

A Client Story

The Sharing Project

Have you ever wondered how you are going to share your life legacy? Is documenting the highlights of your life on your "Bucket List"? Many of us think about making a written record



of some sort, but never actually move the intention into reality. Yet participating in this process is a true gift! Hospice Niagara's new initiative, the Sharing Project, does just this.

With the Sharing Project, Hospice Niagara now has specially trained volunteers available to help Hospice Community Clients and Residents create a written document of their life legacy. Since September, we have helped nine people reflect on their lives during a 30 to 60 minute in depth interview. That interview is then transcribed and edited into a story-like document. Upon completing the first draft, an opportunity for further editing and the addition of more thoughts or details are offered to our clients.

Some people have chosen to complete the project at this point. One of our clients requested that four copies of his story be simply bound so he could present it to his children as a unique and priceless Christmas present.

Other people have chosen to take their story one step further, having our team compile their legacy along with scanned photographs into a bound, soft-covered, professionally printed book. One of our Day Hospice clients who worked with us to complete her 24-page book states, "This whole experience has been very positive. My book turned out better than I had hoped. I now have orders for 20 more copies! Once my friends saw the book, they told me that my story is an inspiration to them and they wished to purchase a copy!"

One volunteer recalled visiting with a client who, when the volunteer initially entered her room, was curled up in bed in a fetal position. After about an hour of participating in the Sharing Project, the client had eaten a little, was propped up in bed, and thanked the

volunteer for her time. The volunteer observed after the interview that the process seemed to provide this woman with a new perspective, stating, "The reflections she has shared with me may have helped her view her life differently, and see more clearly the difference her life has made. What a joy to listen to her and see her face light up!"

The Guiding Beliefs of the Sharing Project are:

- Every person's story matters.
- In the telling of the story there is healing and growth.
- Leaving a recorded legacy has value.
- Families are comforted by the stories of their loved one long after the person has died.

The Sharing Project is rooted in the principles of Dignity Therapy Research conducted by Dr. Harvey Chochinov and his team in Winnipeg. Dignity Therapy is "a recounting of thoughts, ideas and events that are particularly relevant and meaningful for patients to recount and pass along to others. For most patients, it is an opportunity to share the moments that shaped their lives... It also helps the patient get in touch with the accomplishments and experiences that have made them unique and valued human beings". (Source: www.dignityincare.ca)

In his book entitled "Dignity Therapy: Final Words for Final Days" (2012), Dr. Chochinov states:

"Prior to Dignity Therapy, it would have struck me as entirely unfathomable that a brief psychotherapeutic intervention might enhance a patient's sense of meaning, purpose, and dignity, offer comfort to the bereft, and have the potential for multigenerational impact... Our research (has shown) Dignity Therapy capable of accomplishing those very things." (page 187).

Our experience with the Sharing Project is confirming the findings of the Dignity Therapy research. The whole process is proving to be one of life-giving. An additional level of fruitfulness is the effect on the interviewer. One Sharing Project Volunteer stated "I feel privileged to be welcomed into another person's life so deeply and immediately. What an honour to listen to the moments that have meant the most to them. Then, to be able to help them turn their thoughts and memories into a story that will be treasured for years to come... it's so humbling for me!" What a precious gift given from the client to the "helper" as we bear witness to another's journey.

"Let's remind one another that what brings us true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness."

~ **Henri Nouwen**