

Minds in Motion is now in York Region

By **LISA DAY**
Communications Coordinator

For Carolyn Watt, the desire to help launch the Alzheimer Society of York Region's Minds in Motion program in East Gwillimbury is twofold: volunteering comes natural to the woman who has been helping others since she was a child and a program that helps those living with dementia and their care partners is just what her community needs.

Watt should know.

Her husband of 27 years, Tony, has young-onset dementia and now is in a long-term care home in Toronto. Before he was admitted, Watt was her husband's primary caregiver, taking him everywhere she went.

"I was being proactive in how I cared for my husband," said Carolyn in a phone interview from her Mount Albert home. "I took him to DAY programs, but I also brought him to town and introduced him to storekeepers. I made a flyer with Tony's photo on it so staff would recognize him and asked for their support.

It meant everyone knew Tony and greeted him by name, making him feel welcome

and appreciated. But Watt herself felt alone and isolated, eventually giving up most of her volunteer and social commitments to care for Tony around the clock.

Watt did attend a couple of support groups, but it became expensive. Aside from online groups, there was nothing local – Watt had to go to Newmarket, Aurora, or Markham. And there were no programs designed that they could both attend.

So when Watt heard the Minds in Motion program, which supports people living with early to mid-stage dementia and their care partners, was coming to East Gwillimbury, she knew she had to help. Watt, along with Mount Albert's Maggie McNicoll, got on board immediately to spread the word in East Gwillimbury about the program, to find participants and locations.

Doing it together

Minds in Motion is a community-based social program that provides people living with dementia and their care partners an hour of physical activity taught by a certified fitness instructor, an hour of cognitive stimulation that will help rekindle memories and an hour of social stimulation including information sharing.

Andrea Ubell, director, programs and clients, at the Alzheimer Society of York Region (AS York) said Minds in Motion "provides people with the opportunity to engage with others who are similar diagnosed or in similar situations. It's also great for the caregivers. It reduces isolation and builds support."



Minds in Motion takes place in six provinces and at 17 Ontario societies. **Thanks to an Ontario Trillium Foundation** grant, AS York is now hosting the program until September at various locations in East Gwillimbury and the Town of Georgina.

Circle of support

According to findings from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario's Minds in Motion pilot project, which ran from 2014 to 2016, the program improves balance in those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias, increases alertness and increases confidence. It also builds a circle of support for the caregiver.

There are three times for the Minds in Motion program with more dates to be announced.

- March 19 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Mount Albert Legion.
- April 3 from 1 to 4 p.m. in the Ice Palace in Keswick.
- May 9 from 1 to 4 p.m. at Temperance Hall, Sharon.

It costs \$20 per person for each eight-week session. AS York is looking for participants as well as volunteers to help with the program.

Contact Jaime Cruz, Minds in Motion Coordinator, at jcruz@alzheimer-york.com or call 905-726-3477, ext. 234 to register or for details.

