



VHA Voice

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New Online Palliative Care Toolkit Designed by VHA Caregiver Partners

“When my husband was diagnosed with ALS and immediately deemed palliative, our family entered into a new reality—a frightening and confusing reality in which we had no experience,” says Zinta Erdmanis, a VHA Client and Family Partner.

Stress and a sense of being lost at the start of their journey were common themes expressed by the caregivers on VHA’s Palliative Care Committee and were feelings they hoped to ease for people facing a similar situation.

“I wanted to help others who are facing a similar palliative diagnosis by providing an online resource that helps them navigate the social system and understand the options available to them,” adds Zinta. VHA’s Online Palliative Toolkit provides relevant resources thoughtfully chosen by caregivers, including:

- Articles on providing palliative care at home
- Support links to community resources and knowledge
- Tips and planning
- Upcoming events and information sessions

Visit the toolkit at: www.vha.ca/palliative

Have you seen our new lanyards?

You may have noticed that some of your VHA service providers are now wearing our new rainbow lanyards.

These lanyards represent that the staff member has completed LGBTQ2S training and is an ally of the community.



This newsletter is available in alternate formats on request.

Celebrating Creative Abilities

When people talk about the struggles of being an artist, it usually conjures images of creative and financial hardships. But for VHA client Tiffany, who has developmental differences and is non-verbal, daily physical challenges don’t stop her from exuding positivity and creating distinctive works of art. We chatted with Linda, Tiffany’s mom, about her inspirations as a painter and artist.

How does Tiffany communicate with others?

Tiffany doesn’t speak, however she has discovered many ways of expressing herself. She communicates through her expressions. One of the ways Tiffany communicates is through her paintings. She has been painting for more than 15 years with her close friend, Diane, who is a professional artist. She started when Diane invited Tiffany to her studio, lent her brushes and watercolours, and gave her the opportunity to paint. Tiffany enjoyed it so much that it became a regular affair.

Is that what led Tiffany to become an artist?

Yes, it’s from Diane that I learned you can teach somebody to paint. I always thought painting is a skill you’re born with and can’t acquire. There was a lot of experimentation with Diane. Then Tiffany started sharing her paintings and gave them away as gifts to her family. Eventually she started getting into art shows and exhibiting her work. In between, there was a world of learning all the essential steps to explore art and become an artist. It was important for Tiffany and the people around her, that she have a typical experience of a painter, just like everyone else. She has never been part of any disability group. She designs her own way with the support of people around her.



Tiffany's paintings vary from gentle images to vibrant ones.

Where does Tiffany get inspiration for her paintings?

Generally, Tiffany can’t tell us what’s inspiring her to paint. We just sit with her and talk about it and offer ideas on what we think she’s trying to express with her art. If she responds enthusiastically, then we know we’re getting close to what she’s trying to communicate. Once a month Tiffany has a group of people visit her to help her plan her life. Part of that meeting is to put names on the art that she has created. Everybody gets an opportunity to share their thoughts about the painting and whichever title gets Tiffany’s strongest reaction, that’s the title we pick, and sometimes a painting remains untitled. Tiffany’s paintings vary from gentle images to very vibrant ones with lots of action.

At the studio, there are lots of people who get together to paint, have lunch and socialize. Being a very social person, Tiffany sometimes just wants to visit and chat, not paint. I think it’s kind of typical with artists; they need to be in the zone to paint. What I’ve observed is that if she’s not inspired, she doesn’t paint.

Are there any other artists in your family?

No, I only remember that my father could draw well and I have a niece who had an artistic flare. When Tiffany was younger she never indicated an interest in painting. It’s more of a relationship thing. She started showing interest in art when she was in high school. She had a wonderful, caring teacher and it made her happy to study art. After high school she didn’t paint until she met Diane. And she really loves Diane. Part of it is a shared interest, so she can spend time with someone she likes and share painting with them. And this is part of how she goes about her life. When she shares a common interest with people, it helps her connect with them and build a relationship. Painting doesn’t just keep her busy, it’s a way of bonding with others.

How did painting change Tiffany and her relationship with people?

I think for her, painting just added another dimension to her life, and provided another role for her in her community, where she can be recognized as making a contribution. And for other people, I think one of the outcomes is that it changes their hearts and minds and how people see those with disabilities. Some are surprised that Tiffany is an artist. There have been many artists in the past who had their own challenges. One of our favourites is Maud Lewis, who did folk art. She suffered from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, which reduced her mobility, especially in her hands, and yet, she painted wonderfully. She helped people realize you don’t have to be fully abled-bodied and intellectual to have a fulfilling life.

For Tiffany, nothing is impossible. She has gone through many rough times with her health and it has required a lot of energy, concentration and a positive outlook for her to get through each day. However, she has become quite adaptable to change and the variety of her paintings express her strong will in a very powerful way.



Tiffany (right) has been painting with Diane (left) for more than 15 years.

Become a client partner and make VHA better!

VHA is always looking to improve. Share your voice and join the conversation. If you would like to share your thoughts and become a Client and Family partner at VHA, please contact **Stacey Ryan** at **647-460-8595** or **sryan@vha.ca** for more information.





Heart of Home Care AWARDS

Do you know a *spectacular* family caregiver? Nominations for our 2019 Heart of Home Care Awards are open!

Each year, VHA Home HealthCare recognizes the true heart and soul of home care—the family members and friends caring for people living with chronic disability and disease. Do you know an **unpaid caregiver** whose caregiving is nothing short of spectacular? Then why not submit a nomination? We are accepting nominations for Ontario non-professional caregivers until **January 31, 2019**.

Nominate at www.vha.ca/hohc

VHA'S Spectacular SPIRIT SURPRISE!

VHA's Spectacular Spirit Surprises!

Every holiday season, VHA works hard to make sure the holidays are extra bright for some of our clients and workers who could use a pick-me-up. We asked our staff to nominate clients, caregivers and colleagues they thought had a difficult time in 2018, and those they thought could use a boost to get into the spirit. Check out our featured videos online with the links below. Their stories prove that even the smallest acts of kindness can go a long way in bringing a smile to those who need it during the holiday season.



Anamarie Poblacion

Watch her video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritanamarie

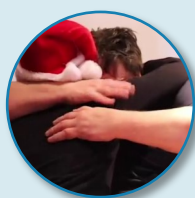
Anamarie has had a difficult year and was on a leave of absence from work. Her colleagues Raquel and Jeraldine knew they had to do something to bring her some holiday joy. "Oh my goodness! Can I give you a hug?" said Anamarie when we surprised her at the mall with flowers and a gift certificate.



Penny Green and Michelle James

Watch their video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritpennymichelle

Our Champlain Rehab Solutions staff in Ottawa were excited to surprise the Extreme Cleaning team with gifts this holiday season. Penny and Michelle's work is grueling and often unpleasant, but their attitude is overwhelmingly positive so we were delighted to show them some holiday love!



Scott Pack

Watch his video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritscott

VHA client Scott has spent the year trying to better himself. Despite some emotional struggles, he has persevered and continues to keep a positive attitude.

December is never an easy time for him, so his nurses Sarah, Cassandra, and Rita wanted to give him a holiday pick-me-up! "I can't believe it!" exclaimed Scott as he received his gift. Get ready with the tissues for this one.



Dionne Morgan

Watch her video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritdionne

Dionne is a VHA Care Team Supervisor who is loved by her staff and clients alike. She is always positive and helpful. When her colleague, Felister, found out that she could give Dionne a surprise holiday pick-me-up, she couldn't help but nominate her. Her reaction will bring a smile to your face!



Susan Hong Logie

Watch her video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritsusan

Susan is an amazing mother who goes above and beyond—staying up late many times to make sure her son is cared for. His nurse Nahar thought Susan could use some well-deserved time to herself and asked us to help surprise her with a spa day for the holidays. The gesture left her emotional and a little overwhelmed. "Oh, how wonderful! Thank you very much to nurse Zahar for nominating me. It's very touching and heart warming," notes Susan.



Carrol Smalling

Watch her video at bit.ly/spectacularspiritcarrol

Despite some health issues, Carrol still goes above and beyond for her clients and colleagues. Her co-worker, Lisa, wanted to show Carrol her appreciation by surprising her. Instead we were the ones surprised in this video. Be sure to watch and laugh!



Loved our newsletter? Thought we missed something? Want to be profiled or contribute?

We're interested in hearing your ideas, stories and suggestions! Email communications@vha.ca or call 416-489-2500 ext. 4344, toll free at 1-888-314-6622 ext. 4344. We want to hear from you!

We're All Ears!

