

To maintain a good quality of life seniors need more than the physical ability to go out and about as this story demonstrates.

"Aging is not for sissies" says Betty, member and volunteer at the Anne Johnston Health Station. "With so much information, change and such a hectic pace in today's world, especially in this electronic era, things can be positively overwhelming for anyone of any age." A senior herself (she refers to those in their early seventies as 'the young ones'), Betty is well aware of many of the needs of older adults in maintaining a good quality of life. And that's why she chose to become involved in her local community health centre.

Like all community health centres, the Anne Johnston Health Station in North Toronto, relies on its community for guidance, feedback and direction. It is an organization where the ideas and input of people like Betty Hatt are not only welcome, they are absolutely critical for all aspects of the operation. Betty, says, however, that it is "very much a two way street. By helping others and staying involved, I know I am also helping myself to stay healthy".

A recently completed Quality of Life Profile for Seniors done by the University of Toronto and the North York Public Health Department confirms Betty's personal perspective on health and well-being. Beyond the physical ability needed to get out and about, the study found that making one's own decisions, feeling one's life is accomplishing something and creating new personal challenges were every bit as critical to good health.

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"Where quality of life can be so threatened, community health centres play an important role with programs that are geared to preventing illness and to supporting people in ways that have real significance for them", claims Betty. "Most importantly, they provide opportunities for people to be part of something, to feel a sense of accomplishment and to learn new things." Which are the precise reasons why she volunteers at the community health centre.

Betty first became involved with the Anne Johnston Health Station when she decided to attend some group discussions on various health topics. From that point, there was no stopping her. Betty has provided peer phone support to other seniors, has volunteered for numerous events, has assisted in the coordination of a resource centre for 'the Station', and sits as a regular member of the Seniors Advisory Committee. Executive Director, Linda Jackson, says Betty's name is heard so often at the centre, that she originally thought Betty was a staff member!

From the perspective of Jean Emond, Volunteer Coordinator, and the rest of the staff, the community health centre could not exist without people like Betty. As a volunteer and as an active member, her role is "at the core of everything we do". Jean goes on to say, "the willingness to work with us along with other community members to discuss community needs and help shape our programs gets at the very essence of who we are. We are the

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community."

A busy senior, Betty has to be particular about how she spends her time. So, although she has volunteered in one way or another throughout her adult life, she looks for certain environments where she can feel that her work is of value. "I believe in the concept of community health centres, and think the role they have especially for seniors, is really important. The idea of people having a say in their own health care, programs based on ideas of wellness instead of concentrating just on illness, openness to alternatives and the community thrust...all of this combines into something I really want to be part of and contribute to."

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"And I am really made to feel that my contribution is worthwhile. I can get a real sense of accomplishment in providing direct support to other people, in seeing a resource library come together, and in feeling that my ideas are being heard, my skills being used and that I am indeed making a difference." Betty thinks that being able to make a contribution is so critical to building and sustaining a person's confidence. She wishes that more people in the community would or could volunteer. "You not only feel worthwhile by giving something to your community, you get so much back yourself by having new challenges, learning new things and knowing that you can continue to make a difference."

While Betty is quite adamant of the benefits to her of being involved, she also notes that it is nice to feel her contribution is so appreciated. "I've never been involved in a place where people are recognized so much for the work that they do....thank you cards, notes of appreciation, volunteer luncheons....these things go a long way to keep the spirits up and feel good about oneself. Besides the recognition...the friendly atmosphere, the sounds of laughter the fact that everybody knows and calls you by name....all of these things make it simply a nice place to be."

"Things are never perfect. I think there are a lot of things that the Anne Johnston Health Station can do to be better known and to provide even greater support to the community." Linda Jackson says that it is just that perspective that makes Betty, along with all of the volunteers and members so important to the community health centre. "Our community is integral to who we are and what we do. And we are so thankful to have such wonderfully talented people as Betty to help us to be all we can be".