



LISAARD &
INNISFREE
HOSPICE

Winter 2021

A Message from Maria Empringham, DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL SERVICES

As the seasons change and Autumn is upon us, I find myself reflecting on the word “goodbye”. It’s a word we often use without thinking too much about it. And it’s a word that takes on tremendous power — and is never more heartfelt, difficult, or permanent — than when we’re faced with the terminal illness of someone we care about.



Throughout my years here, it has been my privilege to support many families and their loved ones through their end-of-life journeys. As a team, we’ve also had the opportunity to support our staff and volunteers in caring for their loved ones. And it has been an honour to walk with a coworker through her own end-of-life experience; as a team, it has been one of our greatest challenges and, at the same time, one of our greatest rewards.

The pandemic has created challenges for everyone, and in our Houses, its impacts have constrained our ability to provide the physically supportive care for families we’re used to. We frequently reach out to put an arm around or hug a grieving family member, and have found ourselves unable to offer caring gestures like this for over a year and a half. Bound by social distancing, masks, shields, and gowns, it took time to navigate how to show compassion, empathy, and sympathy from behind the barriers — even now, it’s still a struggle. As we move with the world towards more freedoms, there’s a glimmer of hope that we’ll return to the warmth of our ‘normal’ in the months ahead. And we’ll welcome that normal with our arms wide open!

All my life, I never dreamed of being anything other than a nurse — in fact, I was the kid playing with the Fisher-Price hospital while everyone else played with dolls, cars, or games. And well before I was a nurse, in my personal life I was exposed to the type of end-of-life care that exemplifies what we do at Lisaard & Innisfree Hospice: focusing on things that matter in someone’s life — big or small — while facing death. Those experiences drew me to palliative care, and I’m so grateful to work with others who share and demonstrate that same passion.

It’s the generosity of our community that powers our mission to Make Moments Matter, and for that we are so grateful. Thank you for helping us continue to provide exceptional care for families and their loved ones — it means so much to everyone who comes through our doors.



I WAS CARED FOR - AND NOW I CARE FOR - Our Residents and Families

It’s difficult to find someone who hasn’t been impacted by the loss of someone they love. It’s also difficult to find staff and volunteers at Lisaard & Innisfree Hospice that haven’t been touched by hospice care, whether in one of our Houses, or elsewhere.

The experience here is gentle and reverent to each individual we serve. Over our more than 25 collective years, we have touched thousands of lives in our community, many of whom return to help serve others. We’d like to introduce you to Lainy Gilbert, one of our palliative care nurses, who shares her journey to our team.

See Lainy’s Story... ►

“It’s so important for me to make a connection with residents and families, and I take the lead from them on how to best support them. As a team, we can see ourselves in the family dynamics – whether it’s a person losing a parent, a young mom with kids, or a partner losing their spouse – and we give families the time and space they need while taking care of them all. People often associate death with gloom and heaviness, and there’s no doubt it’s difficult – but there can also be beauty in loss. There is so much lightness at Lisaard & Innisfree – physical, spiritual, and emotional – and we offer many resources along the end-of-life journey and beyond into bereavement.”

Lainy’s Story

Most people think of January as the New Year, but for me, the fall is really the beginning of the year. It’s a time of change for me and my family – school starts, new routines are set, and it’s interesting for me to think back about the roads that led me here.

I’d worked in hospitality for 20 years, and the late nights didn’t work with raising a young family. I always had my eye on a career supporting others since the diagnosis and loss of our baby daughter Isabelle in 2000. After her death, my husband and I attended a grief support group, and I then undertook a role facilitating programs for others who had lost a child. I knew it was important to be in a role of service having been through the experience of loss myself. It was very rewarding, and that’s when I realized this was a space where I was comfortable and could make a difference.

My mother was admitted to Lisaard House in 2005, and even though it was a distressing time, I always felt safe and supported, and my kids were able to be kids there – to play in the gardens, and watch the birds and butterflies. I wasn’t familiar with hospice then, and was amazed that it’s such a beautiful home-like setting; we could come and go as we needed,



and there were always friendly faces. Mom loved having her nails done, and we would take her bed into the sunroom to do that while she enjoyed the bright, warm peacefulness of the house.

When my youngest began kindergarten, I went to Conestoga College to talk to a counsellor. I knew nursing was in my future; I was comfortable in the grief space, and the aptitude tests reinforced my skills and interest, specifically in palliative care – so back to school I went. During that time, I watched them break ground to build Innisfree House in my neighbourhood, and I knew that’s where I wanted to work. My heart was set on being part of the team, and I wouldn’t take no for an answer – literally! – to land my dream job.

When Innisfree opened, I was a direct-service volunteer providing bedside care, which gave me great insight into the importance of supporting our community at end-of-life. In 2018, my father-in-law was facing a terminal illness,



and I was so proud our family chose Innisfree to spend his final days. The time he spent here was a treasure, giving family members space and time to visit as long as they liked. And my boys were able to ride their bikes to visit Grandad on their own, which was priceless.

A year after his death, our family held a tribute to him with fellow musicians and hundreds that enjoyed his singing and strumming over the years. We raised \$10,000 that night to support Lisaard & Innisfree Hospice and bring more awareness to this gem in our community.

I know how it feels to be taken care of at such a vulnerable time, and I’m able to translate my experiences into my care for our residents and their families. I let them set the tone and provide guidance and direction along their unique journey. When I think about coming full circle, to me it represents that I’ve survived my personal losses and reframed my life with them in mind.

Losing people I’ve loved has given me a valuable perspective on life, and has opened my eyes to what’s really important.



“We are specialists in the field of pain and symptom management and do so with kindness, compassion, and authenticity. I’m so proud of the team I work alongside with, providing individualized resident care and supporting families. Our specialized team of nurses, PSWs, physicians, pharmacists, social workers, music and spiritual therapists, our operations crew that work tirelessly behind the scenes, and of course our incredible volunteers – we’re a cohesive group all dedicated to supporting the quality of life for those at the end of theirs.”

**MAKING
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