

Living Well Luncheon informs us that Approach and Attitude towards Dementia are Changing.

A Living Well Luncheon was held this Friday January 25th to recognize “January is Alzheimer’s Awareness Month”. The lunch was compliments of Jerrett Life Celebration Centre Funeral Home in Thornhill. Jerrett provided a lovely sit-down meal while our luncheon attendees and exhibitors listened to speakers present on the topic of living well with dementia.

Mona Lancaster of Memory Lane Home Living Inc. was the Master of Ceremony for this engaging event that brought together experts in the field— community members who live with dementia and their care partners, dementia advocates, members of the Alzheimer Society and academics. Each of these presenters offered a unique perspective on living well with dementia in the community. According to Mona and many of the other speakers, Memory Lane represents an innovative approach to co-housing: it is designed to be a place where individuals a dementia diagnosis can be supported to actively participate in the community.

The conference opened with Dr. Elizabeth Kelson (Social Gerontologist Instructor and Researcher from Ryerson) who presented on the how communities can foster well-being and a good quality of life for persons living with dementia. She discussed how the desire to age-in-place is the goal of many older adults and communities need to be better able to respond. This includes the design of more inclusive social and physical environments. It became clear as Dr. Kelson spoke that communities play a key role in supporting this growing population through the creation of accessible public spaces, availability of services, as well as housing options that allow a person to remain where they feel they belong. In fact, this response is not only personal, but also political in the most basic and positive sense. Elizabeth contends that people with dementia have the right to be included in *all* aspects of civic life.

We also listened to an inspiring presentation by dementia advocate Mary Beth Wighton, Founder of Ontario Dementia Advisory Group (ODAG) and committee member of both the National and the Ontario Dementia Strategy. The ODAG encourages involving those with dementia in the development of policy changes. Her talk emphasized the importance of a social model of care that moves beyond a medical model to offer meaningful roles in the community for persons living with dementia. As someone with a dementia diagnosis since 2012, Mary Beth's message is to "make decisions with us not for us."

Betty and Fred Beaton shared the challenges of the journey of a caregiver and a loved one with a diagnosis of dementia. Their message was to face the challenges of the dementia journey together. Betty shared that her greatest gift to Fred has been her acceptance of her diagnosis and desire to live well with a dementia diagnosis. Early on the two connected with the Alzheimer's Society, who sent out support for Betty to improve her cognitive skills. With the appropriate cognitive work Betty knows her skill level has improved. Fred's gift to Betty is to demonstrate empathy on her good and bad days, and not do so much for her that she loses her sense of purpose. Their greatest words of wisdom were "to help others, instead of focusing on ourselves".

Our final speaker and guest of honor was Jaime Cruz from the Alzheimer's Society of York Region. She spoke passionately about the importance of changing the stigma associated with a dementia diagnosis. We are starting to see that even with a diagnosis we can live active and healthy lives, and she gave us some very impressive examples of individuals who do this.

For information regarding the speaker presentations, and the exhibitors who were invited to participate, please go to the website memorylanehomeliving.ca/events.