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Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County hosts Caregiver Retreat Day

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Caregivers dedicate countless hours to care for loved ones, taking careful time to provide the necessary support and comfort to those who live with Dementia and Alzheimer's.

But on Oct. 23, the Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County (ASDC) decided that the caregivers deserved a day of care. Elaine Griffin, a psychogeriatric resource consultant with the ASDC, said that it's a day for caregivers to put themselves first.

?This is our second annual retreat day, and the goal for our group is to give our caregivers a day of respite, and leave the joy and the love, and also the burden of caregiving, at home,? she said. ?Today, they are totally going to be pampered and spoiled so we can recognize the fabulous work that they do.?

She said that the caregivers present were all on different journeys with their loved ones, but they were in an environment that supported them and let them process their love, their loss, and any other feelings they may be going through.

?Everybody in the room today is caring for someone living with Alzheimer's disease, or related dementia,? she said. ?Some of them are still going through the grieving process, so we want to acknowledge that the journey doesn't end when their loved one has passed. Some of them are going through what we call ?ambiguous grief.' What that means is as they go through their journey, they lose parts of that person that they love.?

She said that all kinds of caregivers were welcome.

?These beautiful people are coming from all sorts of different situations,? she said. ?Some live at home and care for somebody 24 hours a day. Others are part of support teams from retirement homes or long-term care.?

An important part of any caregiver, Griffin said, is self-care, which sometimes caregivers forget to prioritize. Scheduling days like this one allows them to stop, think, and decompress from their responsibilities. Then they can take care of themselves before returning to caregiving.

The day featured food served by the nearby Centre Cafe. ASDC also provided guided painting and musical activities.

Jerry Hayward, a local caregiver who takes care of his wife, Peggy, said the day was an incredible idea and he's thankful to the ASDC for putting it on.

?This is so awesome,? he said. ?I wasn't taking care of myself, and everything was really draining me badly, which in turn meant that I couldn't help. But the society really helped me, I'm really indebted to the Alzheimer's Society, I love them.?

Hayward offered some advice to anyone else going through a similar situation.

?You have to take a step back, and you have to really try not to take things too seriously,? he said. ?You need to go with the flow, one day at a time, because every day could be different in ways you can't see coming. Things that used to work might not work today. So you need to go with it.?

Hayward said that, despite the challenges Peggy faces, they still go out fairly regularly. He takes her out for food at Swiss Chalet, and they are regulars at Theatre Orangeville.

His story is one of many that continue to evolve with the support the ASDC provides every day.