

Endowment fund to help ensure the continuity of the Cummings Centre's Mental Health Day Program

Although Allan Levitt has been a long-time supporter of the Cummings Jewish Centre for Seniors Foundation, he, along with his sister Marilyn Yunis, felt it was time to take their involvement even further. The Rona & Irving Levitt Family Foundation, named after their late parents, has designated a gift of \$600,000 as an Endowment Fund to benefit the Centre's Mental Health Structured Day Program. Also a Life Governor of the Foundation, Levitt felt that the program would benefit from the funds and ensure that the support extends well into the future.

"We got involved because we felt that the programs and services offered by the Cummings Centre were important to the community," he said. "The main reason we chose to support the Mental Health Program was the need. Seniors with mental health issues are not generally talked about and there was a lack of financial support for this kind of program that addresses these issues."

The Community Mental Health Day Program at the Cummings Centre aims to provide a structured therapeutic stimulating and safe environment for isolated individuals age 55 and over with limited social networks and resources, insufficient activities of daily living and who have a diagnosis of mental illness. A range of activities are offered to each group with the goal of helping participants enhance their social skills and break isolation within a nurturing supportive environment. As well, weekly sessions of art, drama and music therapy and wellness activities have been incorporated into the program.

Levitt, accompanied by his sister Marilyn, had the opportunity to visit the program on a previous occasion and heard first-hand from clients. "Participants were very appreciative that this program is available to them," he said. "They all said that they were happy to be here and look forward to coming to their next meeting. Participants are able to converse with one another, share any issues that they may be having and partake in activities. The group provides comfort and support. Without this program, many would not be leaving their homes. Here at the Cummings Centre, they come to a welcoming environment in a community setting. They thanked us for our support."

The outcome of the program in the life of each participant is impactful with an aim to enhance their quality of life. Participants share that this group intervention has helped them reduce their psychological distress and helped them experience a feeling of inner peace. The program helps them express their emotions, increase their self-esteem and restore their sense of self and honour. Overall the Mental Health Day Program has reinforced a sense of belonging to the community and the relationships among each participant.

Allan's son Jon was so inspired with the Endowment Fund and the program it is destined to support, he agreed to give his time and volunteer at the Centre. "Mental Health programs were stigmatized in the past," he said. "Programs like this aims to break down those barriers. Mental health is an important issue to address in the senior adult community. "We have to show that we still care. There is help out there."

Philip Abbey, Foundation President, emphasized how important this Endowment Fund is to the Foundation. "It allows us to ensure that this program will be funded in perpetuity," he said. "We are tremendously grateful to the Levitt Family for this exceptional gift."

The Cummings Jewish Centre for Seniors Foundation aims to meet the philanthropic challenges and needs of the 50 plus population. The Cummings Centre is a leader in the provision of quality programs, professional social services and a wide range of volunteer opportunities to the 50+ community.

To make a gift to the Cummings Foundation and help support the senior population call Cathy Simons, Executive Director, CJCS Foundation 514.734.1777.