

Alzheimer Society

WATERLOO WELLINGTON

For immediate release

October 1st, 2015 – Waterloo Wellington, ONTARIO – The Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington, in collaboration with the Guelph Police Service, announces *Safe Pathways: Supporting Dementia in the Justice System*. *Safe Pathways* is a collaborative community approach to support and guide individuals with dementia and their care partners through or away from the Guelph and Wellington County Judicial System.

Background

Currently there are 747,000 Canadians living with some form of dementia, with over 10,000 living in the Waterloo Wellington region. The most well-known symptom of dementia is memory loss, but some forms of dementia can also lead to impaired judgment, thinking or reasoning and changes in personality and behaviour that are out of character. These behaviors can lead to criminal offences that are processed through the criminal justice system. As the prevalence of dementia grows with the aging population (a 35% increase is expected by 2020 in the Waterloo Wellington region), an increase in these types of incidents can be expected.

The Alzheimer Society is encouraging local police services across the country to partner and develop strategies in relation to this community concern. In the Guelph Wellington community, the Guelph Police and Wellington OPP have partnered since 2003 with the Wellington Seniors at Risk Consultation Team, and have been discussing a number of incidents in which seniors with dementia and other mental health issues have faced legal consequences as a result of their actions. It is the goal of this committee to look at alternative measures in some of these situations and look at alternative solutions.

Jennifer Gillies, Executive Director for the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington states, “Persons with dementia, like all individuals, respond to their environment. Because of the brain changes in the person with a dementia, they may not be able to control their response to the environment, and as a result, respond in a way that is socially inappropriate or at times criminal in nature. The purpose of the working group is to develop safe pathways that support individuals with dementia and their caregivers with dignity and respect.”

Safe Pathways

Safe Pathways aims to review possible alternatives where a person with dementia will enter the criminal justice system due to behaviours that may cause harm and result in a criminal offence. To achieve this, the committee is committed to creating a three pronged approach which will assist the communities with this growing trend. First, an education and awareness initiative will be developed for police services, caregivers, health care

providers, and the community. Second, a response program for persons with dementia will be developed. Third, a process for supporting persons with dementia and their care partners already in the judicial system will be established.

The Guelph Police Service brought the idea forward to the committee level indicating that our Mission statement of the Guelph Police Service is about forming partnerships which will enhance the quality of life for those who live, work and play in our safe and diverse community. This community partnership that we have created will certainly assist in making a difference in the lives of many in our community who are impacted by dementia.

This community partnership was made possible from the Safer and Vital Communities grant through the Ministry of Safety and Correctional Services, and this two year project is set to run until March 31, 2016. Community partners for this program include family caregivers and service providers including the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington, Guelph Police Services, Seniors at Risk – Wellington, Specialized Geriatric Services, and St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph.

About the Alzheimer Society and the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington

The Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington works to improve the quality of life of persons living with dementia, their care partners, and the general public by providing support, education, and resources in the Waterloo Wellington community. People, who have questions about this project, or the behaviours of someone living with dementia, are encouraged to contact the Alzheimer Society.

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