make telephone calls just to say 'hi!'"

Debbie, we are so thankful for you and for the commitment you've made to help the Alzheimer Society of Oxford improve the quality of life for people and their caregivers living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

Ernie & Nancy Pierik

Volunteer Companions since 2019

"Nancy and I have volunteered in many different capacities over the years, but why with the Alzheimer Society? We recognized some limitation that occurs with getting older in ourselves, and we have seen some of the loving efforts caretakers have made with aging family members with dementia. We recognized there was a real need for volunteers to help support people with dementia and we sensed that each of us, even with our own limitations, still have something to share with them, and at the same time, give the caretakers a bit of time for themselves.

"We love to volunteer and to serve others because Jesus has done so much to change our lives. We love to help change other people's lives for the better. That has been a central focus of our lives, even in our careers, and part-time during our working lives. We retired early to do full-time volunteer work to give back to the community for what we have received. And, as is always the case, with volunteering we were probably blessed the most.

"Our encouragement to others would be to get involved in serving, volunteering and helping others. You are most likely going to get much satisfaction and joy from it as well as giving joy, meaning, and connection to someone else. Having said that, realize it might involve some hard work, some sorrows, and pain, yet the joy and blessing you give in all of that come back multiplied many times. So yes, jump in!"

Ernie and Nancy, thanks immensely for your sincerity and commitment to warmly support our clients every single week! You've truly made a difference!



Gayle Platt

Volunteer since 2018

"I feel that it's important to stay active and give back to one's community. I owe so much to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. The people and programs were invaluable to both my husband and me during his Alzheimer's journey. When the opportunity arose to volunteer as a receptionist, I was more than happy to become a part of the "helping" side of the society as opposed to just a grateful recipient.

"I enjoy the interaction with both the public and staff and to be able to help in my small way to spread the word about what a wonderful resource the Society is for both those with dementia and their caregivers.

"I gain the satisfaction of knowing my time has been well spent along with the unexpected bonus of being very much appreciated. Plus, I now have many new friends.

"I do, and have even before I became a volunteer, encourage anyone who has approached me to get in touch with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford for information and help with their concerns and questions about dementia."

Gayle, you are such an asset to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford in your office volunteer role. We thank you for the many hours you've devoted to administrative tasks and seeing that our clients are warmly welcomed and directed to the appropriate support.



Anne Knops

Anne Knops looks forward to her weekly visits with her match in the Volunteer Companion Program offered by the Alzheimer Society of Oxford.

She knows she is providing some respite for the family of her match, but Anne gets as much benefit from the two-hour visits as anyone. "It lifts my spirits, and it gives me a purpose," said Anne.

The two ladies do a lot of sightseeing during their match time. "She loves to drive in the car," said Anne. "And she likes to be active."

Where they go on their outings depends on what her match would like to do, or ideas that Anne has come up with based on what she has learned sparks an interest in her match.

"She's a great person. Even though she's got Alzheimer's disease, she's got great wit and we have a lot of fun with that. "We're a really good match."

The pair met about five months ago. It was when Anne retired that she decided she wanted to give of her time as a way to give back to her community. Though she hadn't had any involvement with the Alzheimer Society previously, this was where she decided she would volunteer her time.

"They're a very good organization," Anne said. "The Volunteer Companion Program is a great program and the Alzheimer Society gives such great training."

She had no preconceived idea about what it would be like to volunteer as a companion but felt very confident after she took part in the training. Anne participated in several sessions totaling 12 hours of training before meeting her match. The training covered the different types of dementias; how they affect people differently; situations that may arise during a visit and how to deal with them; as well as ideas for activities or games.

When she first met her match, Anne was accompanied by a member of the Alzheimer Society staff who helped to introduce the two and gauge their interaction. After that initial interaction, the two ladies began to visit regularly on their own. Anne always feels supported by the Alzheimer Society.

"If you get into a situation, there's always someone at the Alzheimer Society, they're just a phone call away. You're never alone. There's always someone there."

Anne wishes more people would participate in the one-on-one Volunteer Companion Program. She said it's so different from other volunteer opportunities, and if she had the energy, she would have a second match.

"It energizes you," Anne said. "You're making a few moments in their life a little brighter."



Bobbi Moore

When Bobbi Moore's mom was living with Alzheimer's, she became intimately familiar with the challenges caregiving can bring.

They lived in different cities, and it wasn't always easy to get her mom out of the house as often as she wanted to.

Now, through the Alzheimer Society's Volunteer Companion Program, Bobbi is able to help people dealing with similar situations. For a couple hours once a week, she spends time with her match, a person who has been diagnosed with dementia. Bobbi has been matched with seven people since she started volunteering in 2006.

"I like meeting different people. I love helping the elderly," she says. It makes the program a great fit.

Bobbi finds the program means a lot to caregivers. Even though it's for a short period of time, she knows from experience how helpful it can be to have a break.

With her current match, they often go for a drive and grab a coffee. Sometimes they stay in instead, playing a game or doing a puzzle.

Bobbi also helps out at the Walk for Alzheimer's. She's happy to pitch in whenever the organization needs her because everything is so well run, she says.

Bobbi also enjoys the social element of volunteering. Not only does she get to build a relationship with her match, she also gets to meet other volunteers at monthly meetings. It gives her a chance to share her experiences in the program and trade ideas.

"I love doing it. It gets you out and about," she says.

She would love to see more people get involved in the Volunteer Companion Program. One day, she says, people might need to access its services for themselves or a family member.

With more than a decade of experience in the Volunteer Companion Program under her belt, Bobbi has no plans to slow down. As long as she's able, she'll be taking her match for a drive and a chat, doing what she likes best: giving back.



Celia

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I had intended to help at another community organization but it wasn't built yet and shortly after that 3 month training I was recruited by Shelley Green for the Alzheimer Society along with some other choir friends.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I began attending training for the Alzheimer Society in September of 2008. In 2009 I began visiting as a Volunteer Companion.

3. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

My most memorable moment was realizing that this kind of visiting was what all my life, to that moment, had been leading me to do. Once I wanted to be a social worker, then I became a missionary, and later experiences as a mother, greenhouse worker, and lay leadership in churches all contributed to a desire to help those who couldn't help themselves and I had the time and energy, still, to go on being useful to someone else. This happened with my first visit and continues with all the others.

4. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

The impact of this kind of volunteering has many rewards because it helped me to know myself. I am able to share in what is a current need of today's society.

5. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Patience and listening is good for the spirit, it is yoga for the soul. People who we visit usually communicate in non-verbal ways. Sometimes we can only interpret what they want to say through listening and loving them. We are only a small part of their life now, two hours a week is not much in the great scheme of things but it seems very important.



Debra Hiltz

Debra Hiltz just had a feeling. She knew very little about the Alzheimer Society, but every time she drove by the office, she thought that it must be a great place to work.

Turns out she was right.

Debra has now been volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford for more than two years. Once a week, she goes into the office to help with administrative tasks. She jumps in wherever she's needed, whether it's photocopying, making phone calls or helping put a presentation together. She also helps out at the Walk for Alzheimer's.

The warm, supportive staff make her excited to come back every week.

"I'm always greeted with a smile and even the occasional high-five in the hallway. Every week, I say I'm going for my weekly dose of positivity!"

The welcoming atmosphere has done more than put a smile on Debra's face – it's also helped reduce the anxiety she was feeling before she got involved. The confidence she's developed in the position has led her to try new things she wouldn't have in the past.

Knowing a lot about the Alzheimer Society's programs wasn't a prerequisite for getting involved. Through volunteering, Debra has learned about how the Alzheimer Society supports people living with many different forms of dementia. It's information she wishes she'd known when her dad had dementia, before he passed away.

"The support given would have been so valuable to us," she says. "We had no idea how to deal with things and I think the guidance and support would have made such a difference."

Now Debra gets to help make a difference in others' lives. Volunteering her time helps the Alzheimer Society staff deliver their many resources to the community, from information sessions to support groups.

Giving back to the community is a "great feeling," she says. "I always feel like I'm getting more than I'm giving."

Debra would encourage anyone looking for a volunteer opportunity to consider the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. For her, the staff's encouragement and support have made all the difference.

"They are so thankful and appreciative of their volunteers," she says. "They really make you feel like you are part of their team."



Don Taylor

Volunteer Since 2012

Don and his pal Rick have been instrumental in providing maintenance support to the Alzheimer Society of Oxford.

“I have found myself in the fortunate position that I have the opportunity to give back. Anyone who volunteers knows how rewarding it can be! If there’s anywhere locally that I can apply skills I have learned over the years to help others out, I am happy to volunteer.”

When asked what he enjoys most about volunteering with the Alzheimer Society, Don shared, “I really like the staff and very much value the work they do. I am pleased to be a part of who they are and what they do.”

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, Don was asked if he’s found himself continuing to volunteer his time in some way within his community or close network of friends or family. “It is a very frustrating time to be a volunteer. I was lucky to find a small wheelchair ramp project and remain isolated, but those opportunities seem few and far between.”

Don, thank you for the many ways you give your time and skills to serve the Alzheimer Society of Oxford and your community at large! We’re so grateful!



Frances Lister

Frances Lister knew very little about dementia before volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford, other than she saw the toll the disease was taking on her friends whose spouses were suffering with its effects.

She said her friends were exhausted and had difficulty making times for themselves.

“The grief of losing somebody before you lose someone was just so hard on them,” said Frances.

When Frances saw a poster promoting the Alzheimer Society of Oxford Volunteer Companion Program, she decided that was something she could do to help others who were struggling like her friends.

Frances contacted the Alzheimer Society and was soon set up in the training program that helps volunteer companions gain a solid understanding of what they might expect during their regular visits with their match. She said the training was very comprehensive and covered everything from the basics through to any number of different situations that might occur and how to handle them.

“They were trying to make all of us feel more comfortable with it,” said Frances.

It worked for her.

“I had no experience with the disease before, and I was apprehensive about it at first.”

With the knowledge that the Alzheimer Society fully supports its volunteers with ongoing education and activity ideas, Frances began to feel more confident that she could make a beneficial contribution.

Now she’s very comfortable in her role and has been with her match for more than a year.

The duo spend their weekly visits going for walks or drives depending on weather, listen to music, or simply sit and chat over coffee. It all depends on what her match is interested in doing on any given day.

Frances realizes that she is helping to provide a respite for everyone involved in caring for her match. The caregiver has a couple of hours to spend on their own while her match gets a change of scenery and activity.

She has also found that volunteering as a companion has been a satisfying experience for herself.

“I gain more of an understanding of the disease and the toll it takes,” she said, “And I really get a feeling that I’m helping out.”

Knowing that there is a wait list for volunteer companions, Frances encourages anyone who can give a couple hours of their time each week to step up and inquire about being a volunteer. The socialization offered through the Volunteer Companion program helps individuals with dementia to stay at home longer. Volunteers also provide social and recreation time for the person with dementia, and the respite time for the care partner.



Gail

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Henry had been volunteering for a long time and I started out baking for a Saturday workshop and tagged along with Henry on a display.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Officially for 2 years but unofficially for 6!

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Baking, prepping newsletters for mailings, pre-walk phone calls, deliveries, picking up supplies. Set up and staffing of display tables at fairs. Set up for Walk For Memories and staffing a table. Setting up for the Gala.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Pushing the coffee cart from Streetfest up Dundas St, Wellington and Peel with Robyn and Henry when we took down the display.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

It has made me aware of how many services that the Society offers and given me the opportunity to meet the staff and many other volunteers.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

It's a great place to volunteer. The volunteers are shown great appreciation and a person can volunteer as much or little as they wish to fit in with their daily life.



Glen

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

There are several organizations to volunteer for these days. The Alzheimer Society of Oxford was closer to me as family members were stricken with the dementia disease. It only seemed fitting to “give back” to a strong “local” organization that provided support in our time of need.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford? And what volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

My connection with Alzheimer Oxford goes back over 15 years, of which the last 8 + years, allowed me the opportunity to assist with fundraising events and more gratifying being a Volunteer Companion for 4 years and then 4 years sitting on the Alzheimer Oxford Board for 4 years being a Past President and currently a Director.

3. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

The greatest impact of the Society was helping other dementia families, either the person with dementia or their caregiver, by giving of my volunteer time to help them out during their struggle with the disease. To be able to discuss “hands on” encounters along with updated education on dementia , it went a long way on relieving some of the stress and frustration on those families.

4. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Everyone has some time, somewhere in their schedule, to volunteer. I would encourage you to belong to a solid family, the Alzheimer Society of Oxford. Take the opportunity to experience the personal gratification yourself, my words alone are only your starting point.



Heather

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

My father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2005. Since then my husband, my Aunt, and a cousin have received the diagnosis. The Oxford chapter has been a tremendous support to me and my family.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I have volunteered since 2009

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I am on the ASOx Board of Directors, we are assisting with the new logic model for evaluation, Walk For Memories, and in the past A Changing Melody as well as speaking at volunteer get togethers.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Walk for Memories is one of my favorite events. It is filled with hope and fun as well as some very poignant moments.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

I have met the most amazing, caring group of individuals. There is such support for our family. It's so important to know you are not alone on the journey.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

So many families benefit from the support. You never know when you will need it. It is an amazing opportunity. I believe you often get back more than you have given.



Henry

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I was looking to do volunteer work after retirement and since my mother had Alzheimer's disease I felt the Alzheimer Society would be the best fit for me.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Approximately 15 years.

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Volunteer Companion, work on display booths, errands, set up for special events, shopping for office supplies, research presentations, phone calling and prepping mail (newsletters).

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Taking my match to Caressant Care Nursing Home where he joined a 92 year old resident and put on a jam session to entertain residents. My match played a harmonica, I played the bag pipes and the resident played a guitar.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

It has been an important part of my life for many years. I have met many interesting people, made many friends and have felt a great deal of satisfaction in helping people and contributing to my community.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Whatever you do as a volunteer is very worthwhile as the Society provides a great and needed service to many people in Oxford County. All volunteer work is greatly appreciated by the Society and clients and all volunteers are valued and treated well by the Society staff.



Ian

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

During one of my internet searches I happened upon the Alzheimer Society website. At that time a person with computer/clerical skills was required as a volunteer in the office. I met the criteria; the rest is history.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Over ten years.

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Web-based Free Advertising Assistant.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Receiving my certificate, which acknowledged my volunteerism with the Society.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

Since I promote events pertaining to ASOX I am informed and will engage with people, encouraging them to participate.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Volunteering can provide a healthy boost to your self-confidence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity - remember as a volunteer you are appreciated, much more than you may realize.

Why I Volunteer



James Prole

I have been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford for approximately 3 years.

I started to volunteer as I have been involved with various organizations and when I moved to Woodstock, after retiring, I found that I needed something to do. By going to a seminar on Alzheimer's disease I learned a lot and I decided that this is what I wanted to volunteer my time with.

I am now a Volunteer Companion. I find this very rewarding as there are many people suffering from Alzheimer's, and their caregivers need time for themselves. A couple of hours a week make a difference in their lives and it feels great to know that you can help someone.

While volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford I have informed people about Alzheimer's and they have had family members tested, some have tested okay but a few have been diagnosed with a form of dementia.

I encourage everybody to volunteer as there are many people and organizations that need your help.



Justin Mills

Justin Mills - Volunteer Since 2019

Justin is one of the tremendous volunteers who clean the Alzheimer Society of Oxford office.

"I am lucky enough to get every other Tuesday off work. I enjoy doing other types of work than what is required at my job, which is normally a lot of administration and sitting at a desk. It feels good to move my body even if it's just cleaning some floors. I have family members struggling with Alzheimer's disease and have lost a grandfather to it. It was high on my list of organizations that I wanted to volunteer for. I wasn't sure what I would be doing when I first volunteered but I am happy we found a need that I was able to assist with.

"Volunteering provides me the opportunity to contribute to organizations that I believe have a positive impact on the world. People don't always get the same opportunity to do that when you're constricted by the requirement for a paycheck.

"I feel it's important for people to feel that they are doing good for the people around them and volunteering is a great way to do that."

When asked what he enjoys most about volunteering with the Alzheimer Society, Justin shared, "The positive attitude! When I first started coming into the building, I was blown away by the positive attitude that every single member of the office had. They are all so motivated and positive that you can't help but feel better."

Justin, we're so thankful for the role you play in providing a safe, clean and comfortable environment for our clients, staff, and volunteers! It means so much to us all!



Kathy Benjamin

Kathy Benjamin-Volunteer Companion since 2019

"I started to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford because my Mom had dementia years ago. I wanted to give back and I love to help others.

"What I enjoy most about volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford is that I know that my visits are appreciated by my match. She recognizes me when I arrive and when I leave, she stands at the door and waves goodbye to me as I leave the parking lot. This leaves me with a nice warm feeling.

"I take time to volunteer because I like to help others. If someone needs a hand, I'm happy to help. I've used my sewing skills to assist organizations in mending clothes for their clients who need assistance and I've also provided childcare. I also participate in a supper club that serves meals for another organization. It's important to start volunteering early in life and be aware that people need our help."

Kathy, we are so grateful for your desire to make a difference in our client's lives! You truly have! Thank you.



Peter Vanzansky

Peter Vanzansky - Volunteer Companion since 2017

"About 20 years ago my buddy volunteered quite often for special occasions in London. I asked him, 'Why do you volunteer? There is no money in it for you.' He said, 'Peter, it is impossible to explain, you have to try it yourself.' So, after I retired, I tried it and would not give it up."

Peter is one of many fantastic Volunteer Companions making weekly visits with our clients who have Alzheimer's disease or other dementias. "Seeing happy faces when entering their homes, is priceless!! I try to help clients to keep their memories functioning. It makes me happy when I walk in and they recognize me. We play games and they have a good time. The feeling of helping someone is wonderful. I just hope that one day someone will be helping me."

When asked what message Peter would like to send to our youth today about the importance of volunteering, he shared, "Volunteer while you are young and able to. One day you will appreciate some volunteer visiting you. And remember, every time you perform a good deed, you score positive points up there. So, when your time comes up, St. Peter will happily open the gate!"

Peter, thanks immensely for the many ways you've provided companionship to our clients!



Rebalee

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I choose to volunteer at the Alzheimer society because it was in the field of study I was about to take (personal support worker). I wanted to know and understand the daily struggles a person living with the disease has to face, and how I could help.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I have been volunteering for the Alzheimer society for two years as of March, 2015. It has been one of the most rewarding, heartfelt experiences I have ever encountered.

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I am currently involved in the Volunteer Companion Program.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

There are so many special moments I have encountered with my match. The most memorable moment for me was the day my match welcomed me at the door with a smile, and called me by my first name. This happened about a year after I had been volunteering. It certainly was an unexpected surprise to hear my name coming from my match's mouth after so long. It's a feeling I won't forget. After spending two years with my match from time to time now she will remember my name and say, I really enjoy you coming to visit me and thank you so much! Those words are so powerful, and at those moments I know I made the right choice in becoming a volunteer companion.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

This has shown me how we take the simple things in life for granted, we don't stop to "smell the roses" as they say! This has opened my eyes and heart to really live in today because tomorrow is never promised.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I would like to say that if anybody is looking to dedicate their time volunteering, the Alzheimer society of Oxford is one of the most touching, heart-warming experiences that you will ever encounter. This to me has been so rewarding in itself, seeing my matches smile week after week, and knowing how much you are helping their caregiver, there are so many benefits for everyone. The support and encouragement I have received from the Society helping me along the way has been incredible. The Alzheimer Society provides you with the knowledge and understanding of this disease and offer many other educational programs. The best part is, you are valued and appreciated as a person and for everything you do. The Alzheimer society of Oxford treats and respects their volunteers with dignity, and they value your time. This has been an amazing experience and one I will never forget.



Rick Bell

Rick Bell - Volunteer Since 2012

Rick and his pal Don have been so supportive of the Alzheimer Society of Oxford as cheerful maintenance volunteers tackling numerous projects over the years.

"I make time in my life to volunteer because I learned at an early age the value of being a volunteer. It started in Boy Scouts where we earned Merit Badges for performing certain tasks. I remember planting trees for a Conservation Area and there were numerous tasks that had you volunteer a service. In university, I remember filling sandbags to help prevent flooding in Guelph. When I was teaching in Stratford, the Geography teacher started a ME Club (Man's Environment). One of our big projects was to set up glass container recycling depots. We would collect the glass, take it to a central location and smash the glass in barrels. It was then taken to an industry in Toronto and the club received funds from the sale. This was in the 1970s.

"As a teacher, I was involved in coaching football. This required many hours each season, but I enjoyed it. In 1984, a Lions Club was formed in Sweaburg and I joined. Lions clubs have many activities that serve the public. So, I guess you could say that I have been a volunteer for most of my life.

"My friend Don and I began helping different charities when we retired. We have helped at Ingamo Family Homes and the United Way (mostly on the Day of Caring). I think it was Cathy Hill (administrative staff) who knew that we did this sort of thing and asked if we could help at the Alzheimer Society. The rest is history.

"I enjoy volunteering at the Alzheimer Society because what we do is appreciated and it feels good to help. It's always nice to see smiling faces."

Rick, your desire to support and invest time in the Alzheimer Society of Oxford is very much appreciated! The work you've done is so incredibly valuable!



Sharon

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Good value on investment- to give a caregiver a few hours of relief from constant care of their relative/friend with dementia.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

1.5 years.

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Volunteer Companion Program and helping with special events when needed.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Listening to my match signing all the carols/hymns in the Intergenerational Choir. My match has difficulty with speech but is able to sing every song.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

I have learned a lot with lectures, seminars and guest speakers about dementia. We have good social interaction between volunteers and staff. Staff are extremely well organized, upbeat, happy and helpful so we enjoy volunteering!

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

It's refreshing to get away from yourself for a few hours a week. Excellent policies and procedures in place to protect both volunteers and clients. Initial and ongoing education, support, safety and privacy.



Vicky

1. Of all the places in Oxford County, why did you choose to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I chose the Alzheimer Society because I witnessed first hand the need for caregivers to receive some much needed time away from their loved one that they are trying to care for at home. My Uncle was struggling to keep my Aunt at home for as long as possible. He finally did reach out to the Alzheimer Society for help and it was through Judi Restemeyer that I learned about the Volunteer Companion Program. Within a month I had signed up for the training program and was introduced to my first match a couple of months later. It was the best decision I ever made.

2. How long have you been a volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I have been a volunteer for 5+ years now.

3. What volunteer positions are you currently involved with at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

Currently I am only involved with the Intergenerational Choir. Previously I have been a Volunteer Companion and was matched up with two remarkable individuals. I have delivered newsletters, volunteered at a Alzheimer booth at side walk days. I've helped with the Circle of Support group. Having parents that no longer drive has made it harder for me to commit more of my time to the Society but I hope to get back to doing more in the future.

4. What is your most memorable moment from volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I can't really pinpoint a most memorable moment. Sounds kind of cliché to say they all have been memorable. But I guess I will to say that when I spent time with my two matches and they had been having a bad day I would just start to sing. I have seen time and time again how powerful just singing with someone can be.

5. What impact has volunteering at the Alzheimer Society of Oxford had on you?

Volunteering for the Society has had a huge impact on my life. I have often struggled with why I have been placed on this earth. Knowing now and seeing first hand what we might think of as being small gestures and how they can change someone's life in a moment is truly the most rewarding feeling that a person can get. I realize that perhaps this is what I and all the rest of us are here for. To help wherever, whenever and whoever we can in some small way.

6. Is there anything you would like to say to encourage others to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society of Oxford?

I would definitely encourage others to volunteer their time. We can all make time for other. If you can brighten someone's day by giving a few hours of your time, why wouldn't you? The rewards are worth it. I remember reading this quote somewhere: "Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident. It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice!"

So why not choose to volunteer for the Alzheimer Society.



Cheryl Douglas

When Cheryl Douglas started volunteering with the Alzheimer Society on the advice of a friend, she didn't know much about the organization or the disease. Fast forward a year and a half, and Cheryl is an enthusiastic advocate for the organization and a committed volunteer.

Cheryl started out in the Volunteer Companion program. She quickly found that her lack of experience was no barrier to a meaningful volunteer contribution. The training was amazing, she says, and she's had ongoing support from staff.

Cheryl looks forward to seeing her match every week. They chat, play board games or do crosswords, and sometimes she paints her companion's nails. Lots of laughter is a guarantee.

"I wanted to do something that was rewarding for me and also very helpful for someone else," she says. "So this certainly fit the bill for me."

Cheryl has recently picked up an additional role at the Alzheimer Society, as a volunteer receptionist. She felt comfortable taking on a new role knowing that she would be supported by the staff. She had training before she started, as well as on the job, and will be able to access training for any new tasks she wants to take on.

At the office, Cheryl gets to be a friendly face for people when they walk through the door, helping them feel more comfortable. She also fields phone calls and handles whatever odd jobs she can.

It's the kind of behind-the-scenes work she got a preview of when she helped with set-up at the Walk for Alzheimer's last year. She got to work with all kinds of different people and draw on her creative skills to help the event come together. "It was just a fun day. I saw a lot of faces I ended up knowing."

Cheryl didn't get involved with any expectations that she would receive a lot of gratitude for her work – she just wanted to help out. But she says she's been blown away by how the Alzheimer Society manages its volunteers.

"They just make you feel so good about what you do and are very appreciative, and they're very supportive," she says.

But, of course, what really drives volunteers is knowing that they're helping out with such an important cause.

"We know how many people are affected and in the future may be affected by the disease."