

Yorkton area selected for dementia project

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Yorkton and its surrounding region has been selected for the Interventions to Enhance Social Inclusion of Older Adults with Dementia in Saskatchewan project.

It's a five-year project that will fund three to four organizations to deliver services that support greater social inclusion of older adults living with dementia and their caregivers.

The project is being conducted through the Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Unit (SPHERU), a research centre based at both the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.

The project is being led by Dr. Bonnie Jeffery, a professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina's Prince Albert Campus.

The team also includes Dr. Tom McIntosh, professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies, and Dr. Nuelle Novik, associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work.

"We believe that Yorkton and the surrounding communities are ideal places to explore what interventions can best enhance the quality of lives of people with dementia that live in smaller communities and rural areas," said Jeffery.

"We are also confident that services and supports that are shown to be effective in this area can be expanded to other rural communities in Saskatchewan."

"It's great for the province," said Jeffery. "Our particular project has a rural focus, which has been most of my research work for many years."

When the opportunity for the project came up, Jeffery saw it as the perfect situation to grow the work she was already doing.

"There was a call that came out from the federal government through the New Horizons for Seniors Program," said Jeffery. "They were asking for proposals for projects that would address social inclusion of older adults."

"We had already been working with the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan surrounding social isolation."

"So we were interested in pursuing this because we saw it as a way to extend that work and they were interested in working with us," said Jeffery.

"Then we put together a proposal and we were one of the projects in Canada that was selected," said Jeffery. "Pretty well every province and territory has at least one project so it was a competitive process."

The choice of Yorkton for the centralization of the project was decided based on multiple factors.

"When we applied for it we said, 'we will do this in small cities and rural communities in Saskatchewan,'" said Jeffery.

"Then when we were successful in getting the funds — there's only so many funds to distribute over five years — we thought, we don't have the resources to spread this out over the whole province."

"We went through the process of looking at different regions of the province and we were kind of looking for a place with a smaller city as the hub that spreads out to other rural communities," said Jeffery.

"A couple reasons we selected Yorkton, it has one of the oldest population distributions in the province, we are working closely with the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan and they have a new office in Yorkton, and the project is at the University of Regina so the majority working on the project are there and we have staff that will need to go out to the communities a lot."

"We thought if we spread ourselves too thin then we wouldn't do as good of a job as if we concentrated on an area," said Jeffery.

"It is in Yorkton, but our hope is if these programs work in places around Yorkton and surrounding small communities then they can be transferred to other communities in the province."

There are multiple key components to the project, spreading awareness around dementia, offering better services for those with dementia and their care partners, and helping rural communities with getting the resources they need.

"We're hoping over the next four years we actually see a decrease of the stigma associated for people with dementia, and part of that comes from increased public awareness," said Jeffery.

"We also want to see whether some of the programs that are offered for people with dementia and their care partners are effective supports and to make sure it's effective if you live in a small community."

"It's one thing if you live in Regina or Saskatoon where support groups are readily available, but it's not as easy if you live in a small community in rural Saskatchewan."

The funding the project has received will go to multiple organizations to provide different types of services needed for those with dementia, their care partners, and to help spread community awareness.

"Part of the project is we got money — \$3 million and some of those funds go to support our infrastructure and pay our staff — and will be distributing those funds to organizations who will deliver programs at three different levels, we're just in the process of soliciting community interest at this point."

"There's three different levels, the first is individual level support and that's things like support groups," said Jeffery.

The second is community level programs and an example of that is the Dementia Friendly Community Initiative that the Alzheimer Society promotes that's helping to make communities more accepting and supportive of people with dementia."

"The third one is organizational level, and to give an ex-



Gordon Grant, an advisory committee member for the project who lives in Moosomin.

ample, many small towns have a grocery store and the person goes to the store and maybe forgets what they're there for or gets lost, so we want to help work with organizations to train their staff to be supportive and inclusive of people with dementia," said Jeffery. "It could be with any organization, grocery stores, banks, libraries."

"We want to give them the tools to make their staff more aware so they can give good customer service to those people."

One of the biggest parts of the project is educating communities on dementia and those living with it to help everybody better understand.

"Often there's a lot of misunderstanding about dementia and I think most peoples minds go to somebody with end stage Alzheimers," said Jeffery. "But that's only one form of dementia, there are several forms."

"Many people with dementia continue to live in their own homes for a long time and can be active contributors in their community."

"It can be a really lonely and isolating experience for people, especially in small towns," said Jeffery.

"It's really important to spread awareness because if more people understand dementia then they're less likely to be fearful," said Jeffery. "Sometimes people are a bit afraid of it."

"A lot of us have our lives touched by disease and if you help people understand the different types of dementia and how to engage with people with dementia, it makes them more comfortable."

"There are lots of resources out there, that's why we're working so closely with the Alzheimer's Society," said Jeffery. "They have a tremendous amount of resources, really practical resources to help people out in this area."

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the world to go into isolation and it's giving everybody a glimpse of what the stigma around dementia can lead to.

"Most of us can talk about social isolation and it's always the other person experiencing it and we have our active lives," said Jeffery. "But this Covid-19 situation has raised the awareness for many of us around what it's actually like to feel isolated."

"That generates more compassion and caring for being supportive of those with dementia."

"So, sadly because of this crisis it is starting to shine a light on that," said Jeffery. "It gives people a sense of what it feels like."

With the Covid-19 crisis, it has slowed the projects timeline, but they're continuing to work forward in alternate ways.

"We had a good work plan and timeline, but like everybody else we are adjusting," said Jeffery.

"We receive the funds at the university and disperse them to these organizations so there's a lot of paperwork on our end," said Jeffery. "So we've developed an application form and a process."

"We're looking to fund three or four organizations so we've done a lot of reaching out to community organizations."

"We had planned to do a community meeting where we would give out information on the proposal, talk about what we're looking for, talk about the application process," said Jeffery. "Of course, that's not happening so we're doing a webinar instead of a face-to-face meeting."

"We're going to get out to Yorkton as soon as it's safe to do so, but in the meantime we're just connecting with people virtually."

"Everybody is in the same situation so we feel like it's moving along the best it can given the circumstances," said Jeffery. "We'll probably do a couple webinars to make sure we're really reaching out."

Edna Parrott is a former Director of Home Care for the Sunrise Health Region and sits on the advisory committee for the project. She was the caregiver for her husband who lived with dementia.

"This project will allow us to have programs developed by rural Saskatchewan people, for rural Saskatchewan people," said Parrott.

"Saskatchewan is a diverse province with many different cultures, so we can take that into consideration and implement programs suitable for specific areas," said Parrott.

Living with dementia

Gordon Grant lives in Moosomin and is on the advisory

committee for the project. He lives with dementia.

"This project can give groups or programs the support, training, and awareness they may need to better provide assistance for those living with dementia in rural communities," said Grant.

"When there is more community awareness, this will hopefully reduce the stigma that prevents people from seeking help and support."

The stigma around dementia has negatively impacted those living with it both in terms of reaching out for help and feeling accepted in communities.

"I was diagnosed quite a few years ago and with this the stigma is one of the big things," said Grant.

"People sometimes can't get the services or help they need because they wait too long or they're scared to come forward because people look down on them."

"That was one of the most important things for me with this project, to spread awareness," said Grant.

With a lack of services for those living with dementia and their care partners, this project is a big step forward.

"This project is important to start as early as possible because there are time restraints on it," said Grant. "And rural Saskatchewan has limited services for those living with dementia and their caregivers."

"The longer these community groups have to work with this program the better chance of seeing services expand across the province in the long-term."

The key thing for Grant is seeing increased awareness for dementia and those living with it.

"I hope the project will increase community awareness and bring services to rural Saskatchewan," said Grant. "People living with dementia can still be active and contribute a lot to the community."

"I hope that increased awareness will help reduce the stigma associated with dementia diagnosis."

"Reducing the stigma of having dementia will allow people with dementia and their care partners to feel supported and included while continuing to be active in their community," said Grant.

Dementia isn't something that stops members in the community from contributing, but the stigma around it does.

"It's extremely important to develop dementia awareness," said Grant. "The stigma attached to the disease creates isolation and loneliness."

"I hope more awareness will help reduce the stigma so that people with dementia continue to be active in their communities."

Grant would like the project to lead to services for those throughout rural Saskatchewan where they don't have access to help right now.

"It's really important to provide services to those living with dementia and their care partners in rural Saskatchewan," said Grant. "Services can provide an opportunity to those with dementia and their care partners to feel accepted, understood, and supported."

Getting the project off the ground in an area that can reach smaller communities is a great way for this to build momentum and to grow says Grant.

"I feel this project is quite important for all communities, but they have to start somewhere," said Grant. "With a community like Yorkton there's a lot of smaller communities close by."

"Hopefully this will evolve into something a lot bigger," said Grant.

I am extremely excited to be back serving my hometown and the area of Esterhazy! I started my career at Sapara's in 2016 as a pharmacist, and then a year-long term pharmacy manager, and it feels great to come home to my community.

I have worked the last few years as a relief pharmacist, servicing rural areas around SK and have gained invaluable knowledge and experience that I am eager to share with our customers and patients.

I hope everyone is staying safe at this time and when restrictions have been lifted, please come in and say hi! - Samantha

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