

# Drumheller Pioneers Rural Dementia Care in the Community

Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative

In 2016, the Big Country (Primary Care Network) PCN and the community of Drumheller started participating in the Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative (PHC IGSI) to increase capacity across primary health care teams to provide ongoing care and support for those living in the community with cognitive impairment, or a diagnosis of dementia.

As a result of this initiative and the relationships built locally because of their participation, Drumheller conducted a 10-week pilot project, the first rural day program for people living with dementia. This is vital for the community with a large population of seniors. In 2016 Drumheller had a population of 6,439 people. About 18 percent were 65 years old or older, and just under three percent of those were 85 years of age or older.

“Because of the support and encouragement from PHC IGSI, we had the backing and the knowledge to move our work forward,” says Amanda Panisiak, PCN lead. She sought local partners from health, social and community organizations who supported seniors and created a community coalition with them to establish priorities to which they collectively work towards.

## **Program designed for community needs**

Among the services the coalition piloted is the Community Dementia Day Program, which was recently completed and evaluated, with glowing marks.

Information captured in a community survey conducted before the program was designed, offered the group insight that potential participants wanted most of all to make new friends, so the programing focused on socializing.

“The feedback we received before the program was that our individuals with dementia were sleeping in their chairs all day,” Amanda explains. “We encouraged them to come out and have fun. I wish we could have calculated the amount of laughter and smiles we shared.”

The program, which eight participants, four who have a family caregiver, participated in, included coffee, conversation, brain games and physical movement. At the end of the sessions, families took home toolkits with suggested activities. The idea was to have them continue to promote these activities in the home every day. Additionally, over the 10 weeks, caregivers of those participating received the equivalent of 80 hours of respite from their caregiving role.



## **Community programs foster independence**

Among the participants who benefited was 72-year-old Bev\*, a lifelong learner who loves needlework. She has been living with dementia for five years. Her husband is her caregiver. Amanda met Bev at the clinic and realized she had lost her ability to drive, and felt under confident using the local Handibus, so was completely reliant on her husband, who works full time.

“Bev was feeling bereft at the loss of her independence,” Amanda says. As a result of the program, Bev has had a huge improvement in her quality of life, and has gained confidence to take the Handibus independently.

“She’s now able to engage in her community,” Amanda says. “We also discovered that Bev had difficulty participating because she couldn’t hear well. We were able to help her by getting her a hearing aid.”

Bev now volunteers with the Salvation Army Christmas Kettle campaign, and participates in other community programs. She also met new friends.

“I didn’t realize I was becoming a hermit and loner at home before coming to the program,” she says.

\*Not her real name.

## **Community Partners**

- Town of Drumheller
- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)
- Drumheller and District Seniors Foundation,
- Big Country PCN