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Alzheimer Society?s new lead challenges Dufferin to become a dementia-friendly community

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County is a local nonprofit organization that supports people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, as well as their families and caregivers. They now have a new executive director, Teresa Waldner.

Waldner is bringing deep not-for-profit and healthcare experience to the Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County, returning to work in her home community.

?I feel very grateful to be able to land back in my community and bring anything I may have learned throughout my career with me,? she said. ?I'm looking forward to engaging with anyone and everyone within the community that has an interest in Alzheimer's.?

Waldner's career began in marketing for the arts, but was reshaped by personal loss and exposure to hospice and palliative care, leading her to pursue roles across the not-for-profit healthcare sector.

She has held leadership positions with organizations such as Bethel Hospice and Community Living, steadily building expertise in community care and organizational leadership.

In her new role, Waldner said that she has identified three key priorities.

?It's still early days for me, but there are three pillars of our work that I really want to focus on,? she said. ?The first is programming ?? making sure we have enough programs, and the right programs, for the people we serve. The second is partnerships, strengthening the relationships we already have and forging new ones. The third is awareness and education, ensuring people can access the information they need and really pushing the idea of a dementia-friendly community.?

She is particularly focused on advancing the vision of Orangeville and Dufferin County becoming a dementia-friendly community, where businesses, emergency services, and citizens are trained to recognize and support people living with dementia.

?I'd like to challenge Orangeville to become a dementia friendly community,? Waldner said. ?Orangeville and Dufferin County and businesses can do that by reaching out and asking for training.?

?We can train their staff, whether it's not for profit, for profit, and then we can all work together to ensure our residents who are or will have dementia in the future have a safe place to live with access to all of the services that they should have,? she added.

Underlying her approach is a belief in connection, compassion, and collaboration as the foundation of both individual well-being and a healthier, more supportive community.

Waldner's priorities and goals are the cornerstones that define the Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County.

Their goals and work aim to ensure that no one faces dementia alone by providing education, emotional support, practical guidance, and advocacy, while also building a more informed and dementia-friendly community.

There are more than 1,500 people living with dementia in Dufferin County, and the society supports hundreds of residents each year through education programs, caregiver support groups, one-on-one counselling, and safety and care-planning initiatives.

To support this work, Waldner said community support is crucial, from donations to volunteering to simply helping spread awareness.

?We're always fundraising, and we're always encouraging people,? she said. ?Our big fundraiser is the walk in May. Besides that, we're always encouraging people to volunteer, with a number of different roles, and we provide training within those roles. We always appreciate monetary support, too, of course, but the awareness is what truly brings us to our goal of having a dementia-friendly community.?

With a dedicated team behind her that made settling in easy, Waldner said the Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County will continue to forge ahead with its mission and will continue providing the high-quality care and support it has become known for.

For more information on the Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County, go to: alzheimer.ca/dufferincounty