



GRATITUDE

L'Arche Winnipeg Newsletter #81



Life in L'Arche Homes During a Pandemic

by Kadian McNuff
Homes Coordinator

Kadian has been a member of L'Arche Winnipeg for seven years. She first lived as an assistant in a L'Arche home, and later became a House Leader. For the last four years, she has been working out of the L'Arche office as a Homes Coordinator.

The year 2020 will be one for the history books. A year that deserves its own college course. And come December, when we are looking at the year in review, I am sure COVID-19 will dominate our story. Stories of how we coped and the collective grief we felt, but also stories of how we held space for each other as we journeyed together. Before I get ahead of myself, let me rewind. I'd like to take a closer look on the logistics of dealing with a pandemic and how we are currently living it in our community.

As a child growing up in the Caribbean, the threat of hurricane is a yearly occurrence. Something we plan for by tracking its movement almost precisely and taking cover as it approaches. COVID-19 on the other hand, an unseen virus, required a lot more planning. The L'Arche Winnipeg Coordinating Team gathered in March to work on the *Pandemic Preparedness Plan*. It included details such as: what to stock up on, where to isolate, who to report to, etc. Gathering Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) proved challenging, as everything was sold out. Thankfully, with the wonderful support of our community members, we had many people volunteering to make PPEs. ZOOM video conferencing instantly became the platform that connected us. Meetings and community events were moved online. To help facilitate these virtual connections, tablets were purchased for each house and the internet services were upgraded as well.

Plans, equipment and devices are nice to have, but how were we as a community and individuals really liv-



Kadian (right) in a pre-pandemic celebration of Anita's birthday at a restaurant.

ing? To get a clearer picture, I turned to Jessy for her outlook as a live-in assistant.

With everything on lock down, leaving people to spend more time together, Jessy discovered gifts and passions in others that she didn't know existed - from talented guitar players to visual storytelling. Jessy attributed these discoveries to people simply spending more time together. Additionally, they would go for walks, listen to music, dance, cycle, jog and have BBQs. They stayed connected with friends

and family by making phone calls and video chats and even visiting the grave of loved ones.

Jessy admits that in the beginning, things were hectic and they all worried how they would fare with so much uncertainty. After all, a trip to Disney and plans for a holiday in Mexico were put on pause for two core members. Jessy expressed that it took a lot of encouragement to get people to engage in other activities. Staffing was also a concern, but with some flexibility and dedicated teammates, they were able to cover the needs of the home.

On a more personal level, Jessy became sick with some red flag symptoms of COVID-19, but tested negative. She shared that, during her time in quarantine, she felt like she belonged to a real family and the support she received was overwhelming. The genuine expression of love was felt deeply.

In conclusion, though this year has presented some challenges, it has also presented us with opportunities. Opportunities to be more connected to each other, a realization of what is truly important, what isn't, and hope that we will see better days.



Finding creative ways to celebrate during the pandemic: members of a L'Arche home bring their birthday wishes to Stacey in April.

To Walk, or Not to Walk?

by Hubert Pantel

When, back in February, we launched our 15th annual **Vickar Automotive Group's Walk with L'Arche**, we had no idea of how everything would change the following month.

The "stay at home" and "no large gatherings" directives meant we had to cancel the May 3rd Walk gathering at Oxford Heights Community Club, which usually attracts over 300 people.

Our initial thought was to postpone the event until the fall. Upon further reflection, we wondered about people being overwhelmed with too many other events postponed "to the fall", which was also problematic: would restrictions still be in place then? Do we want to incur the cost of re-publicizing the event, print new brochures? Some people had already registered and collected pledges. Finally, we decided to cancel the gathering but keep the Walk Pledge Drive going. We thought we might still raise \$25,000 - 50% of our budgeted goal - and hoped to make it to \$30,000. We extended the Pledge Drive by a month - to the end of May - and encouraged the use of secure, online credit card donations.

Then, in April and May, something else, also unexpected, happened. We were overwhelmed by the support and generosity of our faithful friends and donors whose pledges kept coming in. Some donors gave larger amounts than previous years, others gave more than once. Our top fundraiser for the past few years, Hazel (picture) outdid her previous accomplishments by breaking the \$5,000 level: with the help of her friend Kathy, she raised \$5,270.00 for L'Arche! By the end of May, we had raised over \$59,000 - just \$2,000 less than the previous year's total. Six major corporate sponsors and 287 individual donors helped make our "virtual walk" an unexpected success.

Equally touching were the messag-

es of support and encouragement that accompanied some of the donations (see text box).

We were pleased as well to see that a number of people did their own individual Walk for L'Arche on May 3rd in their own neighbourhoods, and sent us their pictures - see page 4 for some of these pictures.

On behalf of everyone at L'Arche, **thank you** for your generous support of the **2020 Vickar Automotive Group's Walk for L'Arche!**

Thank you for the wonderful work that you do for L'Arche. It is a privilege for us to support such a caring team and such a wonderful organization... - *Rene F.*

I miss seeing all of you at L'Arche Cafe. I know how difficult this time is on all of you! - *Bonnie S.*

Stay safe and thank you for all the support you give to those with disabilities... - *Noreen E.*

Thank you for your compassionate, supportive, and valuable work... - *John M.*

I support the generous work that you do. You play an important role in promoting the dignity of all people... - *Donald B.*

I hope this (*donation*) helps achieve your goal, since the pandemic must be hard on charities at this time... *Yvonne V.*

Enclosed is my donation to help in these trying times... *Cecile M.*

It is a pleasure to (*help*) provide social opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. What a good work ... *Francoise R.*

God bless you all in the work you do, especially at this difficult time. Thanks for your excellent care of everybody. Praying for your ongoing care and programs ... *Joanne N.*



Hazel (left) and Kathy proudly wearing their 2020 Walk T-shirts. As top walk fundraiser, Hazel collected a total of \$5,270.00

Quarantune

"We could all use a little joy right now" was the message/invitation from the Communications Team of L'Arche Canada last month. The invitation was for L'Arche members to create a video of themselves singing or dancing to the song "Tiny Lights". Within 48 hours, 209 videos were submitted!

The videos were mixed together to create this "Song of Hope" (already viewed over 15,000 times) which you can view here:

https://youtu.be/t_pARR9_QDE



Finding God's Love in the Midst of a Pandemic

by Jim Lapp
Community Leader

"O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good: for His steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those He redeemed from trouble."

- Psalm 107 v. 1-2

Throughout my life I have had many experiences confirming that the Spirit of God is always with us. That Spirit of Love wants only the best for all of us. I KNOW this from my experiences. But at times the fear of the unknown has overwhelmed that knowledge.

I am 68 years old and there has never been an event in my life that is even close to being as disruptive as the pandemic we are in. When the pandemic really hit Manitoba in the middle of March. I became very fearful for our community members, my family members, and my friends. I was especially concerned for older people I know because they, like me, are in the high risk group. I think the fear came from not really knowing what we were dealing with. Would dozens of my friends, including L'Arche members, die? I, of course, asked myself if I would die. As a cancer survivor, I think I am about as peaceful around my own death as a human being can be. But the fear of death is part of our DNA and it cannot be denied. At times that fear for myself and others overwhelmed me.

Now, almost three months later, we still don't know much about Covid-19 except that it can be controlled with good public health measures like physical distancing, hand hygiene, and staying home when you are sick. By the grace of God and the cooperation with public health directives by most of the people of Manitoba, Covid-19 has been well controlled here in Manitoba, and all the members of L'Arche Winnipeg have been safe.

But as I reflect back over the last three months, the struggle with Covid-19 in the end has not been about fear, but about love and compassion. Whenever I see love and compassion, I know that it is God's Spirit working within the people dis-



Roger is given props reflecting the "colors of the rainbow" theme of our February community Lenten retreat. The rainbow reminds us of the God-with-us covenant and mercy - with hope that we will see better days.

playing the compassion. I have seen a great deal of compassion in all the members of L'Arche Winnipeg. The members with a disability have been amazing. They have had to stay

home and not go to their day programs, stores, and restaurants. Through them I have discovered that take out from Tim Horton's or McDonald's is just not as good as actually going in the restaurant and enjoying a meal or coffee! They have adjusted to their new life as well as anyone could. The assistants and support workers in our homes, staff members working in the office and at the Café have put in extra time and effort to make sure everyone was safe and doing well. We looked after each other. Our Board of Directors was very supportive and encouraging as they started meeting almost weekly on Zoom. And, as it states elsewhere in this newsletter, our supporters encouraged us through the Virtual Walk with L'Arche. I particularly appreciated their notes and phone calls of encouragement. I will be forever grateful for the support everyone connected with L'Arche Winnipeg has given to each other, and I am sure that will continue as we deal with this pandemic.



Linda's Wish premiered last June to a full house at the Park Theatre in Winnipeg. This short film by Monique Pantel is now available online, you can view it at:

<https://youtu.be/GJAvY1i9LyU>



Café Re-Opens

L'Arche Tova Café re-opened with a limit of 50% capacity on June 3rd, in accordance with all provincial health guidelines for physical distancing and sanitizing. A Health Inspector visited the Café on the 2nd day of opening, and confirmed that all appropriate safety measures were in place.

The Café is now open 8 AM to 2 PM 5 days per week (Tuesday to Saturday), and we look forward to serving many of our faithful customers and friends again!



Shawn took her dog Ronnie for a walk at Oxford Heights Community Club



Stacey walked with her parents, all wearing T-shirts from three different years of the walk



Tom had an important message for all the people walking for L'Arche: **Stay Safe!**



Eva took her daughters Olivia and Sophia for a walk at Oak Hammock Marsh



Helene's great grandchildren made their own "I walked for L'Arche" signs, complete with Transcona flamingos



L'Arche *Dayspring* members gathered in their basement on Walk day



Denise dressed her dog *Beckham* for the occasion

Thank you to everyone who walked **for L'Arche** on Sunday, May 3rd, and took the time to submitted their walk pictures!



Members of L'Arche homes **The Ark** (left) and **Chimo** (right) paused for a photo in front of their houses.

