

Fredericton branch: Training program attracts many new caregivers



There's no better way to find highly qualified staff

than to educate them yourself. That's the strategy at Bayshore Home Health's Fredericton branch. For the past 10 years, it has been providing training for its field staff, the vast majority of who are personal support workers.

"We don't have a program in New Brunswick to train personal support workers, so twice a year, one of our nurses delivers education sessions that include 26 training modules," says Louise Billings, Area Director of the branch.

As provincial requirements for the certification of personal support workers inch closer to becoming a reality, interest in Bayshore's free training has grown. It has attracted many new recruits. "Not everyone out there has a certificate because it's just not available, so we decided to provide it. It's only fair to employees and clients. A lot of our staff are loyal because they've had the training with us," says Billings, adding that the office also holds monthly in-services training sessions.

The branch serves Fredericton, the capital of New Brunswick, and the surrounding area. It has nine office staff and about 160 field staff, and its clients are mostly seniors. "About 50 per cent of our business is private pay, which is a nice balance," says Billings, who has been with the branch since it opened in 1986 (it was the first private home care agency in town). "We don't depend totally on government referrals," she adds.

Over the years, the branch has built a solid reputation, thanks to its "we can do this" attitude. "That's how we've grown. In the beginning, we had patients that other agencies wouldn't take on. It's really about caring for our clients and our caregivers," explains Billings. "Fredericton is a conservative city, and things are done by word of mouth. If you do things well, it gets around. It's very much 'Who have you used that's done a good job for you?' whether it's in home care or when you need a plumber.

The branch faces strong competition from numerous other home care agencies, but Billings is confident that Bayshore stands out. "I think that what sets us apart is our nursing response. Three of us in the office are nurses. In New Brunswick, a lot of agencies don't have a nurse on their

administrative staff at all. We're also very responsive to requests, and we work hard at getting back to people quickly. That's a priority for us."

The branch also provides a hair and urine collection program for the province's Department of Family and Community Services. Specimens are screened for drugs (both prescription and illegal) at a laboratory. "It might be for children they are concerned about, or maybe it's a parent who wants to prove they're not using illegal drugs," explains Billings. "We can test children's hair to see if they've been exposed to drugs in the home environment, such as marijuana. We can also test babies and newborns to see if their mothers used drugs during pregnancy."

The test results are evidence that can be presented in court. The program has grown quickly through word of mouth among child protection and social workers. "It's still a small part of our business, but it's growing," says Billings.

The branch also works hard to give back to the community. The staff are getting ready for Hike for Hospice Palliative Care, to be held on May 3, in support of Hospice Fredericton. Last year, the branch raised over \$800 for the Hike. It has also supported Fredericton's Doctor Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital for the past decade, raising money through dress-down Fridays to help purchase equipment.

Billings also serves on committees in the community, including the board of directors for Hospice Fredericton. She is on the committee that is developing best practice guidelines for members of the New Brunswick Home Support Association.

The staff also find time to have fun and reconnect with one another. Recent events include a Valentine's Day skating party and a catered Christmas dinner. Billings is justifiably proud of what her team achieves, day in and day out. "We work hard to improve what we do and to provide great service to great clients with great people."

For more information, please contact lbillings@bayshore.ca

Front row, left to right:
Karen Bower, Kathryn
Johnson, Sandra Calhoun
and Louise Billings.
Back row, left to right:
Kimberly Stiles, Audrey
Bissett, Lauri Deveen,
Melanie Cleghorn and
Deanna Pospolita



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