Volunteers of the Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre

“OUR STORIES”
During the last three years of volunteering, one thing that has really touched me is how many people are confined to the hospital over the Christmas season. Many lucky patients have family come to visit, but sadly, and for various reasons, many do not have visitors and they are alone during this special time of year.

Two years ago, I decided that I could make a difference to those people. After saving enough money, I purchased ‘stuffsies’ for every patient on the Stroke Unit, and together with my mom, we planned an evening of playing Christmas carols on our violins and handing out the stuffies. It was incredible as we went room to room playing our violins and watching patients sing along to their favorite Christmas carols. I will never forget the tears in their eyes, wondering if they had not heard these carols for a long time, or if they had conjured up special memories of past holiday seasons with their families. Afterwards, I gave each of them a stuffie. Many patients hugged and thanked me. They said we made their day very special. Family members also thanked us, and one shared with us that it turned a bad day into one of joy!

Because giving stuffies brought such joy to the patients and satisfaction to me, this past Christmas, with the help of my brother, Luke, who also started volunteering this past year, and my volunteer partner, Taylor, we purchased stuffies (and candy canes) once again for the patients on the Stroke Unit and made a special delivery to them at Christmas. It was fun to share the joy of giving with my brother and my volunteer partner. Armed with reindeer antlers, bells, and Santa hats on our heads and big smiles on our faces, we made our way from room to room delivering Christmas cheer once again. The response from the patients and their families was one of surprise and pure happiness! Until that moment, we did not realize how a small gesture like this could make such a difference in the life of a patient in the hospital. We truly believe that for a moment that day, we were able to distract them from their illnesses with our act of kindness! Because of this, we intend to continue with this act of giving by making the stuffy delivery an annual event at the Red Deer Hospital!

Andrew Panteluk
Renal Dialysis
3 Years Volunteer Service
My time spent with Serena and Jeffrey was truly heart warming. I was blessed to have the opportunity to cuddle with Serena’s newborn son, Jeffrey, while Serena was learning to walk again. I was often amazed with this bright-eyed little man and how quickly he captured the hearts of so many around him. We’d often walk circles around the unit and visit. Jeffrey would bring a smile to the faces of so many patients and staff during our interactions. Some of my favorite moments were spent rocking him and having cuddles during his feeding time. When his innocent little eyes would look up at me, I could feel my heart melt. Being able to provide a comfortable, safe place for him so Serena could focus on healing was a tremendous privilege.

Serena was always so grateful to see me each time I arrived. She may not have known it, but she helped me feel needed in a way that really mattered. I felt hugely honored that she trusted me with her precious newborn baby boy, and watching Serena progress in her healing was incredibly inspiring for me! I watched Serena push through a very scary time in her life with a great deal of strength, determination and courage. Her tremendous love for her family was undeniable and she was so committed to doing everything in her power to recover.

I feel proud and very fortunate that I was asked to be a part of Serena and Jeffrey’s journey. It is so wonderful to know that they are healthy, happy and reconnected as a family. There really isn’t a way to measure the rewards my heart receives as a Volunteer Pediatric Caring Cuddler. I get far more back than I can ever give!

Carrie Giffen
Pediatric Caring Cuddler
15 Years Volunteer Service
Who knew that more than a decade ago, the simple act of volunteering to hold a baby in need would develop into a friendship that would span the years?

In 2001, I started as a Volunteer Pediatric Caring Cuddler at the Red Deer Hospital. The first little person I got to spend time with was “Little Eric”. He was in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and I would go over after work to spend some time cuddling and singing to him. On the second day, I met a young mom, Lucy, who was there with her newborn baby, Chas. I found out that Chas had been born in Calgary and was not ready to go home to Canmore yet, so mom and baby were transferred to Red Deer. I got the opportunity to spend time with Lucy and Chas when I would come in to spend time with Eric, and we developed an instant friendship. When Eric was ready to go home, I continued my visits with Lucy and Chas. I remember walking in some days and Lucy would start to cry, and when I asked her what had happened, she told me that Chas had failed his car seat test yet again. Then the day came that he did pass his test, and now we cried because they were going home.

Lucy and I continued to stay in touch following their return to Canmore. Lucy invited me to come to Chas’ first birthday, and I happily drove to Canmore on a snowy day in February 2002 to celebrate with them. We took lots of pictures and valued our time together. In September, Lucy sent me a card and said they were moving to England.

Over the years, I had often wondered about where they were and how their life was going. In the beginning of December 2012, I was going through some old boxes and I found an envelope with pictures of Lucy, Chas and myself, and other things that Lucy had sent me all those years ago. As I went through these treasures, I again wondered where they were. After much looking and many phone calls, I discovered that they were now living in Calgary. I reunited with Lucy and her family just days before Christmas. We talked for hours and exchanged phone numbers. Not only was I able to reconnect with a friend, but with the little boy that I had cuddled with during the first days of his life. On the Saturday after Christmas, I got up early and drove to Calgary on a snowy cold day to have breakfast with Lucy and her family. I arrived with great excitement to see them again. I walked up to the house and rang the bell, and this young freckle-faced boy met me at the door and greeted me with a big hug - it was Chas, now almost 12 years old!

It is truly amazing when something as seemingly simple as cuddling can have a lasting impact on the life of one child, one family, and me as a volunteer!
When I was young, my mother, who was a nurse in pediatrics, would take me on tours of her unit and introduce me to her colleagues. It was probably around this time that I thought I would be interested in working in the health field. My father encouraged me to explore this further and to look into volunteering at the Red Deer Hospital.

In high school, along with some friends, we took volunteer shifts in the evenings and weekends. The coordinators at the volunteer office were fantastic in letting me explore the areas I was interested in, and the hospital staff made the environment stimulating and meaningful. I particularly enjoyed pediatrics, helping take care of the children. On the adult side, where I would help with meal trays and water jugs, I remember hearing stories from the elderly patients about their younger years. On the maternity wards, it was fun getting to meet the excited new parents and their newborn babies.

It only took 13 years after I graduated from high school before I came back to Red Deer to work as a Nephrologist. I didn’t think I would be coming back to my hometown, but an opportunity came up that I couldn’t refuse and now I find myself working in the same hospital where I was born! It was exciting to catch up with a few of the people I’d met here before. There were some nurses on the Pediatric Unit who remembered me well from working with my mom. Some of the doctors were happy to have a “Red Deer boy” come back to the city, and who would have thought the cashier at the café would remember me always ordering “chicken strips with fries” during my volunteer shift in the evenings? It was definitely exciting to see Darci still at the volunteer office as well, and to hear of how big the youth volunteer program has grown over the years.

I have since had the opportunity to meet a few of the current volunteers at the Red Deer Hospital. Some of them are also interested in pursuing a career in the health field, and I see a bit of myself in them when I started this journey all those years ago. The volunteer experience definitely encouraged me in my pursuit of becoming a doctor, and it’s nice to be back working in the hospital where I first started.

Edward Lee
Former Youth Volunteer
2 Years Volunteer Service
Being a teacher in an elementary school and a mom to a vibrant young daughter, I have the opportunity to spend a lot of time with children. I absolutely enjoy the inventiveness, creativity, and imagination children possess. Before finding a full-time teaching position, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper and decided to volunteer as a Pediatric Kindergarten Tour Facilitator at the Red Deer Regional Hospital. I thought with my teaching background and experience as a mom, I would benefit from, and be a benefit to, others in this capacity. The tours I helped facilitate not only educated kindergarten students about basic medicine, they also alleviated any fears children may have about being in the hospital. There were many occasions where the students were able to share their experiences of already being in the Pediatric Unit or Hospital because of past health-related issues. For those who had never been to a hospital before, the experience allowed a hands-on approach to learning what types of things might occur if they were ever admitted.

My favorite part of this experience was the learning centres. Each child brought a ‘stuffy’ to the tour, and at these centres they learned about how certain medical tools and devices work by practicing using them with their stuffed animal. The stuffy got a cast, temperature taken, got an IV, were weighed and received an ID bracelet. What a fun way to learn about the hospital! By providing the information in this format, I believe the children learn so well and they remember that the hospital is not such a scary place after all.

I was a volunteer for the Pediatric Kindergarten Tour program for two seasons, but had to resign when I accepted a full-time teaching position. I still remain an active volunteer with the Pediatric Unit as a Caring Cuddler. In my experience, the best part of volunteering is the children, because if there is any chance that I can inspire someone and show them the good in the world, I gladly take on that responsibility. To model the good in the world is something children need to see a bit more often, and what better way than to give them the opportunity to experience it firsthand. I believe that volunteering provides a more lasting impact, in that I get to see how my time has truly made a difference. The children learn from me, and I learn so much about the wonders of the world from them!
As a Youth Volunteer with the Red Deer Hospital's Flower Delivery Program, from time to time I had the privilege of presenting a beautiful “Pay It Forward” flower bouquet to patients in an effort to brighten their day.

‘La Petite Jaune Fleur’ is proud to sponsor the “Pay It Forward Flower Campaign”. They started this program to provide floral cheer for patients who are in the hospital and who receive limited or no visits, or those who just need some floral cheer.

Laura, the Owner/Operator of La Petite Jaune Fleur, states, “We have a wonderful community in Red Deer who genuinely care about people. On top of our contributions, we have everything from local people who donate a few dollars, right up to companies who donate the full cost of an arrangement. We put together as many special flower arrangements as we can, and then deliver them to the hospital as often as possible.”

Marie, the lady in the picture, was thrilled to be one of the recipients of a “Pay It Forward” arrangement, and she commented to me several times that “it made her day!” This is what I love most about volunteering with the Flower Delivery Program. I feel like I am the deliverer of smiles!

Shaye-Lyn Bovair
Flower Delivery & Wheelchair Round Up
3 Years Volunteer Service
I have been volunteering off and on at different hospitals for the past fifty years. The past twenty years, I have been at the Red Deer Hospital assisting on various units. For many years now, I have volunteered on the same day, the same shift, and with the same patients in the Renal Dialysis Unit. I like it there as I have established long term relationships with many of the patients. We’ve gotten to know each other and are comfortable sharing stories about their families and mine. I know they appreciate what I do for them because they have told me, and we look forward to seeing each other every time I volunteer.

I sometimes think it’s time for me to retire, but I keep putting it off because I would miss their friendships. It’s nice to know that I make a difference for them on that one day of the week!
I have only been volunteering for over a year at the Red Deer Hospital. After 42 years of nursing, I always knew I wanted to be able to give back. When I was working in Diagnostic Imaging before retiring, I noticed the lab greeters working in the collection area and I knew that was where I would like to start to volunteer. I retired in June 2014, and when I saw the advertisement for Lab Greeter in October 2014, I quickly returned to the hospital to help out.

Every Monday morning is my day to volunteer. It is wonderful to meet new people and be able to share in their hospital visits. It’s good to know I have become a part of a team again, and I can smile and help patients and lab staff out by doing my part every Monday to lighten the work load for everybody.

Linda Mallet
Lab Collection Greeter
1.5 Years Volunteer Service
I have really enjoyed my 24 years of volunteer experiences at the Red Deer Hospital, both in the Gift Shop and at the Admitting Desk. It is a great way to meet new friends, and old friends, and to do a worthwhile service for the community.

One experience that I really treasure was something that happened for a number of Mondays at the Admitting Desk. A mom would come in every week for a procedure and bring her four year old daughter with her. The little girl was super cute with blonde hair done in ringlets and bows. She would bravely come right up to me at my desk to see my rings. She was such a “little lady” and she really loved jewellery! I have lots of rings, and I would deliberately wear different ones every Monday. “What ring have you got on today?” she would ask. When I wore my blue sapphire ring, she would say, “blue is my favorite color too.” Just the joy of seeing this adorable four year old girl nearly every week was worth the time volunteering there.

Marlene Wallace
Gift Shop Assistant
24 Years Volunteer Service
I have volunteered at the Red Deer Hospital for twenty years through Cosmos Agency, an agency that is very active in our community. I started by distributing magazines throughout all of the hospital lounges. Some of those lounges are not even there any more because the hospital has changed so much over the years. I was a very, very shy guy with minimal socialization skills. Now I make it a point to come early to have lunch with the staff and my fellow volunteers, and I even engage in fun conversations with them. I think volunteering has helped me very much to overcome being so shy. When the magazine program ended, I started compiling chart packs for two different units by myself. I am also willing to help out with other units when my other volunteers are not in. I was also a star in the Volunteer Resources recruitment video, where I got to say, “I like helping people, it is my job and I love it!"

Christopher Kirbyson
Department Aide
20 Years Volunteer Service
The Red Deer Hospital Centre was the first volunteer placement for Christopher. He was just out of high school and looking to become involved in the community through a support agency. Christopher is non-verbal with a hearing impairment, and he uses a “thumbs up” when he’s happy or to say yes. He started out volunteering with chart packs once per week, and because of his enjoyment and his skills, he quickly added more volunteer responsibilities with chart packs. He now volunteers 3½ days every week.

His proprietor says when she goes to wake him up and mentions that the day is one of his hospital days, he gets up right away and is more eager to begin his day. Christopher is so very willing to fill in when his fellow Cosmos Volunteers are away, and his versatility to do wheelchair round up, newspaper deliveries or linens is so appreciated, and these additional tasks definitely increase his skill set.

Christopher has been volunteering at the Red Deer Hospital for four years. He is a young man who likes to give hugs once he gets to know you and you become a regular, familiar face. He is gaining a sense of independence by being a committed, active volunteer at the hospital. He is able to collate his chart packs without direct supervision and only an occasional check!

Christopher Rogers
Department Aide
4 Years Volunteer Service
I have been a Volunteer in the Moose Cottage for over three years. Prior to my first day, I thought I would just be a server… pouring coffee and tea, and serving goodies. Little did I know the rewards I would receive in this volunteer role! For one, my perspective on my own life started to change dramatically. Ups and downs, we all have them, but what I discovered is that mine are miniscule compared to what I witness in the Moose Cottage. There are the patients who came in dealing with devastating health issues, and yet they exhibit such courage in dealing with them. There are the other volunteers who come in to cheerfully and lovingly give of themselves to assist patients with mobility issues and other health problems. I also want to mention some of the hard working staff members who come for a short visit and a treat, and the Hospital Chaplains who come in after Chapel and are always so polite and kind.

The Moose Cottage is such a sweet refuge to family members who are visiting loved ones, and for those who just need a break. Sometimes they share with us and sometimes they just need a quiet time, but invariably they express their appreciation for this little place in which they recoup and re-group.

I look forward to my Monday afternoon at the Moose Cottage and consider it a privilege to be able to contribute a few hours each week. Thank you to the team who puts so much effort into making the Moose Cottage such a pleasant and welcoming place, and especially the Loyal Order of the Moose for providing the funding over the last 23 years for this beautiful place of respite.

Donna Vig
Moose Cottage Host
4 Years Volunteer Service
I began volunteering at the Red Deer Hospital Centre when my hours at work got cut back, and it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me! In giving of myself, I have also received in many countless ways. Volunteering has been, and continues to be, one of the most rewarding things I have ever done in my life.

Besides volunteering on the Dialysis Unit, I also volunteer for Pastoral Care bringing patients to Chapel and taking them for coffee afterwards to the Moose Cottage. As I think back over recent months, I recall a gentleman who was 90. After Chapel this particular day, I asked him if he would like to go for coffee and he promptly said, “Yes!” While we were chatting, I asked him what he had done for this life-long career and he told me that he had been an engineer. “Oh,” I quickly replied, and pointing to his little finger I said “Well, where is your silver ring?” His face lit up like a light bulb and with surprise he said to me, “How did you know?!” But before I could tell him, he quickly corrected me and told me that the ring was not made of silver, but iron. I then told him the reason I knew is because my son is an engineer and my husband and I had attended his “iron ring ceremony.” This brought back many good memories for this gentleman, and in talking it was like we were best buddies. I was able to be a part of his life, if only for a moment.

These are the moments when I’m volunteering that I will never forget. I will always remember the look on that lovely gentleman’s face when I asked him where his silver ring was. His enthusiasm spilled over when he talked about his younger years. Oh, how I hope and pray that I will have the same enthusiasm in me when I am 90 years old!

Dorothy Bennett  
Renal Dialysis Assistant & Chapel Program Assistant  
3 Years Volunteer Service
Volunteering is a blessing that radiates in all directions, like the warming rays of the sun. My Therapy Dogs and I are enriched by all of our interactions at Red Deer Hospital, and we know that the visits touch the hearts of staff, patients and their family members. People often experience some degree of stress in a hospital setting, and even a few moments of dog cuddling can be comforting and relaxing.

After nine years of visits, one of our greatest pleasures is to reconnect with young adults and teens who were young children the first time we met. On our first meeting, one little fellow was a patient in Pediatrics, and to his surprise was about to be transported by ambulance to another facility. He was upset and started to cry when the EMTs arrived for him. "Ambulances drive too fast!" he sobbed. My Children's Therapy Dog, Margaret Rose, was very concerned about the child's crying and wanted to comfort him, so when the gurney was lowered for the boy, Margaret Rose also quietly got on and lay beside the child until it was time for him to leave.

The next time we met this patient, he was a teenager and it was my Children's Therapy Dog, Sachi, who cuddled with him and leaned against him, and made him feel adored. The nursing staff told us that the young man had been sharing his story, in great detail, with the doctors and nurses of his long-ago visit with Margaret Rose. This same boy, who had such special visits with both Margaret Rose and Sachi, is now back in the hospital and still struggling with some health concerns. He met and cuddled with another one of my Therapy Dogs, Leilani, and shared his memories with the other patients and staff about Margaret Rose and Sachi. The patients were working on a wall project while we were there, and he posted on the wall that petting Therapy Dogs is one of his coping mechanisms.

A repeat encounter of another special kind occurred when Margaret Rose and I visited a teen in Pediatrics who, as a young child, had been one of the children that participated in Margaret Rose’s intense evaluation for working with children as a “Children's Therapy Dog”.

Being a Therapy Dog Volunteer has changed everything: my life's purpose, my priorities and where I put my focus. It is a privilege and an honor to partner with my dogs in this way, sharing with others their tenderness and unconditional love.

**June Thompson**
*Pet Visitor*
*9 Years Volunteer Service*
My first volunteering role at the Red Deer Hospital was on the Palliative Care Unit, and there was a patient whom I will call “Anne”. The first time I encountered Anne, she was sitting outside her room harshly demanding of everyone why her water (which had come from the cooler and had ice in it) wasn’t cold. She would sip it and say “bleck” while scrunching up her face in order to prove this point. Naïvely, my volunteering partner and I decided that getting fresh water (also from the machine) would remedy the problem. It didn’t. And thus began our weekly visits with Anne.

Most of the time, Anne would tell us seemingly senseless stories, but we were able to pick out details that told us that Anne was in the hospital awaiting placement in a care-home, which she didn’t want to go to, but which her absent daughter thought best. Every week, Anne had some happy anecdote to tell. Though she did suffer from some sort of confusion, she didn’t let that bother her, so long as we smiled and gave her the friendly companionship she desired to make her “cooped-up” stay a little less “dreadful”. Some weeks, we would take Anne to the atrium, others, we would play cards with her. In our company, Anne always smiled broadly revealing to us her missing teeth – which in turn made us smile because we knew we were truly making a difference.

I think by this time, Anne remembered who we were and that we brought good times. We had also discovered the trick to “cold water” was to get it from the sink in her room and show her that we let the cold water run for a while first. After a few months of Anne’s stay, my volunteer partner and I decided to bring her a gift from Volunteer Resources. It was a purple, fuzzy blanket. My friend and I were both pleased with the idea of the gift, and Anne liked it too, until we went to leave and she tried to give the blanket back! When we explained to her that it was a gift and she could keep it, she seemed to feel honored. The next week, she didn’t remember the blanket, but that didn’t matter because it’s real purpose had been for the week before. Even though I didn’t know Anne long, her way of living life and enjoying it has been a lasting impression for me. One day, I even shared her wisdom on social media: “Life is short, and if someone asks you to dance, dance, as you may not get another chance.” I don’t know how Anne’s story ended, but I believe she would have made it a happy one.

Emilee Anderson
Renal Dialysis Assistant
3 Years Volunteer Service
Volunteering at the Hospitality Desk at the Red Deer Hospital has been a very special position for me, and in the five years I have sat at the desk, many people have passed by me. Some are only recognizable by their faces, whereas others I have come to know by name. One such person was Jack. He was one of the regulars, as he had his dialysis treatment on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. He always had a cheery “hello” and we always seemed to find something to chat about. Finally after many mornings, I asked his name. He just said it was Jack, but that his full name was Edward John. What a coincidence that was, as my father was also called Jack and his full name was John Edward. So, that was the beginning of our solid friendship. We discussed our families, and I met him once or twice at the grocery stores and he introduced me to his wife, Lauretta.

On January 22nd, my morning started off as usual, and as the nurses, doctors and other staff passed by, I was waiting for Jack to come out of the elevator with his cheery greeting. Time passed and he was a bit later than usual. Finally, he came through the east doors accompanied by his wife, and he was struggling to get to my desk and sit in one of the nearby chairs. He told me he had been in Emergency twice that week. He looked so weak and frail, so I offered to get one of the wheelchairs for him and told Lauretta that I would take him to the unit. When he left my desk after our little chat, he usually said, “You better go to work now,” to which I would reply “I don’t work very hard.” Well, not on that day!

The following week, I waited for him to arrive as I was going on holidays for two weeks and wouldn’t see him until I got back. He didn’t come. I asked the husband of one of the other dialysis patients if he knew anything, and he didn’t. I wondered if he had been admitted, but was unable to check as I didn’t know his surname. When I got home that afternoon and was reading the local newspaper, there was Jack’s obituary. I was really taken aback, and of course very sad to read of his passing. His funeral was to be held the upcoming Friday in Rumsey, but I was unable to attend. I felt so sad by all of this that I felt compelled to call his wife, Lauretta, to pass on my condolences. I introduced myself, but she said that wasn’t necessary as she knew all about me and my family. I explained that I knew all about her and her family through my visits with Jack, and I expressed my condolences and offered hope and empathy to her and her family. She told me Jack would have been pleased that I called. I told her my Wednesdays would never be the same without my visits with Jack, and so far they have not.
As a volunteer at the Hospitality Desk with our Admitting Department, I have the pleasure of assisting patients, families and visitors in moving themselves around our hospital. I like to roam and not just sit at the greeter desk. I find by doing that I am able to help a greater amount of people. In my volunteering, I have two very different situations, that when I reflect back on them, makes me think I was definitely in the right place at the right time. One day after my shift, I was heading to my vehicle in the underground parkade when I heard a lady screaming. I then observed a young man panicking as he was trying to help his very pregnant wife out of the truck. I reassured them that I would get a wheelchair and return quickly. When I returned with the wheelchair, we assisted her into it and by then, a few others had taken notice and said they would call ahead to Labor and Delivery. On the elevator we went, with the husband using pressure to ensure the baby wouldn’t be born before we reached the unit. I was holding tight to the wheelchair and the soon-to-be mom, and ensuring the dad was doing his job. We reached level two and were off to Labor and Delivery, but the baby was not waiting and made an appearance as we entered the unit. The staff were ready, and I turned over my patient and her husband to the professionals. My heart was beating very fast, and I really had to embrace what had just happened. I thought I’d best head back to Volunteer Resources to tell them what happened, and when I appeared in the office, the coordinators were alarmed by the look on my face. When I told them what happened, they congratulated me and offered their thanks for my action, but also commented to me that it was “just another day in volunteering!” right Bob?

My second situation involved a gentleman who was in the lobby of the South Complex of the Hospital. He did not appear well and was looking to exit the building. I asked him how he was doing and if perhaps I could be of some assistance to him. By the time, I got my question out to him, he started to collapse and I was able to hold on and ease him to the ground. The staff at the information desk immediately called for medical attention, and the outcome for this gentleman was very positive. As I stood back and watched our amazing team provide him with the medical attention he needed, I thought how truly fortunate I was to be in the right place at the right time again, but most importantly how lucky I am to be a volunteer with the Red Deer Hospital!

Bob Pelletier
Main Floor Greeter
4 Years Volunteer Service
There was a moment as a Palliative Community Visitor when I realized that what I do has become less about volunteering… and more about a friendship. In the spring of 2015, I met a lovely, smart and inspiring woman. She is 84. Every week I would visit her, and it was great getting to know each other. I loved hearing about her family, her many years as a teacher, and of her dearly loved husband who had passed away a few years ago. As the months passed and her health began to decline, she said to me, “I’m not afraid of dying, but I am uncomfortable to be alone.” Soon, our visits became more frequent. She would sleep as I sat next to her with music gently playing, easy listening because it’s her favorite genre. One day when I went for a visit, I knocked at her door and announced my arrival, “It’s just Theresa,” I called. She smiled, took my hand and said, “You are never just Theresa… you are Theresa”. It was a lesson learned. Soon after, she was unable to leave her bed. I go to see her every weekday. I play her music as I hold her hand. I tell her the day, the time and what the weather is like. She is unable to respond, but I believe she knows I’m there. Each time I leave, I say a good bye as it may be our last visit. It has been an honor and a privilege to provide her with my company, my hand to hold, and tender care to my dear friend.
An elderly female patient was on one of the Red Deer Hospital units for many months. On occasion, she would require being restrained in a Broda chair. She was often in the hallway near the nursing station, and she would shout and rattle her tray repeatedly. This was disturbing for all the staff and patients within earshot. She often told me she was going home, and when walking with her walker, she would attempt to leave the unit. One day, she was in a difficult mood and was again restrained to the Broda chair. I knew from Specialized Geriatric Services that her husband had been admitted to the hospital, and he was a patient on the floor below.

A staff member suggested that I give her a ride in her chair, but if she didn’t settle down she would have to be put in her room. The staff was tired of listening to her commotion. I asked a nurse if I could try to bring her husband upstairs to spend some time with her. They had been married for 62 years, and she was likely missing him a great deal. The nurse seemed to have no idea that her husband was a patient in the hospital, but agreed. I was able to bring him up for a visit, and they sat next to each other in the hallway. She was no longer agitated and didn’t need to be restrained. They were like two lovebirds. He whispered in her ear, and she smiled and seemed very happy. One particular expression of affection was his tickling her under her chin. They were so content and oblivious to most of the traffic going by them.

This happened on my birthday. As I left the hospital that day, I felt as if I was on cloud nine, and I was filled with feelings of fulfillment and joy. I had received a very special birthday gift, never to be forgotten. There was a reasonably happy ending to this couple’s hospital stay. They both went to a facility where she could be in the dementia area, and he could be “next door” and able to visit her every day.
I love my time volunteering at the Red Deer Hospital Centre! I was looking for a place to give back a few years ago, and after checking out a few options, I knew I had found where I wanted to make a difference. Being an artist, “Creative Connections” was the perfect fit. I truly believe that art has a healing power in people’s lives. A lot of my work is done outside of the hospital, contacting artists, scheduling displays and collecting the art. We change the art on all three floors every six weeks. The staff, patients and visitors express great pleasure in the new art that adorns the walls. The Creative Connections Walls are also a wonderful opportunity for local artists to have their new works viewed and appreciated by the public.

I expanded into a new venture recently, and spent time with some of the hospital patients making a beautiful Christmas wreath to be auctioned at the “Festival Of Trees” fundraiser. I had a blast! People there are from all walks of life - they are patients, staff and visitors. Everyone is there for a different reason, but the greatest common denominator is the appreciation for volunteers.

I volunteer to give to others, but I always leave with so much more given to me. Every small act of caring makes a difference in our world. Hugs, compliments and mostly smiles makes it all worth the time!

Lynn Carter
Creative Connections Assistant
2 Years Volunteer Service
My name is Murrey Hall. A car accident in 1972 left me a paraplegic and I spent approximately five years in and out of the hospital as a patient. During that time, I saw so much loneliness and suffering. I recall the candy stripers that used to volunteer when I was a patient. They were always cheerful and encouraging to the patients. Through that experience, I learned to have empathy for others.

I began volunteering at the Stettler Hospital in the Recreation Therapy program in 1990. I met so many interesting people - many war veterans from WW1, WW2 and the Korean War who are now gone. Many of their stories were personal accounts of war history, and learning about it from those who had actually experienced it was very interesting and rewarding. I was also encouraged by some of the volunteers that have been active for 50 years! Now I enjoy my time volunteering at the Red Deer Hospital Centre, visiting, playing games, talking to patients and encouraging them to not give up. Often, you don’t have to speak a lot, you just need to be there in the moment. Sometimes, just a smile and a “hello” is sufficient.

I have met so many nice folks, and they are such a benefit to my soul. I’ve met policemen, ballet dancers and Olympic gold medal winners at the Glenrose Rehab, where I volunteered while living in Edmonton. When we lose something we depend on, like an arm or a leg, or maybe lose a job from an illness or injury, it is very depressing and hard to deal with. This can be harder on some people than others.

I have met many other volunteers who inspire me. You can’t help but be encouraged when you’re there supporting someone else. I also realize that I have grown from all of my experiences, and it is me who benefits from them. I don’t pretend to know more, or do more, than anybody else. We all have special gifts, and it is by the grace of God that I do what I do. I personally feel very blessed to be a volunteer.

Murrey Hall
Recreation Therapy Assistant
15 Years Volunteer Service
Jodi and Melanie are Co-Facilitators of the Bariatric Support Group. “I volunteered to facilitate because I wanted to help others who are going through the same experience. The Peer Support Group meeting leaves me feeling encouraged and content that there are others who understand how I feel. I want to help other patients and share my story, as I know when I started this journey three years ago, it was the stories from other patients that inspired me to keep going.” ~ Melanie Timms

“Bariatric surgery has changed my life, allowing me to become healthier and to end my lifelong struggle with weight. One of the ways I give back is by helping my peers through their weight loss journeys in a supportive group and encouraging environment.

The Bariatric program in Red Deer offers a support group once a month for people at various stages or choices in their weight loss journey. Like me, they all struggle with various aspects of being addicted to food. Over the years, this support group has changed hands from a professionally led group transitioning into a peer led group. That's where we come in, the peers, giving each other the tools to succeed.

Volunteer Resources at the Red Deer Hospital has been very generous in providing us with Facilitator Training through Canadian Mental Health to help with the basics of running a group. We have access to a big, beautiful meeting space for the evening, and we have access to speakers, trained professionals and literature to help plan monthly topics as well. Tech Support also assists us with teleconferences from any location.

Before each meeting starts, I have to pump myself up a bit. I remind myself that I have over a decade of experience and knowledge, having lived with this weight loss tool, a band and now a sleeve. I can see in the eyes of all who are in attendance, their concern, discomfort and a need to connect with people in their circumstance; people who truly understand their unique feelings. Through everyone’s sharing, they realize that we do understand how emotionally and physically exhausting it is to carry excess weight. The new people understand that the group can provide a safe and caring space for them to share their wounds and get encouragement to move forward with the information.

After spending time as member, and now a Peer Facilitator, I believe that at a certain stage of life, giving back becomes quite important and this opportunity has been very personally rewarding.” ~ Jodi Dore
I am a volunteer in a program that gives arts and crafts kits to patients. I also visit the patients and talk about art and culture while hanging paintings by local artists on the walls of their hospital room. I am an artist myself, and I adore chatting with the patients and seeing how caring, creativity and beauty makes people smile. I began volunteering in these programs because my late husband had cancer, and during his treatments we would make little art projects to help distract both of us. What we found was that the projects didn't just make us happier, but also became fun for our neighbors in treatment and the staff in the chemotherapy room. When we made art, people talked about the project instead of sickness; it brought a moment of reprieve during a difficult time.

As a hospital volunteer, sharing and supporting art and creativity becomes a very meaningful service that touches the hearts of others. My volunteer work also stands as a memorial to the artistry of my husband, it reminds me of the joy I feel in creativity, and how meaningful art can be in a person's life.

Teena Dickerson
Artist In Residence Cart
2 Years Volunteer Service
Growing up in a family of volunteers, it is something I have loved to do most of my life. I have no recollection of when I actually started volunteering for the Caring Klown Program at the Red Deer Hospital. I remember seeing a notice that there was a training program for Caring Klowns. I called the Volunteer Coordinator, Shirley Wolf, to inquire about the program. I was a staff member at the hospital and I had been clowning since I was a teenager. I had planned on simply signing up and volunteering as a clown, but as luck would have it, Shirley Wolf and Rick Janz (who was Volunteer Coordinator for the Innisfail Hospital) were open to some of my ideas and I became the program organizer. Since then, I have trained and clowned with many partners over the years.

Our last training day was one of my favorites! Karen Baxter (Rootin Tootin Newton) from the ‘Edmonton Caring Clown Society’ came to present to the group ideas and activities to do when we visit with patients. She was full of energy and fun, showing us new ways to give small, fun gifts to our patients while enjoying the fun ourselves. My favorite was the ‘Fantastic Elastic Gymnastics’. Using the simple elastic and magically moving it from finger to finger was terrific! The group of volunteers that came to learn and practice being a visiting clown, were delightful, full of energy and ready to play. Every game and trick that Karen taught us were fair game for laughter.

Even if some of the group didn’t actually go to clown, they learned some valuable lessons about asking permission to enter a patient’s room, and to smile and wave good-bye to the patient if they refuse. If the patient agrees to a clown’s visit, having fun entering and leaving their room, and being playful and respectful meeting the patient at their energy level assures the patient will enjoy a visit they won't soon forget … and often neither do we!

Nancy Verdin (aka Wrinkles)
Caring Klown
12 Years Volunteer Service
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Thank You!
Brenda, Darci and Erin
Volunteer Resources
Red Deer Hospital Centre