

End of Life Quilt Project

A few months ago the Palliative Care Committee began discussing our current practises for residents leaving Sunnyside Home once they had passed away. A few other homes in the area have switched to their clients/residents leaving their home the way that they came in, through the front door. The committee began discussing whether this was something that we wanted to consider here at Sunnyside. One thing that came out of that discussion is how to do this in a dignified manner that would also be comfortable for those who may be in the area of the front door when the resident left. Other places that have the person leave by the front door have a specific blanket or quilt that covers the person to honour them as well as make it comfortable for those who may view the person leaving.



We contacted a local Quilters' Guild (Waterloo County Quilters' Guild) to see if they would be willing to help us out with the making of the quilt. There was an overwhelming positive response from their executive and members to donate supplies and time to make a palliative care quilt for Sunnyside Home. We asked them if they would be able to incorporate butterflies into the quilt as that is the symbol that we use here at Sunnyside for those residents that enter End of Life care. The Guild came up with a design that they thought would work. It uses the log cabin style of quilting that incorporates butterflies into the log cabin pattern. They would stitch butterfly bodies and antennae to the butterflies during the final stitching to make the butterflies stand out a little more. The end result would be a 7' X 8' quilt that would cover the resident and stretcher during their final journey out of Sunnyside Home.

Many of the Palliative Care Committee members went to watch the quilt being created during the quilting bee. The Quilters' Guild set up a one day quilting bee to be held from 8am-8pm. Their members came in shifts throughout the day to create the quilt from start to finish. I don't think many of us realized how many steps there were to creating a quilt. The quilt began as scraps of 100% cotton material laid out on a table. Members went through the samples and chose complementary colours/patterns for both the butterflies and solid blocks around the butterflies. Those materials were then cut into strips of predetermined lengths to form the smaller blocks of the quilt. Those strips were then collected by quilters to sew together into the small blocks. They were



ironed so the seams laid perfectly straight and flat and then moved onto the next stage. There, 4 small blocks were sewn together to form a larger block. That block was then layered with the batten and backing. That was then stitched to accentuate the butterfly blocks then the bodies and antennae stitched on. They then added some free stitching to symbolize the flight of a butterfly to the larger block. The larger block was then sent onto a station where multiple blocks were sewn together to start forming rows on the quilt. Those rows were then stitched together to form the quilt. It was given a finished edge to finish the entire quilt.

While we were watching the quilt being formed, many of us took the chance to talk with the ladies who were creating the quilt. We heard many stories of connections that these women had to Sunnyside Home. There were many of them who had had loved ones stay at Sunnyside either long term or in our convalescent unit. We also heard from ladies who only knew of what Sunnyside offered by way of neighbours or friends with connections to the home. No matter how there was a connection, many of the ladies we talked with shared a common desire and excitement to offer a lasting item to our palliative care program and the dignity of those passing on before them.

