

LOCAL

L'Arche celebrates 10 years in Saint John

KELSEY PYE Telegraph-Journal
May 14, 2015

Share this article

Facebook

Twitter

Email



Debbie Turnbull, left, shows Anne Huestis Scott one of her favourite books. Turnbull is a resident at McKim House, a home for people with intellectual disabilities run by L'Arche Saint John. Scott is speaking at L'Arche's 10th anniversary gala on May 22.

Photo: Kelsey Pye/Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • For the seven people who live at L'Arche Saint John, it's not a group home, it's just home.

L'Arche, a non-profit residential care home part of a larger international network of communities for people with intellectual disabilities, celebrates its 10th anniversary in the city on June 7. They're holding a birthday celebration gala on May 22.

Cecelyn Worster, the home's community leader, said that L'Arche has had a ripple effect on Saint John and beyond in the past decade.

You see it in small ways," she said. "Our message is around the fact that all people have gifts to share."

Worster and Debbie Turnbull, one of five core members at the home, often visit service groups and churches to speak about the positives coming from L'Arche. The house also has medical or social work students come in from time to time and experience how the residents see the world.

They're going to go out there and live differently because of that experience."

Similarly, coming into McKim House, the name of L'Arche's home in Saint John, has changed the lives of the core members and the assistants. Turnbull was the second person to move into the house and said her life is vastly different compared to 10 years ago.

Turnbull used to live with her parents but said that's in the past.

I like it here. I'm happier. I'm not going back (to her old house). I'll go back to visit."

Turnbull, along with Stéphane Bastarache, both work at Key Industries. Another resident, Krista Simmons, cleans someone's house every Tuesday. All five are incredibly active, enjoying exercise, art and especially music.

Being involved in L'Arche has given the residents a chance of a lifetime. L'Arche is a large international organization that first began in France in 1964. It celebrated its 50th anniversary last year and Bastarache was elected to help represent the Atlantic branch of L'Arche at a ceremony in Ottawa.

Over the fall I had an amazing experience. I went to Ottawa with Jenn Power, our regional leader, and we visited L'Arche headquarters. We had a visit with Princess Anne, who wanted to know how L'Arche was."

He's quick with the photos if someone asks about the trip. He's extremely proud of his experience, one of the highlights of his seven years at McKim House.

But it's the everyday things that elicit the most laughs and smiles. Every week, live-in assistants Victoria Woods and Maren Heuvig head to the pool with Kristina Cooper, another resident. It's not an outing so much as it is three friends having fun.

When we go to the pool with Kristina, it's not just being there so she can swim," Woods said. "We're all having fun. It's a time for three of us to enjoy each other and our friendship."

Nurturing residents is one way L'Arche makes a difference. Interaction and social outings with each other and people in the broader Saint John community help them open up. Cooper was living in a nursing home before McKim House, and while she was cared for, she only got out once a month, usually to go to the doctor. It was hard for a woman in her twenties to be social that way, Worster said.

Woods, who has been living and working at the house for about six months, said the spirit of L'Arche lives in each of its residents.

L'Arche really emphasizes living in joy and that's what we do. We try and model that in our community."

All five core members have changed her life, she said, and she finds out more about herself each day through her relationships with them.

It's really something special."

The gala dinner, which will be held at Kings Valley Church in Quispamsis, will feature a keynote speaker and an honorary chair. Author Anne Huestis Scott will give a speech on John Peters Humphrey, while Krysta D'Amico has been named the honorary chair for the event.

D'Amico has lived in L'Arche homes in Nova Scotia and said each person learns an important value or lesson by being involved in the community.

It's about reciprocity. Everybody who lives there takes something from someone else."

Share this article

Facebook

Twitter

Email