

Collaboration Brings Programs into Community

Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative

When Wendy Evans, Geriatric Assessment Nurse in Innisfail, first saw Ernest Marr in early 2018, the 75-year-old had a two-year history of changes to his memory and thinking.

“This was an active man who wrote the newsletter for his church and was principal of a school, who now had difficulty completing complex tasks, such as filling out forms and planning,” Wendy recalls.

She assessed Ernest for dementia and the doctor’s diagnosis confirmed it. Wendy referred him and his wife Nyna to the Alzheimer’s Society First Link®, where they could find information and support.

Community partnerships make supports possible

As a result of the collaborative work being done to make Innisfail a Dementia Friendly Community, Ernest and Nyna have many of the supports they need right in town.

“Innisfail is doing a tremendous job reaching out to support seniors,” Nyna says. “When Ernest goes to dementia programs, he knows people. It’s important for him to be able to recognize them and remember their names. And we often walk to these sessions.”

Ernest attends the local Art from the Heart Program, designed for people who are living with early stage dementia and their care partners. It is a partnership between Family Community Support Services (FCSS) Innisfail, the Innisfail Public Library and the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network (PCN). Alberta Health Services (AHS) supplies a recreational therapist who designs the volunteer led sessions.

“We lobbied to get the recreational therapist to help us develop programs in the community,” Wendy says. “Typically, there’s no such thing in rural Alberta.” Since she arrived eight months ago, the recreational therapist has developed the Falls Prevention Program for people living with dementia, which Ernest attends. Centerpoint Church provides space and a volunteer to the program.

While Ernest is in the Falls group, Nyna is in the same building at the Dementia Support Group, an Alberta Health Services and Alzheimer’s Society partnership.

“It’s the best thing I’ve ever done,” she says. “You actually hear from other people who are going through what you are. We swap contacts information; and we vent.”



Collaboration Brings Programs into Community • 2

Nyna also took COMPASS for the Caregiver, a program offered by Caregivers Alberta, which teaches people how to cope with the challenges of caregiving. In partnership with the PCN, the Innisfail Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) sent two people to COMPASS Facilitator Training, then presented the eight-week program twice in 2019.

Local programs benefit community

“In 2018, when we were beginning our dementia programs with Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative (PHC IGSI) none of the programs Ernest and Nyna have accessed existed,” Wendy says. “They would have had to go to Red Deer.”

PHC IGSI is a provincial initiative that supports local primary health care teams in advancing priorities aimed at improving supports for those living in their community with cognitive impairment or dementia. In Innisfail these local programs are important due to the unique demographics – of the approximately 8,000 residents, 39 percent are over 55 years old, compared to the provincial average of 26 percent.

“I am very grateful for our community partners. They’ve made these programs possible,” Wendy says.

The work being done with PHC IGSI and community partners is placing Innisfail at the forefront of creating a Dementia Friendly Community. This means individuals like Ernest and Myna can continue to live in their home with the needed supports within their community.

Community Partners

- Wolf Creek PCN
- FCSS Innisfail
- Alzheimer’s Society
- Alberta Health Services
- Centerpoint Church
- Innisfail Public Library
- COMPASS for Caregivers