

Sharing Success

*Project S.H.A.R.E. (Support, Housing, Awareness, Resources and Emergency) –
Niagara Region, Ontario*

It is sometimes said that we are all just one illness, one job loss or one tragedy away from poverty.

And as Diane Currieⁱ looked at the disconnection notice from the gas company that she had just received, and thought about her children and seriously ill husband, she reflected on how much we can sometimes take for granted.

Just a few months before, this wife and mother of two was a full-time employee of a company in Welland, a small community in the Niagara region. Then her husband became so sick that he needed kidney dialysis and a transplant.

She struggled to help her husband and keep her job until it became too much. Then she left her job to be at her husband's side. But Bob's fixed disability pension only went so far, especially in the face of rising gas and electricity bills.

As his battle with kidney disease took its toll, Bob felt that he was slowly losing his independence and his dignity. Diane was feeling the same way as she held the disconnection notice and, reluctantly, came to the conclusion she had to find some help.

That same day, as she walked into Project S.H.A.R.E., a non-profit charitable organization in Niagara Falls, Diane made a commitment to herself to become a volunteer.

"I thought, what better way to repay the community but to become a volunteer," says Diane.

Project S.H.A.R.E., which stands for Support, Housing, Awareness, Resources and Emergency, offers food, housing and crisis help to people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. They received over \$345,000 from the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) to renovate a new facility in Niagara Falls.

"We feel very lucky to have received that money," says Elaine Harvey, the Executive Director of Project S.H.A.R.E.. "Without it we wouldn't be where we are today. The new building allows us to have a wide range of services all under one roof."

A food bank, drop-in centre, resource room and numerous programs to help the homeless in the community can all be found under that roof. Clients take an active role in these efforts, operating a Food Co-op to help Project S.H.A.R.E. and to provide support to one another.

"They raise funds, organize toy and book exchanges, bring in guest speakers and hold social events," explains Elaine. "They have said to me, 'you were there for us so we'll be there for you.'"

Diane Currie became the chairperson of that Co-op, having already volunteered as a warehouse supervisor and an emergency food intake worker in return for food for her family.

By 2000, Bob's body had weakened further as his kidneys began to fail. Diane continued to support him and the flexibility of her volunteer work allowed her to be there with him when she was most needed.

Then life for Diane and her family started to improve. She was hired by Project S.H.A.R.E. to do janitorial work once a week. In 2001, she received an award in appreciation of over 1,000 hours of service. Most importantly, after a year of tests, Bob learned that he could receive a kidney transplant from his sister.

Diane is now employed five days a week at Project S.H.A.R.E. doing reception and intake.

And, unlike so many of us, she doesn't take anything for granted. "Not one day goes by where I don't thank God for Project S.H.A.R.E.," says Diane. "I'll never forget what they've done for me."

ⁱ No names have been changed. Permission was given by all individuals named in this story.