



This article is written by Barry Bokhaut. Barry is a member of Ottawa Unit Council and a Canadian Cancer Society volunteer who has been providing peer support assistance for the past seven years. Peer support is one of the many services provided by Society to help those who are living with cancer. Newly diagnosed people, who request it, are matched with a trained volunteer who has a similar cancer experience. They speak, one-on-one, usually by telephone.

“I’m sorry to tell you that you have cancer.” These are perhaps the most frightening words that you will ever hear from your doctor. “I’m calling from Peer Support. How can I help you?” These are perhaps the most comforting words a cancer patient will hear.

Ten years ago, I was diagnosed with a relatively rare type of cancer. The long term survival rate was dismal. I feared that I would not survive; that the cancer, or the treatments, would do me in. Then I received a call from Gordon, a peer support volunteer. Knowing that he had survived set my mind at ease, and gave me the confidence I needed. After my treatment and recovery I felt that peer support was what I wanted to do, to repay Gordon's kindness.

I make an indelible difference in the lives of the people I call. In some cases, I will speak to someone a few times and then check back with them several months later. Although they may not remember my name, I have never had anyone who has not remembered my calls. They will discuss things that I have said to them, and tell me that my words have given them courage and confidence. They have said that knowing that someone had gone through their cancer, had survived, and was thriving, had given them the strength they needed, and the optimism to believe that they too would survive.

Peer support calls are not always pleasant and upbeat. Many discussions are brutal; we talk about loss of abilities, of pain and discomfort, of things that will never get better. Yet speaking about these things provides comfort, even to men who don't usually talk about their feelings or weakness. With a peer support volunteer they don't have to keep up their pretext of confidence or strength adopted in order not to worry their family.

Medical staff can provide information about what they will face, what their future will hold. But they often feel that it is more honest and accurate when it comes from someone who, like them, has been on the pointy end of the scalpel.

Often, it's the little things. They will mention that they have trouble eating certain foods or have unexplained discomfort. Letting them know that such experiences are common and normal, and are symptoms that I too have encountered, and overcome, provides great reassurance.

One of my most humbling experiences was when I received a call from the wife of a patient I had spoken to a number of months earlier. The calls I made had been routine, we talked about the concerns that he had about the treatment he was undergoing. I wondered if I had really been of help. She explained that her husband had passed away, and he had asked her to call and thank me for my help. I gave my condolences, and asked about the funeral. She gave a little gasp and said “My dear, he just passed away this morning; I haven't had time to even think about the arrangements.”

It dawned on me. I was a stranger, a voice over the telephone. Yet I was one of the first people she turned to at her time of loss. I could have no stronger proof that I had truly made a difference in the lives of these people.

Like many with cancer, I often ask “why me?”: having seen the impact of my peer support activities I know that my misfortune has had meaning, as it allows me to bring comfort to others.

If you or someone you know would like assistance from Peer Support, please refer to our [website](#) or call 1 800 263-6750. Volunteers like Barry and Fran Seguin, another member of Ottawa Unit Council, are available to help.

Volunteers Making a Difference

Check out our updated volunteer webpage.

You can contact Ottawa Unit Council by sending an e-mail to ccsottawaunitcouncil@gmail.com or by leaving a message with the receptionist at the Ottawa Unit office at 613-723-1744 ext. 3610.



Volunteer Appreciation Night

On May 6th 2010 over 100 volunteers, from each volunteer area, attended the Canadian Cancer Society's Volunteer Appreciation Event at Centrepont Theatre. The staff put on a great event that celebrated the unbelievable accomplishments of CCS volunteers in the Ottawa area. Over the last year Ottawa volunteers have:

- Raised over \$3.3 million dollars through *Relay For Life*, the door-to-door canvass, *Daffodil Days*, community partners, tributes and corporate donations
- Provided over 7,000 rides to 509 Ottawans undergoing cancer treatment
- Supported approximately 250 people who wanted to talk to someone who knows from personal experience what it's like to have cancer.
- Volunteered over 9,000 hours to support people undergoing treatment in the Ottawa cancer centres, as well as creating a positive experience for those staying at the Maurice Grimes Lodge
- Over the last 5 years, the Society has invested more than \$4 million in cancer research in Ottawa including 22 Society-funded clinical trials available to Ottawa area cancer patients

The event highlight was the presentation of a number of region awards presented to a few incredible volunteers in Ottawa:



Celebrating Youth Award - Presented to Noah Zeibdawi. This award is to recognize a young volunteer who has made a considerable contribution to the Canadian Cancer Society, serving as a leader and role model to other young people within their schools, communities and the Society through their volunteer.



Celebrating Dedication Award - Presented to Lynne Peterman. This award is to recognize the outstanding efforts of a Society volunteer whose dedication is not only exceptional, but is often the person who quietly but diligently works "behind the scenes".



Celebrating Teamwork Award - Presented to the Daffodil Day Drivers (Janet Fader, Mike Roach, Bert Beechey, Larry Jones, Nancy Murdoch, Pat Kully and Bob Ferguson). This award is to recognize a group of people who work together as a team to achieve great things.



Award of Achievement in Community Services - Presented to Fran Seguin. The award is to recognize excellence in volunteer performance in Community Services in Ontario East Region.



Award of Courage - Presented to Pete Thompson. This special award is to recognize the tremendous courage of a Society volunteer in Ontario East Region who has had a cancer experience, is currently living with cancer or is a cancer survivor; has faced seemingly insurmountable challenges and persevered with strength, determination and a greater compassion for others.



In addition to these prestigious awards, we recognized a volunteer with over 50 years of service: **Stanley Sweetenham**. Stanley started volunteering for the Society in 1961 and has been going strong ever since.

Thank you to Maria, Helen, Ashley, Beth, Lindsay, Christina, Sharyn, Gail, Laura, Candice, Donna, Kilda, Michelle, Anita and Mary for putting on such a great event.



Dear Canadian Cancer Society Volunteer:

Greetings during National Volunteer Week

Canada's National Volunteer Week from April 14 – 18, 2010. As President of the Ottawa Unit Council of the Canadian Cancer Society, I would like to thank you again for volunteering for the Canadian Cancer Society.

While our volunteers are busy year-round in pursuing the Canadian Cancer Society's mission of eradicating cancer and enhancing the quality of life of people living with cancer, those who assist with *Relay For Life*, take part in the residential canvass, and work on the daffodil campaign are particularly busy at this time of year. With your help, the Society makes the *most* impact, *with* Canadians, *against* cancer, *for* life.

Please join me, the Unit Council members and the Ottawa Unit staff for desserts and some "Sweet Shakespeare Love" with Ottawa's own Company of Fools at the 2010 Canadian Cancer Society Volunteer Appreciation Event - Old Council Chambers, Ben Franklin Place on Thursday, May 6, 2010 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Individual invitations have been sent to you by the staff. [RSVP to (613) 723-1744 ext. 3610] I look forward seeing you there.

Spread the Word

The Society offers reliable and thorough information on all types of cancer, including prevention, causes, symptoms, treatments, and advice for living with cancer. Having access to such information can significantly reduce the stress that cancer patients and their loved ones feel after diagnosis or while awaiting a possible diagnosis. The Society's information services are available:

- on the [website](#)
- by e-mail to info@cis.cancer.ca,
- in publications that the local office will send out on request (please call Helen Ruddock at 613-723-1744, Ext. 3612 and send an e-mail to ottawa@ontario.cancer.ca) or
- on a more detailed, personalized and confidential basis by telephone at 1 888 939-3333, Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The web-site also helps patients and their loved ones to find [services and programs](#) offered by the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations in Ottawa and other communities across the country.

I'd like to encourage each of you to reach out to people that you know who are affected by cancer to ensure that they are aware of this tremendous information resource.

You can also ensure that your family doctor is aware of the Society's information services and can refer newly diagnosed cancer patients or those awaiting a diagnosis to these services. It is precisely in these early stages of cancer treatment that access to reliable information is needed most.

Here is what you can do:

- Leave a copy of this e-mail with your doctor
- Ask the doctor, nurse or receptionist to keep a stock of "Facing Cancer" cards supplied by the CCS in their office
- Let your doctor know that pamphlets on specific cancers can be found on the Society's web-site or obtained in printed copies by phoning the local office

Ottawa Unit Council

The Ottawa Unit Council is a group of local volunteers whose role is to act as ambassadors for the Canadian Cancer Society and to serve as the senior volunteer advisory group to unit staff. As part of our duties, we represent the interests of all volunteers with the unit staff. The current members of Council are:

- Stephen Whitehead – President
- Brendan Marsden – Past President
- Sue Airey
- Tanya Beimers
- Barry Bokhaut
- Dennis Campbell
- Fran Seguin
- Candyce Sun
- Joe Timmins
- Bob Corson

If you have any concerns with your experience as a volunteer or suggestions for improving your volunteer experience, please let any member of Unit Council know by sending an e-mail to ccsottawaunitcouncil@gmail.com or by leaving a message with the receptionist at the Ottawa Unit office at 613-723-1744 ext. 3610. We will respond to you promptly.

Thank You

Stephen Whitehead



December 2009

Dear Canadian Cancer Society Volunteer:

The United Nations recognizes December 5 of each year as International Volunteer Day. It is my pleasure as the President of the Ottawa Unit Council of the Canadian Cancer Society to send you this brief note on International Volunteer Day 2009 to acknowledge, celebrate and thank you for your dedication and valuable contributions as a volunteer for the Society in fighting back against cancer in the Ottawa area.

The Canadian Cancer Society's mission is "the eradication of cancer and the enhancement of the quality of life of people living with cancer". We address that mission as a national organization that delivers its services locally through community volunteers like you. We are the largest charitable funder of cancer research in Canada and we support cancer-focused medical centres across the country. We are the recognized leader in Canada in cancer prevention, advocacy, research funding, information services and support to patients and caregivers, regardless of the type of cancer.

Here are a few of things that we do locally with your help and the help of our 3,800 other local volunteers:

Fundraising with the help of local volunteers - \$3.3 million in the Ottawa area last year.

Research - \$3.6 million in grants to local cancer researchers over the next several years.

Medical Centres - \$1 million to the Maurice Grimes Lodge on the Civic Campus, \$1 million to the cancer assessment centre on the General Campus, and \$500,000 to the Ottawa Hospital's 20/20 campaign to expand the cancer centre.

Support - 155 volunteer drivers drove 130,000 km last year taking patients to and from their treatments on 7,000 trips; peer support to almost 300 local patients and caregivers; financial support to pediatric cancer patients' families and to patients travelling to other treatment centres; free accommodation for out-of-town patients undergoing treatment in Ottawa; cancer clinic support services; cancer information and prevention materials and presentations.

Whether you volunteer to fundraise, assist with Relay For Life, take part in the residential canvass, work on the daffodil campaign, provide peer support to patients and caregivers, provide support as a driver, help out in the clinic or lodge, or volunteer for the Society in other ways, you are part of the local community of volunteers that allows the Canadian Cancer Society to address its mission. You are the Canadian Cancer Society.

Each year the Canadian Cancer Society issues awards on a national, provincial, regional and local basis to recognize exceptional volunteers. If you believe that a volunteer is worthy of such recognition, please call Maria Redpath at the Ottawa Unit office at 613-723-1744 Ext. 3622 as soon as possible and in any

event by December 11, 2009. Maria will advise on the type of award that might be appropriate for the volunteer and assist you with the nomination process.

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I will be in touch with you periodically to let you know more about what the Society is doing locally and how you are helping us in our mission. In the meantime, thank you so much for volunteering and best wishes for the holiday season.

Stephen Whitehead

Help make cancer history
Visit www.fightback.ca