

Outsourcing caretakers threatens level of care



BY KAREN PATON-EVANS

When Lynn Brown kisses her husband, William, goodbye and heads for the home the couple once shared, she is comfortable entrusting him to the staff at the Huron Lodge long-term care facility, owned by the City of Windsor.

Although she is an anxious person, “I can sleep peacefully at night,” Brown says. “If I miss a day, I know he is in good hands.”

William Brown, 86, moved into Huron Lodge in July 2015. “He can’t see and can’t hear much. But he has developed a sixth sense about the people around him,” his wife says of her smart husband. “He likes all of the caretakers.”

So does she. “I know these people are accountable. They have a soul and a conscience. I see that every day.” Brown finds they go “above and beyond” their job descriptions, doing more than keeping the residents’ home clean and safe. They adjust walkers and do other things that add to the residents’ comfort, security and knowledge they are more than residents in a facility: They are people who are seen and respected.

Regular interaction has resulted in continuity of care for the residents. The caretakers, who work alongside nursing and kitchen staff, also communicate residents’ health and other needs.

Residents are “so vulnerable,” says Brown. She believes many people with family living at Huron Lodge are unaware city council is voting on contracting out caretaking services.

“I just heard it by chance,” she says. “We should know what is going on.” Dismayed by the upcoming council vote, she notes, “Sometimes saving money isn’t always

the best thing. I hope they’ll change their minds.”

Carrie Breault and her mother, Joanne Breault, are “against outsourcing, period.” The elder Breault, 81, who has MS and other health issues, remained on a waiting list for three years to get into Huron Lodge, the long-term care home of her choice. Now in her fourth year living there, the active senior serves on the residents’ council and is “as sharp as a tack,” says her daughter.

Breault appreciates the importance of the meaningful and reassuring connections that caretakers share with residents. “My mom says, ‘If I can’t be with my family, I like it here. These people have become my family, too.’”

“The caretakers take pride in what they do. This is their career and they enjoy it,” Breault remarks. “They are in and out of residents’ rooms – their homes. They are very respectful, and take time to chat and listen.”

Breault has also been witness to caretakers offering comfort to family members who know their loved one’s life is coming to an end.

She doesn’t think outside caretakers paid by a private contractor will provide the same levels of care and dedication. “Because they won’t be earning a living wage, I fear they won’t stay and form bonds,” says Breault. She doesn’t want a string of unknown people in her mother’s room. “The elderly have weakened immune systems and multiple diseases,” and can’t risk exposure to “sub-par cleaning.”

“Residents are people who have paid taxes throughout their lives,” says Breault, pointing out they have earned proper care, worth the 58 cents per month that a household would contribute to keep Huron Lodge’s

caretakers employed.

Breault and her mother are frustrated by city council’s actions. In 2015, councillors decided not to consider taking away its employment of nearly 100 municipal caretakers and outsourcing the jobs. Then, in March, 2016, they voted 6-5 to again explore the costs of outsourcing.

“Why would you open it again?” Breault asks. “I’m quite disappointed as are other residents and family members.”

The caretakers’ union, Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 543, was not initially consulted on the turnaround proposal and is understandably distressed.

The City eventually talked to the Huron Lodge residents’ council. CUPE 543 also met with the seniors and heard their strong opposition to contracting out their caretaking services.

CUPE Local 543 president Mark Vander Voort says, “Our members urge city councillors to listen to the residents, their families and the community that cares about their wellbeing. Till now, the City has done right by vulnerable people in its care. Bringing in a private contractor and minimum wage workers will put our elderly at risk and eliminate stable jobs vital to Windsor’s economic health and reputation.”

Council’s new vote was scheduled for Jan. 23; however, the City will hold a special council meeting on Jan. 16, instead.

“Huron Lodge is the last home the residents will ever have,” Breault says. “Call your councillors, email your councillors, let them know you are against outsourcing. Think of the elderly.”

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<http://543.cupe.ca/>