

## **Everyone Can Volunteer and Make a Difference in Our Communities** **By: Diana Primavesi, Public Education Coordinator**

Dementia doesn't discriminate – it strikes people from all backgrounds and walks of life. And when it does, people often start to give up some of their activities, such as volunteering. But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, with a bit of creative thinking and support from others, many people with dementia and their care partners can continue volunteering and make a positive contribution to their community.

**Partner Volunteering:** Who said that one person should have to do it all? Sometimes partnering with another person can allow both individuals to continue their volunteer work. "Mark" was a long-time volunteer with the local meal delivery program. He was considering giving up his route because, although he was still able to drive and had no difficulty with remembering the route or the customers, he was having increasing difficulty walking to the doors to deliver the meals. "Steve" wanted to help out but due to his memory problems he wasn't able to deliver meals on his own. By working together, they were able to serve the customers on this delivery route and became friends.

**Adapting the Volunteer Role:** Why give up on volunteering altogether, when some simple modifications might allow you to continue. "Mary" found that she was having trouble managing her role as a front desk volunteer at a busy non-profit organization. She spoke with the volunteer coordinator who asked Mary to work on an ongoing project that could be completed in a quieter part of the office. Without the constant interruptions, Mary was able to work at her own pace and continue the volunteer work that was important to her.

**Volunteering as a Healthy Brain Strategy:** Being active and social are recognized as strategies to keep our brains healthy at any age. "John" was concerned that his wife "Norma" had given up much of her social activities after being diagnosed with dementia. He asked around and found out about an opportunity which would allow them to volunteer together at their church. This gets them out of the house and has given Norma a new sense of purpose and enjoyment.

**Exploring New Roles:** Often caregivers give up many of their interests as their caregiving responsibilities increase. As things change and they introduce more care supports, they may find they have more time for themselves. This can provide an opportunity to restart familiar activities or explore new options. When his wife moved to long term care, "Ben" found himself driving past a community garden on his way to visit her. One day he stopped in to take a walk and this became a regular habit. Over time, Ben began volunteering at the garden. He made new friends and developed a "green thumb."

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CHARITABLE REGISTRATION NUMBER 12939 7980 RR0001

# Alzheimer Society

PETERBOROUGH, KAWARTHA LAKES, NORTHUMBERLAND & HALIBURTON

**Sharing your Unique Skills and Experience:** There is nothing more compelling than hearing from a person who has “been there.” When people with dementia volunteer to speak with others, share their story in the media, or participate in activities like the Alzheimer Society’s

Client Advisory Council, they help us all to better understand the experience of living with dementia and contribute to making our communities more dementia-friendly. Caregivers also have important skills and experiences to share. Often this is done informally through sharing information and supporting friends or neighbours who are becoming caregivers themselves. Many caregivers also find the time to advocate for changes to the health care system.

The benefits of volunteering are well documented and it is generally agreed that volunteering can improve an individual’s sense of self, fulfillment, and quality of life. There are so many ways to get involved. If you have the energy and time, don’t let your situation prevent you from sharing your talents. Get creative and find an opportunity that suits you. If you would like information about volunteer opportunities with the Alzheimer Society, visit us at:

[www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh](http://www.alzheimer.ca/pklnh)

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