



Complex care, Simple comforts

VHA Volunteers Give Parents a Break

Parent Relief Volunteer Program provides much-needed support to Scarborough moms and dads

Parenting can be challenging at the best of times. But if you're suffering from a severe illness, managing twins or triplets with little outside support, or trying to balance the demands of a special needs child

with your own, it can be an isolating and stressful road. For a number of parents in Scarborough, however, the road is a lot less lonely these days thanks to VHA's unique Parent Relief Volunteer

neighbourhoods." An extension of VHA's Parent Relief Program (which provides families with up to 30 hours of assistance from a Personal Support Worker), it offers referred families access to child care support for approximately three hours a week for up to four months. Volunteers are matched with families based on factors such as skills, language, availability, etc.

People Helping People

Of course the Parent Relief Volunteer Program is ultimately about the people it supports: a broad spectrum of families, all with their own unique challenges. "[The moms] are tired as they are often alone with their children for hours or even days at a time with little or no family support," notes Beverly Douthwright a high school teacher and PRVP volunteer.

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Program (PRVP) — a volunteer-based service, funded by both the United Way and VHA — that offers moms and dads a vital break from the demands of parenting.

A Unique Program

"The program is really about helping families who are having trouble coping from reaching a crisis situation," notes VHA Volunteer Co-ordinator Roseanna Wirt, who not only runs the program, but was also responsible for its design. Launched in 2006, PRVP serves families located in what the United Way defines as Scarborough's "priority

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VHA Volunteers Give Parents a Break



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(L to R) Beverly Douthwright (volunteer), Roseanna Wirt (volunteer co-ordinator), Mercidita Santos (volunteer)

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“They feel they have no one to discuss their baby or child care issues with. They often feel it is shameful to admit they are tired or that they do not know all the answers to their children’s care.”

Being a mother to twin babies can be exhausting at the best of times. But for Dawn*, who was recently diagnosed with cancer, the prospect of enduring chemotherapy *and* caring for her young twins was overwhelming. The stress of the illness was also taking its toll on her relationship with her husband. The PRVP volunteer cared for the twins, taking them out for some fresh air, while mom recovered from chemotherapy treatment. The free time the program provided also allowed Dawn and her husband to reconnect on an occasional “date night.”

Alicia used the additional support the PRVP volunteer provided to deal with her young son’s behaviour challenges. When the volunteer started working one-on-one with the boy, he didn’t speak and behaved quite aggressively. By the end of the experience, however, Alicia noted the volunteer had not only helped her son say his

own name and some of the alphabet, but also assisted mom in defining boundaries for her child. Alicia also reports that since enlisting support from VHA’s Parent Relief Volunteer Program, her son now shows a lot more self-control.

Others rely on the program to help cope with issues often experienced by new moms. Samara, a young mother in her early 20s, was struggling with post-partum depression and feelings of isolation. In fact, the health authorities were considering contact with the Children’s Aid Society because they were so concerned about the baby’s well-being. Though Samara’s husband was supportive, he was often at work putting in extra hours to meet the financial demands of the new baby. Fortunately, the VHA volunteer not only provided care relief for the baby so mom was able to attend treatment sessions for her post-partum depression, but also connected her to valuable community resources like the Ontario Early Years Centre. *The result?* Though not entirely over her depression, Samara is much more confident and well-equipped to cope with the day-to-day stresses of motherhood.

Volunteer Motivation

“The reasons for volunteering are as diverse as the people we serve,” says Roseanna. “Many are looking to give back to the community while some

view volunteering as an opportunity to gain valuable Canadian work experience.” Students, she notes, often get the chance to put academic theory into action while others see it as a great way to improve their English skills.

Volunteers are further supported through a broad range of materials — including information on children’s developmental stages, activity ideas and communication tips — and through monthly training meetings. The current all-female roster of volunteers is a small but dedicated group of 12 who range in age from 22 to 53 and includes: the VP of a mining company, a social worker from the Philippines, an ESL student and an early childhood education (ECE) assistant.

Whether faced with challenges such as multiple births, a special needs child or a chronic illness, VHA’s Parent Relief Volunteer Program is an invaluable service to the at-risk Scarborough communities it serves. “Volunteering with the PRVP is an extremely rewarding experience,” says Beverly of her participation in the program. “The joy and appreciation the families feel can easily be seen by the expressions on their faces. It is a joy to know that as a volunteer you have been able to make someone’s day a little brighter by extending some love and care to them.”

For more information on VHA’s Parent Relief Volunteer Program contact Roseanna Wirt at rwirt@vha.ca or 416.489.2500 ext 4327.

* Note all names have been changed to protect the privacy of PRVP recipients.



VHA Volunteer Profile

Adwoa K. Buahene

As a managing partner of n-gen People Performance Inc., a successful business that partners with clients to design and lead strategic people initiatives to improve workplace performance, Adwoa K. Buahene is understandably very busy. Somehow though she still finds time to volunteer as a board member for VHA. Adwoa discusses her past experiences and the importance of volunteering.

Tell me a little about your career background.

I have worked in a number of sectors, in a number of countries. Upon my return to Canada, I worked for York University, Schulich School of Business Executive Education Centre, managing training programs for both the public and private sector. In 2003, I left Schulich with a colleague and we started n-gen People Performance Inc.

How did you come to volunteer for VHA?

I volunteer for the United Way as a panel chair in the allocations review process. During my first year as a member, VHA was being reviewed. I was highly impressed by the mission, passion and organizational capabilities of VHA. I wanted to be a part of that fulfilling of the mission. I contacted Carol [CEO and President of VHA, Carol Annett] and Vik [VHA's Board Chair, Vikas Sharma], and was pleased to be asked to join the board. As a result, I was moved to a different United Way panel to avoid any conflict of interest.

What do you feel has been the board's biggest success and their biggest challenge?

I think one of the board's biggest successes happened before I joined. I was not present when VHA had to be very prudent fiscally as a result of government contract changes. The board, in conjunction with senior management, responded decisively and with vision, resulting in the current circumstance in which VHA continues to grow and expand, thereby being able to serve greater segments of the community.

The biggest challenge for this board, as would be for any board, is to remain on top of relevant issues. How

are the conditions and stakeholders changing? The speed of business has increased over time, as does the variability of conditions, so being responsive and adaptable to change is paramount to success.

What has volunteering for VHA taught you?

It has taught me to appreciate different points of view and to watch and learn from how others work through debates and issues. Also, I have come to learn a lot about the health care sector. Home health care is becoming an increasingly large part of the provision of health care in our province, so it is important to understand the infrastructure and the rationale behind this core industry.

Why do you think volunteering is important?

Volunteering is critical to being part of the solution, of being a part of the mechanism that makes society work. I was raised by parents who taught their children that giving back to your community should be part of every person's life. It is not an 'extra;' it is an intricate part of defining who you are.

*Comments
or Suggestions?*

Contact the editor of

COMMUNITY
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connection

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Eye On QUALITY

Preventing Falls

- Every four minutes, at least one senior visits an emergency department with an injury
- Every 20 minutes, at least one senior is hospitalized with an injury
- Falls are by far the most common type of injury for seniors
- Seniors accounted for 93 per cent of all in-hospital fall-related deaths

These staggering statistics from **Injuries Among Seniors in Ontario**, a recent report put out by the Ontario Injury Prevention Resource Centre (2007), are especially important in the coming years as the proportion of the senior population is expected to nearly double by 2031. In fact, if effective action is not taken, the report suggests that the province will need to build an additional **five hospitals** each with **200** new acute care beds to handle the projected influx of injured seniors.

These challenges have been on VHA's radar for the last few years as we've worked to improve reporting and documenting of significant events, proactively monitor quality and client safety issues and uncover opportunities for improvement.

In 2007, client falls were the most frequent significant event in Personal Support (PS) services, rising sharply from 2006. Because ongoing educational initiatives have increased awareness on the importance of

reporting and documenting risk (potential and actual) and safety issues amongst staff, we believe falls data were more accurately and consistently captured in 2007.

In late 2007 a **prospective analysis** was conducted on bathing-related falls during delivery of PS services. Through this analysis, ambulation and transfer processes were broken down into various steps. The discussion centred on identifying challenges and risks and developing strategies to prevent or minimize these issues. As a result, we're pleased to announce recommendations generated from VHA's prospective analysis are currently being implemented. These include:

- Training of Service Supervisors and PSWs around the risk assessment for falls
- Reviewing falls risk assessments at all PSW orientation/team meetings
- Ensuring training and client-centred care among PSW staff including client evaluation of physical, emotional and cognitive states to safely proceed with transfer/walking
- Developing a checklist for PSWs to assess and review the safety of the environment
- PSW completion of a bath and equipment assessment

VHA has also become actively engaged in a number of new falls prevention initiatives locally and regionally including: the *Comprehensive Falls Prevention Network* initiative of the Central LHIN and the committees associated with Toronto Public Health's *Step Ahead to Falls Prevention in Older Adults*. This enhanced level of participation and collaboration is particularly exciting and will directly contribute to improving our client safety outcomes.

We Welcome Your Support

MEMBERSHIP

VHA welcomes new members and encourages people of the communities we serve to participate in VHA's governance. VHA members are entitled to vote at our Annual General Meeting and are provided with ongoing information about operations and Ontario home care issues. VHA members may also participate in the work of our board and/or its committees. There is a membership fee of \$25.00 (which can be waived in special circumstances). For more information please contact Patricia Triantafilou at 416-482-4617 or patricia@vha.ca

DONATIONS

Charitable donations to VHA Home HealthCare make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in need of care and support in your community. Donations are welcome by mail, over the phone (credit card contributions) or in person. You may also want to make a "tribute gift" in honour of a loved one. To our 2008 donors, our sincere thanks for your generosity.

Honouring a Hero

VHA Heroes in the Home Award



(L to R) VHA PSW Halina Martyniuk, Helen Martens, Albert Martens

Every year, VHA Home HealthCare's **Heroes in the Home Award** recognizes the extraordinary efforts of a friend or family member who has gone above and beyond the call of duty to provide a loved one who is disabled, elderly or chronically ill with the support needed to live at home. While Albert Martens — a retired quality control inspector for General Motors in Oshawa — may not be able to leap over tall buildings, his unwavering devotion to caring for wife, Helen, is nothing short of heroic.

Married for over 51 years, Helen and Albert met at a Polish hall dance though, ironically, neither is from Poland: Albert is originally from Germany and Helen, from the former nation of Czechoslovakia. Even though both were seeing other people at the time, a spark ignited that night and Helen agreed to go on a date with Albert the next day. The love-struck couple quickly realized this was the person they had been waiting for and eventually

married and had one daughter.

Though Helen suffered from Muscular Dystrophy — a genetic disease which causes the progressive weakness and deterioration of movement-controlling skeletal muscles — it was still in its early stages at the time of their marriage. A few years later, in 1961, however, she was also diagnosed with kidney failure and needed two surgeries. Fortunately, the surgeries were very successful and Albert commends the doctors for “saving her life.”

While over time, Helen's Muscular Dystrophy began to take its toll, Albert didn't give the extra support Helen needed a second thought, noting, “I have to take care of my girl.” In fact, taking care of others is not new to Albert who says he's looked after numerous ailing relatives in the past including his father-in-law. “And he never really liked me,” notes Albert dryly. Though bedridden and weak, the truth of the comment makes Helen grin from ear to ear.

From transferring Helen from her bed to a wheelchair, to bathing, to household duties, Albert had done it all until a hernia operation over seven years ago forced him to seek extra help from a VHA Personal Support Worker (PSW) and frequent visits from a VHA Nurse, both of whom are funded by Central East's Community Care Access Centre.

“I was just impressed,” notes VHA PSW Halina Martyniuk, who nominated Albert for the Heroes in the Home Award and is typically at the Martens' home six days a week. Impressed, she adds, by his ability to persevere through life's ups and downs, his devotion to his wife's care and the obvious love he has for



Central East Manager of Client Services, Sue Beattie presents Albert Martens with Heroes Award

Helen. A love that he openly displays for all to see: a love poem and plaque commemorating the couple's 50th wedding anniversary is proudly displayed on their wall.

Clearly both Albert and Helen are heroes in their own right: Helen for keeping her spirits up even as her physical health and strength declines and Albert for never wavering in his commitment to caring for his wife no matter how challenging.

Offering complex care and simple comforts since 1925

VHA SERVICES

- ✓ Adult and Elder Care
- ✓ Child and Family Care
- ✓ Respite or Caregiver/Family Relief
- ✓ Palliative Care
- ✓ Mental Health Support
- ✓ Foot Care
- ✓ Attendant Care
- ✓ Extreme Cleaning
- ✓ Information and Referral Services
- ✓ Supplementary Staffing in Care Facilities
- ✓ Supportive Housing

VHA PROFESSIONAL STAFF

- ✓ Registered nurses/registered practical nurses
- ✓ Personal support workers/homemakers
- ✓ Client service coordinators/supervisors
- ✓ Other skilled professionals as required

VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of the United Way Toronto and a contracted provider with Toronto Central, Central, Central East, Central West, and Erie St. Clair CCACs, the City of Toronto's Homemakers and Nurses Services program and the Regional Municipality of Durham.

All services can be made available in your own home, in hospital or in a long-term care facility.



For more information, please call us at **416.489.2500** or **1.888.314.6622** or visit our web site at www.vha.ca



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