



# Mary Centre Newsletter

Committed to enhancing the lives of people with a developmental disability

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## Mary Centre Needs Your Help To Help Others

By Paula Antonello Moore, The Catholic Register

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The staff of Mary Centre devote their lives to one main goal; to ensure that adults with disabilities are provided with suitable residence and the chance to live a normal daily life. But with ever-growing cuts to funding and increasing demands their resolve is being tested.

Founded in 1988, the Catholic based centre is supported by ShareLife, the funding arm of the archdiocese of Toronto, through Catholic Charities and also receives funding from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Community and Social Services and private donations.

Now the centre faces challenges such as growing pressure to maintain programs and services while simultaneously dealing with poor enrolment in community colleges in developmental services or social work, and ongoing requests for new residents.

"We reduce training, public relations to bring a balanced budget to keep the agency going," said Dominic Conforti, executive director of Mary Centre, in an

interview from his North York headquarters. "We need additional staff to help the residents as they get older. The government has put money into this sector but more so in salary and benefits for staff. It hasn't put it into services and programs. As residents get older, we need more staff.

Residential services in Brampton, Toronto and Woodbridge for adults provide wheelchair accessible homes in residential neighbourhoods. Each contains four to five people and are staffed in daily shifts or offer 24-hour caregivers. None of the people in the group homes can be left alone. Residents come to Mary Centre through referrals from government, families, doctors and social workers. The families remain connected with Mary Centre during their loved ones' entire stay.

"Most we support have lived in an institution," said Conforti. The government is closing (these) provincial institutions."

Three sites are owned by the archdiocese of Toronto; St. Mary's in Brampton with five residents, Our Lady of Victory

with eight and three at St. Peter's in Woodbridge.

You wouldn't even know that it's a group home," Conforti added. The houses include ramps, chair lifts and other features that allow for easier mobility of residents themselves.

The Supported Independent Living program offers the alternative to group living, where residents live independently in apartments with staff assistance.

"Archdiocese apartments are very nice one bedrooms," he said. "Staff meet with them on a regular basis to do laundry. Rent is geared to income."

Integrated Senior Programs offer people over 50 years of age the chance to choose leisure activities, education and/or volunteer opportunities that encourage integration with others. Staff provide transportation to and from activities such as shuffle board, cards, crafts, swimming and stay with residents until the activity ends.

The Respite Program offers relief to caregivers of adults with developmental disabilities. In

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house support workers offer assistance in life skill development, social integration and access to recreation or host families who provide short-term relief so residents can go and spend time with another family. "Many families need a break to go grocery shopping, to a movie or vacation," said the executive director. "We put qualified staff into the house to teach (life) skills to that individual so that it is less difficult if the parents leave."

There are also faith-based outreach programs in parishes and religious communities of all faiths. "They can be joyful and boisterous," said Conforti of parishioners with developmental disabilities. Mary Centre works with parish social ministry groups to help create a comfortable atmosphere for the parishioners and their parishes.

There are also volunteer opportunities, meeting with residents one-on-one or helping out in other ways such as house repairs.

"Community volunteers who become friends to our residents help bring them to church, to breakfast, read the Bible, take them swimming, approximately 45 who do a variety of things with our residents," Conforti said. Yet there are other offices to fill.

"Our public relations people are volunteers. We're non-profit and have 14 individuals who make up our voluntary board of directors," he added. "Board members have brought skills we didn't have. There are lawyers, accountants, social services,

engineers with experience in properties."

Still, money is always a worry. Fund-raising events like a night out at the Famous People Players or golf tournaments help sustain things but far more is needed.

"There are many changes in their needs as they get older: Alzheimer's, cancer, mobility issues, and they're living to a ripe old age too," Conforti pointed out. He said that many families in the community need the type of support Mary Centre provides.

"We can easily double the amount we currently have, since approximately 5,000-6,000 individuals are waiting in Toronto for these services," he noted.

In spite of all the challenges, Conforti has worked for 30 years in the field because of the many rewards that come with the job.

"Having that dedicated staff to work with is a real joy. And the residents, I never get a word in. they just talk," he chuckled.

"Some of the residents have even been to my house. For me to be in a small agency and still have contact with residents is a real joy."

For Conforti, part of the future is keeping on the government's agenda to ensure that residents are cared for the rest of their lives.

"Mary Centre is a joy to work for," he said. "Yes, there are challenges but we work through them."

For more information on Mary Centre call (416) 630-5533.

(Reprinted with the permission of the Catholic register.)

## Going To Church

By Bill Magladery

I started going to the Anglican Church of the Good Shepherd in 1999. With the help of a former worker, Angela Pearce, I made a list of local churches and I chose the Church of the Good Shepherd because it was the closest to where I lived.

The minister's name is Father S. Brown. I feel that he is the right minister for me because I am able to talk with him quite a lot after the services. He understands what I want to say and whenever something important comes up, my worker Shawn Michael Kernaghan has accompanied me to help out with asking the more difficult questions. For the past two years, Father Brown has attended by annual Personal Support Plan meeting with Mary Centre. He is now helping me deal with the recent loss of a very close friend.

I go to the 8 o'clock service where I follow the scriptures in the Book of Common Prayer and take communion when it is time to go up to the communion rail. At the end of the service, I shake hands with Father Brown as well as talk with the other parishioners. I like the service at 8:00 a.m. but I would like to try going to the 10:30 a.m. service some time in the future.

I feel included there, as I have been invited to a couple of events. In the past year, I have attended a corn and wiener roast and a pre-Christmas luncheon at the Church.

I look forward to going to Church to pray and it helps me to remember family and loved ones. I hadn't gone to church for eight or nine years. I missed going and then decided to return. I feel good for going back.

## We value our corporate sponsors - and hope for many more!

Have you ever wondered how Mary Centre funds the many programs and services that are critical to our mission? It's true that funders such as the Ministry of Community, Family and Children Services provide operational money to provide care to our residents. And Catholic Charities helps with allocations to support our "non-funded" programs, such as Parish Outreach and Respite.

But this money is never enough. That's why donations from individuals and foundations are so important. And why the Board of Mary Centre has committed itself to an ambitious fundraising effort. There are two major events a year:

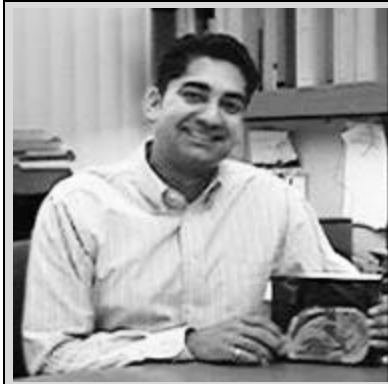
- Mary Centre's Golf Tournament - see the story on our 3rd Annual event in this newsletter.
- Mary Centre's Dinner Theatre with the Famous People Players - our 5th event is scheduled for November 14, 15 2002.

The success of these events is largely due to the support we have secured from the business community - whether it's as a hole sponsor or prize donor at the Golf Tournament, or with the purchase of a corporate table at the Dinner Theatre.

In previous years, many of these corporate sponsors have been introduced to Mary Centre through a personal connection of

the Board. But of course, there is a limit - you can only go to the "same well" so many times. **It's critical that we identify and develop ongoing relationships with new corporate sponsors.** For example, we are most hopeful that our many suppliers - companies from whom we buy goods and services - will see the value of supporting our special work.

Do you know of a potential sponsor? Would your company be interested in developing a relationship with Mary Centre? Please contact our office. We value your support. And we'll be happy to welcome you into the Mary Centre family.



*Photo of Nazim Ali*

Nazim Ali, Operations Manager-Toronto for **Enbridge Consumers Gas**, proudly displays the commemorative Mary Centre crystal. We present these to corporate table sponsors of our Dinner Theatre event to say, "**we value your support.**" Enbridge has been a sponsor for three years. "We'll be back for a fourth year!" says Nazim.

## A Salute To Darlene Dowling

Mary Centre has been fortunate in having extremely dedicated staff over the years. One of those employees is Darlene Dowling. For ten years, she has been committed to the well-being of the residents of Mary Centre. In those years, Darlene has certainly done quite a lot for the agency. She was first employed on a part-time basis in June 1992. In September 1993, she then started working overnight awake at Redcastle. In November 2001, she accepted a full-time position as residential counselor at Redcastle.

Her spirit of compassion and a strong commitment has made it a great pleasure to have her on the Redcastle team. Darlene has been a great asset and comfort to her co-workers and the residents. She is understanding, supportive and valuable to us in everything that she does. She is most definitely a vintage blend.

Her friends.

# GOLF 2002!

Thanks to our dedicated Board members, staff and volunteers we enjoyed a day in the sun and managed to raise money for Mary Centre Programs. We would like to thank all our donors for their generous contributions.

680 News  
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## Scotia Capital

Marg Eisnor, one of our faithful volunteers, won the putting contest, a \$500 certificate for Delawana Inn. Bill McIntyre who scored the Closest to the Hole won \$120 worth of personalized Golf Balls. Simon Pyn hit the farthest on the Men's Longest Drive and won a Glen Loates signed lithograph in a beautiful frame valued at over \$1,000. Marilyn Payne won a day at the Elmwood Spa for her Longest Drive. There was also a prize for every participant, including the volunteers and we would like to thank Silver Lakes for making our day run smoothly.

See you all next year same time, May 27, 2003 and same place.



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WWW.MARYCENTRE.COM

If you would like more information about Mary Centre and/or you would like to make a donation, please clip out this section, complete the information and return to our office.

- I would like more information about the agency
- I would like information on becoming a volunteer

I enclose a donation of: \$200.00  \$100.00  \$50.00  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque enclosed. I wish to use my Visa Card  Amex

Card# \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like to donate a gift in kind. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
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