

Day program provides bilingual space for hope

Steve Henschel

Niagara This Week - Welland | Oct 26, 2016

WELLAND — Gord Duguay is dying.

The 75-year-old Welland man is a palliative chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patient. He knows he's dying but talking to him about it at a Centre de Sante Communautaire on East Main Street you wouldn't know it, his attitude is remarkably positive. For four months Duguay has been attending Hospice Niagara's three-year-old Day Hospice program in South Niagara that recently, after three months at Knox Presbyterian Church, moved to the French language centre, allowing for the program to be delivered in both French and English.

Currently the program runs every other week on Thursdays, inviting palliative care patients with life-limiting illness, for a day of social activity, entertainment and food as a respite for both them and their caregivers.

Duguay has been participating for four months, he said the program has given him a chance for a social life in his final days.

"It's therapeutic talking to people, laughter is important," said Duguay, who went all out last Christmas thinking it was his last. He took 25 family members out bowling with a buffet lunch at a rented hall. Now that another Christmas is looming he has similar plans.

"My motto is yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery and today is a gift," said Duguay, who hopes to see the program to expand to once a week.

He admitted coming to grips with his own approaching death was a challenge.

"It's like you got a punch in the head," said Duguay, adding, "first you have to absorb it, then you start your journey."

That journey led him to the Day Hospice program where he found a way to share in the experience of life's final chapter.

"You need to share that," said Duguay, who admits he does have some regrets, most notably taking up smoking to "look cool" at 17.

"Being cool is why I'm a palliative care patient," he said.

Day Hospice coordinator Barb Nolan said the move to Centre de Sante has been a boon to the program, especially in light of the addition of Francophone service. The new location also allows for more space for complimentary therapies.

She explained the dozen or so individuals who participate in the program are all referred through Hospice Niagara as palliative care patients. Nolan said the simple day of social activities brings a semblance of normalcy for many of the patients. She recalled one recent newcomer to the program sending her a message of thanks.

"She came, she loved it, it helped her feel human again," said Nolan. In total 7,500 individuals in South Niagara have accessed Hospice Niagara programs.

"It's all about compassion but it's also really about hope," said Centre de Sante executive director Marcel Castonguay, explaining the partnership has allowed the centre to build upon the expertise of its own doctors and staff.

"We're finally learning to open the dialogue with individuals and families," he said.

The program doesn't just deliver rewards to participants either. Volunteer David Tyminski has been with the program since 2013.

"It's about what I get back, it's the most incredible positive energy," he said, adding, "you get back so much more than you give."

He was quick to explain volunteering with the program has given him a whole new perspective on life.

"You realize death is not a bad thing, it's a sad thing," he said, adding, "you lose some of the fear."



Patient Gord Duguay laughs with volunteer David Tyminski at the recent celebration of a partnership between Hospice Niagara's Day Hospice Program and Centre de Sante Communautaire.

Steve Henschel is a reporter and award-winning photographer covering the communities of Welland, Pelham, Port Colborne and Wainfleet for Niagara This Week in addition to contributing to Niagara Life magazine. He has a passion for telling the stories of those living in south Niagara and hopes to one day take life seriously. Follow him on [Twitter](#) .