

# Hospice society offers service to the severely ill and their loved ones

**T**he Merritt and District Hospice Society provides a number of services and resources to those facing illness and their families. The local non-profit looks to address this uncomfortable but necessary topic.

Initially forming in 1986, the society has been providing support to terminally ill patients and their families for over 36 years. Their programs and services are offered by a team of roughly 20 volunteers, and one paid administrative position.



It is the firm belief of the society that no one should die alone, and their philosophy of care focuses on helping people “live until they die.” Hospice services are non-discriminatory, and always free-of-charge.

While the term “hospice” generally refers to either a service that aims to improve the quality of life of terminally ill patients, as well as support those who are affected by their death, or an actual building for caring for those who are dying, the definition of “hospice” is changing, according to Merritt and District Hospice Society Chair Jill Sanford.

“The concept has actually expanded a bit to include anyone who has a serious illness, which is one that there is no cure for, but they may not be actively dying. They may have breathing issues such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), or kidney issues, or any life-limiting illness.”

The services and resources offered to those with such life-limiting or terminal illnesses are expansive and wide in

variety. From casual conversation, companionship through letter-writing, and bedside sitting, to respite for caregivers and a library of resources for those struggling with grief, care is focused on the emotional rather than physical needs of the client.

*“We don’t actually do the physical care. We’re just there, and that’s an amazing thing,” said Sanford.*

“They’re surrounded by all sorts of doctors and health-care workers, but there’s nobody there to just sit and talk with them about anything that they want. That’s a big part of what we do. We support them through companionship. Home health nurses are excellent, and so are the support workers under their direction. But they can’t be there all the time.”

A plethora of physical resources are available in the society’s lending library, including books and pamphlets on bereavement and advanced care planning. The society offers resources geared towards both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Along with these physical supports, the society also focuses on community education and awareness through public talks on hospice issues, and community tables at community events. Sanford stressed that these issues are important to those of all ages.

“Even a 20 year old, who’s healthy as a horse, may want to start thinking about that. They might need to have somebody make decisions for them along the way. If you were in a car accident and you couldn’t speak, but decisions needed to be made about your care, your family or your representative can speak on your behalf. You’ll know they’re doing what you want and we call that advanced care planning.”

Volunteer Coordinator and Community Liaison Carol Fulcher is the society’s one paid employee, with various tasks including organising community events and three-day volunteer training sessions, criminal record checks, and