

# There to offer a hug, or an ear to listen



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## ROYALWOOD

Gerri Wilkinson vividly recalls her first shift as a Palliative Manitoba volunteer at Riverview Health Centre.

"The social worker asked me to stay late. A lady had been brought who was unresponsive. Her family was on the way but was delayed. I held her hand for 10 minutes."

Suddenly, the patient opened her eyes and said, "You'll never know how much I love you," thinking Wilkinson was a loved one.

Wilkinson was able to share this with the family when they arrived in the event the patient couldn't. "As a volunteer, one can be an important communication tool."

Wilkinson has remained a Palliative Manitoba volunteer for 11 years.

"Sometimes all people need is a hug or an ear to listen. We're all in this life together; we should have each other's backs," the South St. Vital resident said.

According to Palliative Manitoba's website,



Photo by Tanya Misseghers

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the organization promotes compassionate care for Manitobans touched by any life-threatening condition, or bereavement, and provides services and education complementary to the formal health care system.

Volunteers complete an application and screening process. If successful, they attend an eight-week Compassionate Care Course and commit to one year of service.

"I've always loved talking to people and being open to their stories," Wilkinson said.

Volunteer roles include visiting patients and families plus a range of grieving support programs for adults, kids, and teens.

"Many patients can't say things to their

families and vice-versa. They will talk to a volunteer. It helps them get rid of stress," acknowledges Wilkinson.

Palliative Manitoba volunteers also assist with fundraising events like the Celebrate Life Breakfast. The Memory Tree at St. Vital Centre is an annual program where donations are accepted.

"The Memory Tree is my favourite," says Wilkinson. "It means so much to families to write a personal message on a card and hang it on the tree. I see some families every year — it's part of their holiday traditions."

Wilkinson believes Palliative Manitoba makes a difference in the community. She encourages readers to volunteer and give. "People are living longer and families aren't always close by. There is a greater need."

Palliative Manitoba's annual Celebrate Life Breakfast takes place Thurs., April 27, 2017 at the Metropolitan Entertainment Centre (The MET). The guest speaker will be Charlie Spiring, of the Spiring-Degelman Wealth Management Group at National Bank Financial.

To support Palliative Manitoba, call 204-889-8525, visit [palliativemanitoba.ca](http://palliativemanitoba.ca), or email [info@palliativemanitoba.ca](mailto:info@palliativemanitoba.ca)

*Tanya Misseghers is a community correspondent for Royalwood.*