

Nancy, a middle aged woman finds support in her decision to radically change her lifestyle and manage her deteriorating physical and mental health.

When 41 year old Nancy came to the North Lambton Community Health Center for the first time, she was ready to quit smoking. She had read an advertisement for a Smoking Cessation Group for Low Income Women and was hoping that this group could help her make this important lifestyle change. Her decision to quit smoking was made essential by her deteriorating health.

In Nancy's words, "When my heart specialist in London put me on a waiting list for cardiac surgery to replace my defective aortic valve, I was smoking about a pack a day. My physician advised me that my chances for a successful surgery would be improved if I quit smoking. It was so frustrating waiting to be called for surgery; I was never able to plan anything."

The date of the surgery kept being postponed, possibly because she was still smoking and was a poor surgical risk. "I just kept getting lazier and more depressed," revealed Nancy. Through the support of the group, Nancy was successful in her attempt to quit smoking and ten months later Nancy received a new aortic valve. She progressed through her convalescence without a hitch.

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"The Smoking Cessation Group was okay because of the information and support it provided but the real benefit to me was my relationship with the staff," stated Nancy during an evaluation of the program.

"My family doctor and cardiac specialist are sixty miles away, so I came to the Centre for the twice weekly blood tests following my surgery," explained Nancy. "The Nurse Practitioners were supportive during my recuperation and always answered my questions and followed up on my concerns." The Centre's proximity allowed her husband to return to his regular work schedule without further interruption. "Joe would have to take time off work, or I would have to spend the whole day in the city if the Centre was unable to do my blood work," said Nancy, "This made our life normal again sooner."

Her weight gain following cessation of smoking and surgery was approximately 25 pounds. By working with the CHC dietitian and modifying her lifestyles, she was able to lose weight and tone muscles with her daily walking program. "I found the walks on the beach not only gave me more energy but allowed me to feel better about myself because I was doing something that was good for me. I felt in charge of my life."

Nancy and her husband Joe have been married for nine years and have no children.

Out Of The Gutter

She had to leave her office job with a large banking institution due to restructuring. "I found the days very lonely and I was concerned about my mental health." revealed Nancy. She offered to help out occasionally at the Centre. Her organizational and people skills were outstanding as well as her creativity. Soon Nancy was designing a new bulletin board every month to help others understand the work of the Centre. Over the past few months she has developed into an active health promoter.

"This association with the Centre has done so much for my self esteem," Nancy intimated, "Like Joe says, it pulled me out of a gutter." Nancy credits everyone at the Centre for the support and encouragement they all gave her. "The welcome mat is always out at the Centre. Even if they have had a bad day or just had to tell someone some bad news, they have a smile and a hug for you when you walk in. The whole team works at making me feel special and they do a great job."

Nancy has been deaf since birth. She is able to communicate by reading lips and does this so well, people often have to be told that she can't hear. The one avenue of communication she finds impossible is over the telephone which adds to her sense of isolation. "Sometimes loneliness can be my worst enemy. Things always hurt more or are more severe when you are alone. I know I am not alone because of the staff at the Centre. I know I can go to the Centre with a problem and there will be someone there who will listen and help me. It doesn't have to be a health problem. The staff will support me in whatever need I have in any given situation."

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The staff quickly warmed to Nancy not only because of all the help that she was able to offer but because of her wonderful sense of humour. She brightens everyones day with her positive attitude which quickly overcomes her disability. Beautiful bulletin boards adorn the Centre due to Nancy's skilful talent. She also makes the best blueberry muffins in Ontario and often favours us with these treats.