For Maurice Paul, it's not all about enjoying the limelight of performing on stage. For this volunteer at Ponoka’s Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury, it’s about sing-alongs that help coax patients out of their shells and bring families together.

“SINGING THE PRAISES OF LIVE MUSIC

Speech-language pathologist Melissa McAllister delivers the Get Ready to Learn! program to a group of kindergarten students. The program is one of two Alberta Health Services programs developed with the goal of catching language delays early in a student’s academic career. The programs also help foster environments that support students in developing communication and literacy skills.

— Melissa McAllister, speech-language pathologist

SHOVELLING A PAIN IN THE ... NECK?

The white stuff is no laughing matter as shovelling it incorrectly can cause real harm to your heart and body. So before you head outside after the next Alberta clipper, check out these tips to stay safe.

Know your options

GET THE CARE YOU NEED WHEN YOU NEED IT

+ Health Link Alberta
+ Family Doctor
+ Emergency
+ Walk-In Clinic
+ Community Health Centre

albertahealthservices.ca/options
NURTING – AND NURSING

For Erin Gerodo, her career is all about putting people first

Story by Greg Harris |

“IT’S DIFFICULT TO DRAW DEFINITIVE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE DATA, BUT THEY SUGGEST AT LEAST TWO POSSIBILITIES,” SAYS DR. SEAN MCMURTRY, LEAD AUTHOR OF THE RESEARCH STUDY AND A CARDIOLOGIST AT THE MAZANKOWSKI ALBERTA HEART INSTITUTE. “IT MAY BE THAT MANY ALBERTANS HAVE REDUCED THEIR CARDIOVASCULAR RISK FACTORS BY QUITTING SMOKING, EATING BETTER AND EXERCISING MORE.” HOWEVER, MEDICAL PRACTICE HAS ALSO CHANGED, WITH ANGIOPLASTY BEING USED MORE FREQUENTLY AS A TREATMENT OPTION THAN CARDIAC BYPASS SURGERY.

In angioplasty, a cardiologist inserts a catheter with a special balloon on the end that, when inflated, opens up the fatty deposits clogging the vessel. A stent, or tube, is then usually inserted to help keep the artery open.

Alberta has been maintaining a comprehensive database of information about cardiac procedures since 1996. “Ultimately, the information helps physicians, administrators and even patients make the most informed decisions they can when it comes to cardiovascular health care,” says study co-author Dr. Merrill Knudston of the Libin Cardiovascular Institute of Alberta.

www.albertahealthservices.ca There are plenty of health care options available. Learn yours by visiting the AHS website.
The Program ... Builds on the Basics of Speech and Language to Focus on Literacy Skills

— Melissa McAllister, speech-language pathologist

Get Ready to Learn! blends social and language learning aspects based on the curriculum. It uses movement, stories, and interactive activities to help kindergarten students develop their understanding of social and listening skills, rhyming, syllables and sounds.

Ready, Set, Learn!

Story by Heather Kipling | Photos by Ardell McLennan

More schools than ever before are making catching delays in a child’s learning a key component of lesson planning in Central Zone, utilizing a pair of programs developed by Alberta Health Services (AHS) to help ensure solid foundations of literacy.

Catching delays early is the goal of Get Ready to Learn! and Get Ready to Read!

The programs were developed in 2007 in collaboration with speech-language pathologists, an occupational therapist and kindergarten teachers to support students in developing communication and literacy skills, often before problems arise.

“Get Ready to Learn! and Get Ready to Read! provide us with a way to get working with kids before they’re even referred to us. It’s an early start to intervention that’s proactive rather than reactive in approach,” says Holly Duchow, AHS speech-language pathologist (SLP), who has played an important role in developing the two programs.

“We’re in classrooms, working with kids faster, which enables us to identify delays faster.”

Get Ready to Learn! is used in the group setting of a classroom rather than the more traditional approach of an SLP working with children one-on-one. It uses stories and interactive activities to help kindergarten students develop their understanding of social and listening skills, rhyming, syllables and sounds.

As Melissa McAllister, a speech-language pathologist who also runs the Get Ready to Learn! program explains, being able to play with words and sounds is where it all starts, so the program provides the skills of literacy in developmental steps.

“The program uses lots of activities to help get kids engaged and ready to learn,” says McAllister. “We practise language with the class through activities like singing, which is a great language tool, rhyming, and we bring in some physical activity as well.”

Last year, hundreds of kindergarten students took part in the program. This year, it’s being used by speech-language pathologists and teachers in schools in more than a dozen communities, including Alder Flats, Wainwright, Kitscoty, Paradise Valley. This year, much like Get Ready to Learn!, it has expanded to more communities, including being offered for the first time in Provost and Edgerton.

And the lessons reach not only the students, but the teachers and parents as well. Involvement from parents and teachers is crucial to the program, helping to provide parents with skills to assist their children in becoming lifelong readers.

“Part of it is having parents come in to help with the activities,” says McAllister. “Having everyone on the same page – getting the parents to come see what we’re doing – helps bridge gaps between the school and home.”

Based on an evaluation of Get Ready to Learn!, it’s making a difference for teachers and students alike.

“In our Get Ready to Learn! evaluation, teachers who took part thought the program was successful,” says Duchow. “The preliteracy skills screens used in classrooms where Get Ready to Learn! was implemented showed an increase in phonological awareness and social communication skills. It’s great to see this program is making a difference. It has the potential to be a valuable addition in the classroom.”

Class acts! Two Alberta Health Services programs are on course for developing literacy skills in children – and finding developmental delays before they become a problem.

WE’RE IN CLASSROOMS, WORKING WITH KIDS FASTER, WHICH ENABLES US TO IDENTIFY DELAYS FASTER

— Holly Duchow, speech-language pathologist
REHAB STARTS JOURNEY TO BETTER LIFE
Programming a new beginning ... one step at a time

“I WHINED AND I CRIED BECAUSE IT HURT, BUT I GOT THE DIRECTION ABOUT THE WORK THAT NEEDED TO BE DONE.” — Oe’Livia Chasse

For Oe’Livia Chasse, the worry of being wheelchair-bound is something she no longer carries with her.

Last year, Chasse’s life began to change dramatically when she began working with physical therapist Rajandeep Chandel and rehabilitation assistant Renee Kassian through the Community Rehabilitation Program in Lamont.

“I was experiencing a great deal of pain and my mobility was severely limited,” says Chasse. “Living in the country and no longer able to drive, I felt quite isolated. The home care occupational therapist had made several visits to our place helping me adapt our home with things that would make it easier for me to get around. During one of those visits she suggested I consider the Community Rehabilitation Program.”

While reluctant at first, encouragement from her husband helped Chasse make the call to the Community Rehabilitation Program where, in the first few minutes of her appointment, she was “inspired by Raj’s (Chandel) honesty and no-nonsense approach to treatment.”

“I knew if I was going to be helped, it would be here.”

The physical therapy Community Rehabilitation Program is available to all age groups in the community. It provides physical and occupational therapy services to help clients improve their function and overall quality of life.

During Chasse’s initial assessment it was obvious to Kassian and Chandel that Chasse’s hip pain was limiting her function and that if she did not get any help with her mobility she would deteriorate quickly. In order to be a candidate for a hip replacement, Chasse embarked on an exercise program to improve her mobility and promote weight loss.

“We worked for two to three days a week,” says Kassian, who has worked with Chasse for over 20 months. “The journey wasn’t an easy one; there were lots of days filled with pain and tears, but we worked through it one day at a time with encouragement and reassurance.

“Oe’Livia was highly motivated and she has lost over 100 lbs.”

As her mobility and functionality began to improve, Chasse was able to have her left hip replaced, adding further change to her life by lessening the daily pain she’d been coping with.

“I was encouraged by their belief that I could do the work,” says Chasse, who had her right hip replaced last month. “I whined and cried because it hurt, but I got the direction about the work that needed to be done and the reassurance that I was on the road to a better life.”

“I no longer worry about being wheelchair-bound. I’m able to do things for myself now that used to require help. I use crutches and a walker, but I look forward to the real possibility of walking without aids, of being able to drive the car again.”

And Chasse’s journey has also made a lasting impression for those who have been with her every step of the way.

“This has been a very rewarding experience for us, as staff, to be a part of,” says Kassian. “We’re proud that we have been able to help her improve her quality of life and we are very excited to continue to support her on this journey.”

The Community Rehabilitation Program has been life-changing for Oe’Livia Chasse, left. With support from her husband Don, above left, rehabilitation assistant Renee Kassian, second from right, and physical therapist Rajandeep Chandel – who provide the program – Chasse no longer worries about being wheelchair-bound.

SERVICES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

ARTHRITE POOL EXERCISE AND EDUCATION

For adults who have conditions such as complex arthritis, lupus, post-op hip and knee replacement, or spinal stenosis, this program holds education and in-pool sessions. Pool sessions help to improve physical fitness, flexibility, strength, and balance. Education sessions teach clients about community resources that are available and self-management strategies. Classes (when there are enough participants) run in sessions for six weeks, twice a week, for two hours per session. A referral from a physician or other health care profession is needed. Call Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre at 403.343.4508.

HOME CARE SERVICES

Central Zone Home Care helps people remain safe and independent in their own home or care setting for as long as possible. The program supports Albertans of all ages and includes services including promotion and teaching, treatments, care at end of life, rehabilitation, home support and maintenance, help keeping social connections, and support for caregivers.

Home Care organizes health care service delivery with other health services in the community. Request Home Care services by calling 1.877.341.2131. Family, friends, neighbours or health professionals can also call on a person’s behalf.

ASTHMA EDUCATION PROGRAM

The program provides education sessions in hospitals, health units, or in the community, and can be tailored to meet the needs of specific groups such as preschoolers, sports groups, or adults. Sessions are led by certified asthma educators and registered respiratory therapists. Physicians or other health care providers can provide referrals, or people can self-refer. Call your local public health centre or Health Link Alberta at 1.866.408.5465.

STROKE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Through the Stroke Prevention Program, a team of health care providers use early detection and full diagnostic work-up to address risk factors and educate people. Services are provided by a physician, dietitian, neurologist, occupational therapist, pharmacist, and social worker. Referrals can be made by a specialist or family physician. In Red Deer, call 403.406.5508. In Camrose, call 780.679.3112.

Do you have concerns about your health? Visit the AHS website for symptom information.
Maurice Paul volunteers his voice at the Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury every week, as part of the Amigos, a sing-along band. Through their music, the group provides an entertaining afternoon for patients and families at the centre.

"I play the guitar, and I guess I sing reasonably well. They haven’t kicked me out yet," says Paul with a laugh.

It was about 10 years ago that Paul walked by a sing-along function in the Centennial Centre where he works as a storeman. He decided to join in and add some energy to the small gathering. Ever since, he’s been leading the weekly event with his fellow band members.

“When we first started, we’d get about 10 to 15 (audience members) stopping by. Now we attract 60 or more every Friday,” says Paul. “It’s really a great medium for families and patients to spend some time together, where they can laugh and have some fun.”

Participants are given lyrics to follow, and are encouraged to sing along with the band.

Paul also volunteers his talents at the Rimbey Long Term Care Unit and, at both facilities over the years, has seen incredible reactions to the music in audiences that include geriatric patients and rehabilitating brain injury patients.

“It’s amazing to watch them,” Paul says. “Music is a different language. It connects with people like nothing else. I can give countless examples of times where we saw the music really getting through to someone in a way that nothing else could.

“I remember once, a patient who was virtually unresponsive. But when that music got going, he’d get up and ask his wife to dance. That’s when you know you’re really getting through to someone.”

Along with his Friday volunteer efforts, Paul and his family have visited the centre every Christmas to sing a couple of songs on each unit.

“It was at least five years ago that we started this tradition,” he says. “What an uplifting experience it is to touch those who are shut in.”

It’s a stirring cause, and it’s why Paul is very Friday in Ponoka, the magic of music is on display. Maurice Paul volunteers his voice at the Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury every week, as part of the Amigos, a sing-along band. Through their music, the group provides an entertaining afternoon for patients and families at the centre.

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It’s a stirring cause, and it’s why Paul is...
Keep in mind these tips to avoid injury:

1. **Shovel Soon and Often**: Fluffy new snow is easier to lift and remove than snow that’s been trampled and packed down. If you shovel frequently, you will not have to remove as much at once.

2. **Go Slowly**: Northern Hills Physiotherapy in Calgary says 15 minutes of snow shovelling counts as strenuous physical activity, so don’t push it, particularly if you normally lead a sedentary lifestyle. Because shovelling requires so much effort, your heart rate and blood pressure can rise quickly. Shovel for a few minutes and then take a break. If you feel any pain in your chest or your back, stop immediately.

3. **Avoid Too Much Lifting**: If you can, push the snow instead of lifting it. This also helps you to avoid twisting movements that can hurt your back. Consider investing in a snow pusher instead of the conventional shovel, or a shovel with a small plastic blade.

4. **Stay Straight**: Keep your feet together, as close as possible and bend at your knees, keeping your back straight when lifting snow.

5. **Don’t Do the Twist**: Avoid twisting when you toss a shovel full of snow – always throw it in front of you instead of behind you. And don’t overload your shovel – keep it light.

6. **The Layered Look Is In**: Layer your clothing to avoid overheating. Synthetic fibres help wick away perspiration better than natural fibres such as cotton. Your body’s core temperature can drop quickly in cold weather, so be sure you don’t remove too many layers.

**INJURIES S’NO JOKE**

Try these tips for shovelling the white stuff and avoid strain on your back and heart

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**COOL STUFF**

**GET HELP:**
A number of communities across the province have snow-removal programs for people who can’t tend to their own walks and driveways. For example, Chestermere has the Everyday Angels program and Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality, Edmonton and Calgary each have Snow Angel programs. For a complete listing, visit findingbalancealberta.ca.

**WINTER SAFETY**
Whether you’re shovelling the driveway or taking a stroll through the white stuff, remember to stay safe this winter:

- Try to do your walking and other activities when it’s light out. Use your lunch break, or do family activities when the kids get out of school.
- Walk with a partner if it’s dark out.
- Be careful not to slip on wet or icy ground. You can buy “grippers” for your shoes to help keep you from slipping.
- Avoid outdoor activity in extreme cold, and consider the wind-chill factor.
- Be sure to stop and call your doctor if you have chest pain or feel dizzy during any physical activity.
- If you have breathing problems such as asthma or COPD, ask your doctor before being active in cold weather.

**AVOIDING SLIPPERY SITUATIONS**
Alberta’s winters can lead to falls causing strained and sprained wrists or ankles, broken legs, hips and collarbones. Light snow, freezing rain and prolonged cold snaps can make surfaces slick – and very dangerous. Follow these tips:

- **Keep it clear**: Keep sidewalks, steps and driveways around your home clean and clear, either by shovelling or by using salt. Sprinkling gravel or sand creates traction.
- **Boot up**: A good winter shoe should keep you warm and dry, and have good grip, tread, ankle support and a solid surface area (this means no high heels).
- **Pay attention**: Walking on ice requires extra care, as you won’t have your hands free to brace yourself if you fall.
- **Check out travel routes**: Avoid routes, if possible, that are rarely cleared.
- **Avoid outdoors, if possible**: Outdoor activity in extreme cold and wind-chill factor can be dangerous.
- **Plan your route**: Avoid routes that are rarely cleared, have more stairs or uneven surfaces. If there is a standard railing in good condition, use it.
- **Travel light**: If you must carry items, consider making extra trips or getting help. Use extra care, as you won’t have your hands free to brace yourself if you fall.

**THIS IS NO TIME TO WING IT!**

“Tis the season for turkey dinners. Whether perfecting your family’s favourite recipe, or taking on the turkey task for the first time, no chef can do without the most important ingredient: safety. Keep your feast free of foodborne illness with Alberta Health Services Top Turkey Tips – all the steps you need to take, in bite-sized morsels you can easily digest. Cheers to you, and your festive feast! Visit www.albertahealthservices.ca/TurkeyTips.

Looking for a physician in your area? Visit the Alberta Health Services website for information.
PORTABLE ULTRASOUND A HUGE PLUS

New emergency department tool helps Rimby physicians make key decisions ... faster

Story by Adam Eisenbarth |

More local emergency department (ED) patients can get the diagnostics they need without leaving the community with the arrival of Rimby’s first portable ultrasound machine.

Located in the Rimby Hospital and Care Centre ED, the $50,000 unit is used by physicians and ultrasound technicians to identify a number of conditions, including internal bleeding, fluids around the heart, and ectopic pregnancies.

Now, fewer local ED patients who require this service will need to be transferred to Red Deer, about 70 km southeast of Rimby.

“We now have immediate visualization of the problem and can diagnose more emergency situations right here,” says Rimby Hospital site manager Colleen Connolley.

Local physician Dr. Jurie deBruyn says the portable ultrasound will play a vital role in protecting the health of the community.

“Having diagnostic imaging in Rimby can help save lives in emergency situations,” says deBruyn. “The device has many benefits that are providing the community with improved care.”

A portion of the funds were raised through the David Thompson Health Trust. Individual donations, made prior to the trust’s involvement, also played a significant role in the fundraising efforts.

Corrie Fortner, Executive Director for the David Thompson Health Trust, thanks all donors for their generosity.

“The trust has been working with Rimby for a relatively short time, but in that time we have come to realize that this community places a very high value on ensuring there is quality care available to their citizens,” says Fortner.

Adds Connolley: “We are just so very fortunate to live in a community that supports its local hospital and programs so well and willingly to make this type of equipment a possibility. We are very grateful.”

GIFT FROM THE HEART ... FOR THE HEART

It was a heart’s desire: Delta Rempel receives an automated external defibrillator (AED) on behalf of her organization, the Golden Circle Senior Resource Centre in Red Deer. The gift was thanks to an initiative spearheaded by Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Heart & Stroke Foundation. With Rempel are Mike Hoffman of the Heart & Stroke Foundation, left, and John Heim of AHS. The Red Deer centre, of which Rempel is Board Chair, is one of 150 community organizations across the province to receive an AED, which can save the lives of individuals in cardiac arrest. The AED determines if the heart has stopped beating and, if so, delivers an electric shock to restart the heart.

ENGAGED IN A GREAT RELATIONSHIP

Volunteer council is absolutely key to healthy future

Story by Heather Kipling |

Bruce Buruma knows a thing or two about community engagement.

In his role as Director of Community Relations with the Red Deer Public Schools, and as Chair of the David Thompson Health Advisory Council, Buruma and the council know community engagement is an important step in developing partnerships.

It’s also an important element in helping the council work with Alberta Health Services (AHS) to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

“Our council volunteers want to make a contribution that will support and create the best possible health care system,” says Buruma.

While council members add their own diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, it is the perspective of their communities that they really want to hear.

“We want to hear from communities on the strengths, issues and opportunities facing health care. Health Advisory Councils are one of the opportunities to make this happen,” says Buruma.

Comprised of 14 volunteer members, the Health Advisory Council represents municipalities like Red Deer, Drayton Valley, Rocky Mountain House, Wetaskiwin, Coronation and Drumheller. It represents approximately 300,000 people, serving distinct and diverse people that include many First Nations and Hutterite populations. In an area as large as the Central Zone, finding ways to connect with all the communities can be a challenge for the council.

“We’ve established four regional teams from within the council,” says Buruma. “These smaller teams can cover more ground and really get to know communities.”

The council has also hosted a trio of community consultation sessions in Rocky Mountain House, Sylvan Lake and, most recently, in Drumheller.

“We want to work together to create the best health care system,” says Buruma.

“The more we can gather and share, the more we can work to make improvements for our communities.”

Make a difference in your community. Volunteer with Alberta Health Services.

www.albertahealthservices.ca
The Consort Hospital and Care Centre will be marking 100 years of health care services in the community this month. “We are all very excited about the chance to participate in recognizing the history of health care in Consort,” says Site Manager Carol Trebach.

It was on Dec. 19, 1912, that the original Consort Hospital was opened, costing $3,500 to build.

This small facility would go on to be named a municipal hospital in 1930, with a nurses’ residence constructed. At that time, the hospital could accommodate 16 patients and had eight bassinets. A new facility, the Consort Municipal Hospital, was built in 1947 and was described as a ‘modern’ facility, with 22 beds and six bassinets. The current hospital was opened on June 22, 1984.

A look at Consort’s hospitals, from past to present. Consort’s original hospital, lower left, Consort Municipal Hospital, lower right, and today’s Consort Hospital and Care Centre, top.

To have a healthy holiday:

• Wash your hands
• Get your influenza immunization
• Stay home if you’re sick

www.albertahealthservices.ca

Be sure to visit our website for health advisories around the province.