

Kingston, ON – January 6, 2017

New Volunteer Companion Program Kicks off during Alzheimers Month

January is Alzheimers month, and its an opportunity for Alzheimer Societies across Canada to bring awareness to one of the fastest growing diseases affecting our society today. There are over 200,000 Ontarians living with dementia and this number is expected to increase by 15 per cent in just four years.

The new year is a time for new beginnings and its an exciting time for the Alzheimer Society of KFL&A. The Society will be offering a new program in 2017 to the KFL&A community – one that offers support and companionship to those diagnosed with dementia, and much needed respite to their caregivers and family members. Thanks to the United Way of KFL&A, the Alzheimer Society has received funding to create a year long Volunteer Companion program, a program which will recruit, train and pair enthusiastic and well trained volunteers who share similar interests with a particular client. These volunteers will spend about two hours a week engaging with that client on a one to one basis, facilitating meaningful engagement that is person centred.

In the Kingston region, there are currently over 4000 individuals with Alzheimers or some other form of dementia. The impact of the disease can be enormous, not only on the person with dementia, but on their families, their caregivers and their friends.

Vicki Poffley, Executive Director of the Alzheimer Society of KFL&A, explains that ‘the Society works very hard to offer respite to these families in the form of programs and services designed for clients and their caregivers. There are caregiver outings, drop in programs, client and caregiver support groups, recreational activities and one-to-one support opportunities. She is thrilled that this year, thanks to the United Way, the Society will add a Volunteer Companion program to the list of available supports for people in the community.

“The toll that a dementia diagnosis takes on family members and friends can be just as hard if not harder, than the toll it takes on the diagnosed individual” says Poffley. “Dementia is a 24/7 disease that often requires round the clock care. A shortage of care facilities for dementia clients means that many caregivers are keeping their family member at home longer, and get little time for themselves on any given day- to work, to attend appointments, or just for self care. Many even have to quit their jobs to care for their spouse or family member – two hours a week can make the world of difference to both the caregiver, and to the client”. In order to meet the needs of current clients, the Society is seeking volunteers who will be required to participate in a mandatory training session, provide references and a satisfactory Criminal reference check, have an in-depth interview with a Society staff person, and be able to commit to a minimum of 6 months in the program. If successful, that volunteer will then be paired with a client who shares similar interests. Activities during the 2 hour weekly visits could take place in the home or in the community, depending on the needs and interests of the client, at a time convenient to both parties. It could be as simple as a trip to the grocery store or a game of cards, a visit to a museum or a walk in the neighbourhood.

“We are seeing a new wave of volunteers these days” says Volunteer and Fundraising Coordinator Lesley Kimble, “. Many are students who have grandparents affected by dementia, some have developed an interest through their mental health-oriented courses of study, and many are just looking for a meaningful volunteer experience. Of course, we also invite people from all walks of life - retirees, younger folks who don’t work or work from their home environments, or people who just want to make a difference in the lives of someone else, to become a Volunteer Companion. The type of volunteer we are looking for can be as varied as the interests and personalities of the clients we serve.” In addition to the Volunteer Companions program, Kimble indicates they are also looking for event volunteers who are to help with a variety of fundraising events throughout the year.

Anyone who is interested in applying to the Volunteer Companion program, or for other volunteer positions, is asked to call the Alzheimer Society of KFL&A, at 613-544-3078.

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January is Alzheimers month across the country and the Alzheimer Society of KFL&A will have a new story each week during the month of January, detailing upcoming programs and services.

Next week, watch for details on the new ‘Finding Your Way Program’ . The following week will include details on the launch of the Dementia Friendly Training program available to businesses and emergency service personnel in the Kingston area.

For more information, please contact:

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