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## Dementia supports central to Kaleidoscope Cottage

COMMUNITY Nov 23, 2017 by [Sean Meyer](#) St. Thomas-Elgin Weekly News



Charlene Hanson (left) and Suki Held opened Kaleidoscope Cottage (204 Balaclava St.) in St. Thomas on Oct. 13 with the intention of offering respite care to those living under the umbrella of dementia, as well as caregivers who need a break in their day. - Sean Meyer Photo

As the population ages and the Baby Boomers explode into elderhood, so too do diseases associated with aging, along with the fears many have of being moved into long-term care.

While medical breakthroughs and scientific advancements continue to push back, some disease processes like dementia continue to rise. Existing agencies providing services are experiencing the disconnect between good intentions and the ability to meet people's specific needs.

With that in mind, Suki Held and Charlene Hanson, both with some 15 years experience working in long-term care, recognized these widening gaps in service — especially for those people experiencing dementia — and decided to do something about it.

On Oct. 13 the two friends opened the doors to Kaleidoscope Cottage at 204 Balaclava St. in St. Thomas.

Kaleidoscope Cottage provides the needed resources for support, social drop-in and respite for persons with dementia and their caregivers.

“To get into long-term care is that 'last resort' for someone, the idea that 'please no, not that.' How can we expect people to come and live in long-term care when nobody wants to?” Hanson said. “That speaks to quality of life. It’s all about how you come here to the cottage; once you get here, we’re happy to see you. It’s a place that someone wants to come to; it’s a happy alternative.”

There is neither referral nor diagnosis required to visit Kaleidoscope Cottage, and there is no waiting list either.

Support is available any time day or night so “cottagers” (persons staying for a visit) can spend from an hour up to 12 (extended hours can be arranged) in a safe, secure, engaging, interactive environment, rich with purpose and potential for interaction. It encompasses all that life can be at any given moment, Held said, in an environment that is nostalgically familiar, friendly and accommodating.

“It’s about celebrating who you are in the moment,” she said. “Who you are right now may not be who you are in 15 minutes, but we’re going to celebrate that person too. You meet them on their emotional level . . . it’s a non-confrontational approach and it works.”

Held said this is the right time for Kaleidoscope Cottage because the conversation around aging and how there isn’t enough support for older adults and their caregivers is only growing.



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As an example, she pointed to the recent announcement by billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates that his foundation was dedicating \$50 million to the battle against Alzheimer's disease.

"If that's not an endorsement for what we're doing, then I don't know what is. It's a slow change. I do think change has started, but there's a long way to go," she said. "There's that stigmatising and an ignorance of who that person is or of the disease itself. If you say cancer, the supports are there, you have people's sympathy. Rarely do people back away from you; it's, 'What can I do to help?' That's where the ignorance is. It's not that they don't want to help; it's just that they don't know how. There needs to be a different dynamic in the education around the disease and that takes time."

Everything about Kaleidoscope Cottage exudes authenticity, Held explained.

No part of it, inside or out, is staged to mimic purpose or to limit a person from fully experiencing what they may perceive as purposeful or their ability to do so.

That's important, Hanson said, as the perception around dementia can be as impactful as the diagnosis.

"The word is also terrible. We say dementia because it's an umbrella, it includes Alzheimer's, Parkinson's . . . there are more than 26 different dementias," she said. "When you say dementia, demented, it's just awful. We're missing the point that we're celebrating life. Just because you don't think the same way doesn't mean you've lost anything, you're just different. That's a hard concept to understand."



by [Sean Meyer](#)

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