

New local project to save lives



Staff Sgt. Tim Spence, left, Marion Carr, Don Carr, Alzheimer Society education and support co-ordinator Sarah Kreiger and Const. Philippe Regamey pose with Marion in her home after she becomes the first official leaser of a Project Lifesaver wristband. Marion suffers from dementia. Regamey stands with a piece of the antenna equipment that will help the OPP find her should get lost because of her dementia. / SARAH SOBANSKI

By Sarah Sobanski

A new initiative in Bancroft could save lives.

The Alzheimer Society of Hasting-Prince Edward (ALSHPE) has successfully integrated Project Lifesaver into the Hastings community with the help of the Bancroft OPP and the Bancroft Area Community Policing Advisory Committee (BACPAC).

?This project has been two years in the making trying to get it to Bancroft,? said education and support co-ordinator for ALSHPE Sarah Kreiger.

Project Lifesaver sees wristbands that give off a unique radiofrequency worn by people who are likely to wander from their caregivers. As many as six out of 10 patients who suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's are at risk of wandering at least once during the progression of their disease. These wristbands are very similar to those [cancer wristbands](#) that are worn in support of those fighting for their lives. You may also find some patients will wear these bands to make the general public aware in-case fast help is needed.

?We have a lot of people in this area, [which] we don't hear about it, that go wandering that the OPP get called for,? said Kreiger.

On Oct. 28, Marion Carr became the first active member of Project Lifesaver with her husband Don. Marion suffers from dementia.

Don told of an instance where he dropped Marion off at the front doors of the hospital due to the weather. When he came back she was gone. She had wandered deep into the hospital.

Staff Sgt. Tim Spence and Const. Philippe Regamey visited the Carr household to see the activation of the first wristband.

Spence has worked with search and rescue efforts for 15 years. He has searched and co-ordinated searches. He said all it takes is once for someone to wander and become seriously injured or worse. The equipment bought by BACPAC, and the fundraising by the society to negate the administration and up-keep fees of the wristbands for patients, could save lives.

“Without this equipment it could take hours, even days [to find them]. We’ve lost people that way. This allows us to save time. It’s another tool,” said Spence. He explained that having the equipment locally could also mean beginning search and rescue before outside resources like search dogs arrive.

People with Alzheimer’s or dementia have been known to wander from regular, everyday tasks.

Kreiger gave the example as simple as a patient going to the mailbox to get the mail whenever it comes. One day the patient could forget why they are getting the mail and instead of returning to the home walk down the street.

Regamey explained that patients are unlikely to follow prescribed paths. If they come to the end of a road for example, they could keep walking in a straight line into forests or swamps.

On Sept. 28, the Bancroft OPP spent 12 hours training 10 members of its staff to use the Project Lifesaver equipment – that way at least one trained staff member will be on hand for each shift. Officers searched for auxiliary officers. Some were instructed to hide; others were instructed to keep moving.

The project uses a type of antenna that beeps successively louder the closer it gets to the selected frequency of a wristband. It has three settings; far, medium and near – near is within 50 to 100 metres.

The OPP were able to locate each of its auxiliary officers. One was in the NHHS music room. Another was caught while he got his shopping done at Shoppers. Another was found within 20 minutes even though he was hiding from his pursuers in a culvert.

Regamey explained that using radio frequency wristbands work better than a GPS system because GPS can only target from above. It can get lost trying to get to a target through a building or through heavy foliage. It isn’t as accurate.

“With different frequencies, you can isolate who you’re looking for,” said Regamey. He explained that different frequencies also help if there is more than one wristband within the vicinity of another or on a search.

Families using the wristbands must keep a daily log of their use and replace their batteries every 30 days. There is a \$25 fee every two months for administration fees and battery replacement fees. There are six other wristbands available through the society.

Kreiger was excited to see the project come into fruition.

“It’s goose bumps and elation. Just the potential to provide that sense of security for the people with this diagnosis and their caregiver is an overwhelming feel good moment. It’s warm and fuzzies, release and absolute excitement,” said Kreiger. “I’m so glad that we have this relationship with our OPP so that we can provide this support. This community just has the biggest heart.”

Anyone looking for more information can get in contact with Kreiger through her office at the society at 613-332-4614.