

Bethell Hospice continues care in challenging, uncertain times

By **ROB PAUL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Bethell Hospice is a staple in the Caledon community providing care for those dealing with an illness while allowing them to live their best life.

Its services help make the best of it for residents and their families, and it comes at no cost.

For essential community programs like Bethell Hospice to remain at their best, fundraising is a constant and major factor, but COVID-19 has made it more difficult to keep the community engaged.

"Every family who has been touched by Bethell Hospice has a different story," says Julie Hymers, Associate Director of Marketing and Communications for Bethell Hospice. "In the nine years I have worked there, thousands of people have spent their final days at Bethell Hospice, and thousands more have received support through our community programs. Every year, we must raise over \$1,000,000 to ensure that all hospice programs and services are available throughout our community at no cost to those who need them.

"While my role is to raise the profile of Bethell Hospice, and the money to allow its doors to stay open, I also have the chance to see firsthand how families are wrapped in the warmth and compassion of our nurses, PSWs, social workers and volunteers. The care they provide is, in a word, exceptional. Since the onset of COVID-19, fundraising has been a particular challenge. We are now in our second year of virtual-only events, ever-changing restrictions, and creative solutions."

Losing the personal and social touch of fundraising without members of the community being able to gather for events has made it more difficult for Bethell Hospice over the last year while dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

"The reason fundraising has been hard is because, pre-pandemic, so many of our fundraising events were things that were held in-person, either events we organized ourselves or events people in the community organized on our behalf and then donated the money to the hospice. With limitations on gatherings cutting down, it's very difficult to do fundraising in the traditional way. We've had to become really creative in terms of thinking of ways to allow fundraising to continue and thrive in the pandemic."

The human connections that have been built over years of work at Bethell Hospice between families and staff is one of the most difficult losses from fundraising events due to the current situation with the pandemic.

"A lot of our events have always gained a lot of energy from people coming together and supporting each other," she said. "That's been something in our hike in year's past where a lot of teams that sign up for the hike are formed by family members of former residents of the hospice and for those family members it's always been a really wonderful time for them to come back and re-connect with other families that they met during their time at the hospice. It also allows them to re-connect with some of the caregivers that had meant so much to them. That's an element that we really miss with the events we're doing now."

Without being able to spark passion and goodwill through live events, Bethell Hospice is trying to keep people involved through virtual events like their upcoming Hike for Bethell Hospice and their monthly raffles.

"We've tried our best to pivot and come up with some creative things. One of the newest things that has happened since the pandemic is we've done a monthly 50/50 online raffle. People can go online to our website and buy tickets with 50 per cent of the proceeds supporting Bethell Hospice programs and services directly and the other 50 per cent is the price for the individual. It's been going really well and last [month's winner] even decided to donate her winnings back to the hospice, which was pretty incredible."

In terms of how things have changed at Bethell Hospice, Hymers says the hardest part has been for families unable to be with the residents in the same way and losing the ability to embrace one another.

“Probably the biggest change is, normally in pre-pandemic times the hospice would be abuzz with family members visiting residents and friends coming and going, and there's family gatherings and special dinners and last moments together,” said Hymers.

“Unfortunately, during the pandemic, we've had to go to a model where there are only a couple of designated visitors who are able to come for each resident. It's been a difficult change, but essential to keep everyone safe.

“Our nurses, personal support workers, and volunteers who continue to work with our residents and their families would probably say the hardest thing right now is not being able to give a family member a hug when they need it. Everyone continues to do the absolute best they can through this and we're very hopeful that it won't be for too much longer that we're in this pandemic mode. Our nurses and personal support workers are specialists in the area of palliative care so they're the best people you could possibly have in this situation,” she said. “I'm sure none of us expected a year ago in March that we'd still be in pandemic mode now. It's something that we'd all love to see the other side of for sure.”

As the pandemic continues, Hymers remains hopeful the community will show support through fundraising efforts to make certain Bethell Hospice can continue long into the future with its programs and services.

“It's an ongoing challenge coming up with creative ways to move forward, but we're all really committed to this place,” she said. “We all want to do everything we can to ensure that it remains the important element of the community that it has been for so long.”

Those who wish to donate to Bethell Hospice can do so at bhf.akaraisin.com/ui/bhfdonations/donations/start and for more information on the monthly 50/50 raffle and upcoming fundraisers visit foundation.bethellhospice.org/category/upcoming-events