

## If you have a big heart, you can do this



Tammy Woodcox says all you need to be a volunteer at Hospice North Hastings is a big heart. Photo by BARBARA SHAW

Tammy Woodcox has been volunteering with Hospice North Hastings for about a year. She first connected with Hospice when friends were receiving support at the residential Hospice in Bancroft and while some might feel uncomfortable with death and dying, Tammy says she felt like she belonged in that environment.

After making a strong connection with the staff and volunteers at Hospice, she completed her volunteer training and is now caring for others whenever there is a need.

For those who think volunteering is only for the retired, Tammy proves that the opposite is possible. Tammy works at the Beer Store in Bancroft, at the Legion, she coaches gymnastics, she coaches football and is busy raising three awesome kids.

‘I take shifts at the house whenever I can,’ she says. ‘If I’m not scheduled I will still stop by to check on the family and the patient.’ And that’s the biggest part of what Tammy does at Hospice. She’s just there for both the patient and the family. She’s happy to have a chat but she’s equally comfortable to sit in silence, holding a hand; holding the space.

Volunteers at the residential Hospice are the eyes and ears of the PSWs and nurses. They can support the family members who gather and they can sit with a patient while the family gets some much needed rest. And throughout every interaction, Tammy provides gentle reassurance and plentiful comfort.

‘Here at Hospice it’s like we’re all a family,’ Tammy explains. ‘We all work together. I’m always being trained by the nurses and the PSWs. I’m always asking questions and learning more. And if I’m not available for a shift, someone else is scheduled. I always have the choice.’

Tammy says she loves the time she spends with families when she’s at the Hospice and when she’s not there she’s always thinking about how everyone is doing. Her heart is huge and with every patient she cares for she nurtures a deep connection. She says having a big heart is really the only thing you need to volunteer with Hospice.

This kind of caring is what Hospice co-ordinator Heather Brough says is so special about all the Hospice volunteers.

‘We are always looking for those people in the community who are willing to share some love, comfort and support during a difficult time,’ she says. ‘When you are physically present with someone at this stage of life it really feels like an honour. There is never any doubt that it is time well spent and that you are making a remarkable difference.’

And this is what Tammy loves doing.

‘I just want to be there,’ Tammy explains. ‘It’s simple really, I just don’t want for someone to have to pass away by themselves and in the end, I want to be there for the family.’

Anyone who is interested in joining Tammy and the rest of the volunteer team can register for the next Hospice North Hastings volunteer training session by calling 613-332-8014.

‘If you have a big heart, if that’s who you are, then you can do this,’ Tammy says before going to care for another patient.

Submitted by Barbara Shaw