

Volunteers are vital to the Grace

By Stefani Venere

Volunteers are an essential part of the care team at the Toronto Grace Health Centre by supporting the quality of life for patients and their families. They play an important role in the patient-centred care for patients and family members in the Complex Continuing Care, Palliative Care and Slow-Paced Rehabilitation programs. They also contribute to Dietetic Services, Patient Resource Centre, Pharmacy, Health Records, Volunteer Resources, Spiritual Care and Pet Therapy.

There are volunteers at the Grace that have been assisting patients for almost 20 years and others that have just started their work. "As different as all of our volunteers are, the common factor is their dedication to patient care. No matter what their role they are making a great contribution," says Sara Houston, Administrative Assistant, Toronto Grace Health Centre.

Volunteers in Complex Continuing Care can be seen assisting at mealtimes, spending one-on-one time with patients, assisting with therapy programs and general clerical duties. The volunteers' commitment means patients receive an even greater amount of personal attention. "Volunteers are very valued here at the Grace", says John McGoff, Grace Volunteer and Professor of Criminology at Centennial College. "I feel like we are truly a part of the team. We are here to help them as much as they help others".

The hard work and dedication of volunteers like John, reflects and enhances the core values of Toronto Grace. For some patients the Grace becomes their new home. Respecting this, volunteer programs ensure that the whole person is being addressed, that is the physical, mental, spiritual,

emotional and social needs. Examples of Grace volunteer driven programs that reflect this philosophy are, the Arts at the Grace and the Pet Therapy Program.

Each week you will find pet therapy teams visiting patients at Toronto Grace. Animals possess the wonderful ability to have a calming affect and provide an opportunity for social interaction and a non-verbal connection for patients who may have difficulty communicating. The pure joy seen in the faces of the patients when they are petting a therapy dog, illustrates the wonderful contribution these volunteers make at the Grace.

The Arts at the Grace initiative develops and organizes creative and artistic programs to enhance both the physical environment and the lives of patients and their families. There are a variety of projects included in this initiative such as art shows, gardening and a concert series.

The gardening program has transformed a small area beside the health centre parking lot and the area along Church Street into a beautiful and welcoming place for patients, visitors and staff. Christel Manraj is the lead volunteer responsible for developing and maintaining the Grace gardens. The gardens create an environment that allows patients, families, visitors and staff to feel more welcomed and comfortable at the Grace.

The Toronto Grace Concert Series is a collection of performances for patients, staff and visitors offered throughout the year. Earlier this year, the Grace was delighted with a musical performance by Brian Roman. The cafeteria was filled with excited patients, staff and families eager to hear his renditions of songs like Elvis' 'Can't Help Falling in Love' and Tom Jones' 'Delilah.' His

powerful voice filled the second floor, and had patients tapping their feet and smiling when the energetic singer would go right up to them and flash a big smile. He even sang to a patient who was celebrating a birthday. For some patients, it is difficult to attend concerts and enjoy live music. Programs and volunteers like Brian are critical to enhancing their quality of life. "It is the little extras that matter the most," explains John. "Having these volunteer programs benefits everyone; patients, staff, families and even the volunteers themselves."

"Over the course of a year and half when I worked directly with volunteers, I often found myself wondering what we would do without their help, and I have to say that I always came to the same conclusion. To quote Erma Bombeck, 'Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring,



Toronto Grace has been providing pet therapy since 2002 as a non-verbal connection for patients.

patience and just plain love for one another.' I think the volunteers at the Grace truly embody this sentiment," says Sara Houston.

For more information contact Michael Fliess, Director of

Volunteer Resources
416.925.2251 ext. 256.

Stefani Venere is the Special Events and Public Relations Coordinator at Toronto Grace Health Centre.



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