

Alzheimer Society of York Region and McMichael Canadian Art Collection are bringing art to those living with Alzheimers and other dementias

Six-week project sees older adult volunteers helping DAY Centre participants create works of art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AURORA, ON (May 16, 2018) – For the last four weeks there has been laughter and art created at the Aurora, Thornhill and Stouffville DAY programs as clients living with Alzheimers and other dementias participate in the Artwell Project.

Funded through the federal government’s New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP), the partnership between Alzheimer Society of York Region (AS York) and McMichael Canadian Art Collection sees older adults volunteers, with the help from McMichael staff, lead clients through creating a piece of art.

Aurora’s Robynn Nishio, who has an art background, says she has enjoyed her volunteer experience, particularly interacting with clients and seeing the joy on their face when they complete a project.

“The art projects accommodate the many levels of interest, talent, attention span and focus. So participants can do as little or as much as they want or can and all end up as art pieces. The approach allows participants to feel accomplished no matter what their end product is. And they all look really good. ...The best part is the surprise on their faces on seeing their completed art.”

Artwell runs Tuesdays in Thornhill; Wednesdays in Stouffville and Thursday in Aurora. The program ends the last week of May and will run for another six weeks in the fall.

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About the Alzheimer Society York Region (AS York)

The Alzheimer Society of York Region has been a leader in actively supporting individuals and families coping with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias since 1985. Our history of delivering quality, dementia-specific day program services, an enriched social work program and education opportunities is well respected.

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Q&A with volunteer Robynn Nishio:

How did you find out about this volunteer opportunity?

- Neighbourhood Network email

Why did you decide to volunteer?

- To learn more about Dementia and Alzheimer, since my stepmother had it and my father is showing signs of dementia.

Do you have a background in art? If yes, what is it?

- Haliburton School of the Arts credits

- Fashion Design

How are you liking the volunteer opportunity so far? What is the best part about it?

- I look forward to volunteering each week. The best part is the surprise on their faces on seeing their completed art

What do you think about the art being created?

- The art projects accommodate the many levels of interest, talent, attention span and focus. So participants can do as little or as much as they want or can and all end up as art pieces. The approach allows participants to feel accomplished no matter what their end product is. And they all look really good.

Why do you think this opportunity is important for those living with Alzheimers?

I see several eager to start, some feel comfortable enough to complete one piece of art, go listen to music, then return for more art. Engaging in art also has encouraged conversation with the volunteers and with each other. It's a happy art table; a shared activity.

Would you like to see this program expanded? Why or why not?

The Artwell program seems to have a therapeutic effect on the participants and maybe even for the volunteers. I would support expanding the program to more days per week and to more of those living with Alzheimers. However, not all the participants seemed interested in art and I suggest retaining the intimate atmosphere of a shared table of r10.

Anything else you would like to say?

- I was impressed with the staff from McMichael's. They taught us how to guide the participants to do their art piece with an emphasis on conversation and any sort of creative process, not the final art piece.

- I would appreciate some feedback at the end of this series to know if the families and staff at the Day Program noticed a difference in the participants.

Hope this helps, Lisa

Robynn

Robynn Nishio