

# For care partners who feel isolated and alone, Alzheimer Society of Toronto is a “lifeline”

“I don’t know what I’d do without them,” says Leslie, whose husband, Don, has been living with Alzheimer’s disease since 2021



Since Don’s Alzheimer’s disease diagnosis, Leslie has taken advantage of many of AST’s resources over the years. **PETER POWER**

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When Leslie’s husband, Don, called from a business trip in Calgary in September of 2018 to say he’d forgotten where he parked his vehicle, she didn’t think much of it. When he called back several more times to say he still couldn’t find his vehicle, she could tell something was very wrong. She connected with a Calgary ambulance to attend to him, and between the paramedics and a family member, they got Don to a local hospital.

Neurologists in both Calgary and their home city of Toronto both concluded that Don was suffering from transient global amnesia

(TGA), which is when an otherwise alert person has an episode of extreme confusion. The problem was, typically the symptoms of TGA don’t last more than 24 to 48 hours. Yet weeks after the incident in Calgary, Don was still not back to himself.

In November of 2021, at age 77, Don was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment caused by Alzheimer’s disease. Shortly after receiving that diagnosis, Leslie reached out to the Alzheimer Society of Toronto (AST). “I was looking for education,” she recalls. “I had no idea what I was dealing with, so I knew I needed help.”

“Over 90 per cent of our clients are people with a loved one who has just

been diagnosed with some form of dementia,” says Dave Spedding, the chief executive officer (CEO) of AST. Although an official diagnosis isn’t necessary to access AST’s services, he encourages people living with dementia — along with their care partners — to seek medical confirmation of their condition.

Spedding has a personal connection to Alzheimer’s disease: his mother was diagnosed with the disease when she was 79. Once he found the Alzheimer Society of Toronto, Spedding quickly made use of the education resources. “I found it a very safe environment to ask all my questions,” he says. Over 15

years later, Spedding would become the CEO of the organization that helped him through his mother’s diagnosis.

AST offers tailored social and recreational programs free of charge in a supportive environment where participants can socialize with others who understand their experiences. It also provides training to personal support workers and other health-care workers in the community.

Leslie was immediately referred to a spousal support group and a social worker upon reaching out to AST, who gave her advice on how to manage her new reality — caring for Don in their Toronto condo.

The AST social worker has helped Leslie strategize through daily struggles. “She’s helped me feel less alone,” says Leslie.

One of the most common challenges with short-term memory impairment is that those living with the condition can often still recognize friends and family members but may not be able to manage daily tasks on their own. They might not be able to remember to take their medications and attend to personal finances, so care partners take on these tasks.

Since Don’s Alzheimer’s disease diagnosis, Leslie has taken advantage of many of AST’s resources over the years, including a

photography course run by professional photographers. Through AST, Don is also part of a group that meets for coffee once a week.

“He walks in and gets a big hello. They all want to hear his stories because he’s got great stories,” says Leslie. “He feels very comfortable there.”

Spedding suggests anyone in Toronto who needs help with a loved one living with dementia call AST or visit <https://alz.to/>.

money to fund activities and education for our clients,” Spedding explains. “The more money we raise, the more people we can help. It’s that simple.”

And if walking isn’t your speed, there are plenty of other ways to donate, from making a one-time donation in memory of a loved one to setting up a monthly gift for continued support. Visit <https://alz.to/give/> to learn more.



“The more money we raise, the more people we can help. It’s that simple,” says Dave Spedding, CEO of AST. **SUPPLIED**

He also encourages people to visit the same link to register for the 2024 IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer’s Toronto on Saturday, May 25, at Fort York, which raises funds that go directly to client resources.

“Our organization relies on people helping us raise

For numerous people like Leslie and Don, the Alzheimer Society of Toronto has been a lifeline. “I don’t know what I’d do without them,” she says. “Even if I don’t use them every day, it’s the comfort of knowing they’re there. I know if I’m in crisis, I can call and speak to somebody right away.”