

disengagement very evident. The staff member, wanting to engage and encourage, said, "I wish another bird would come by." "I don't." said the suffering one, but just then another bird did fly by. "Oh, I do, I do", burst forth from the patient, her evident joy breaking through the clouds of depression. A brief moment of gladness in contrast to the depression, but heartwarming!

Our staff members at House of Compassion are special. They foster a joyful and pleasant environment for our residents. They "serve the Lord with gladness". One staff member writes: "The Psalmist says that 'Joy comes in the morning...' but at House of Compassion it comes at all hours."

J. Douglas Johnson

Since our last Newsletter was printed and distributed, a revered board member, J. Douglas Johnson has passed. Doug was a strong booster and supporter of the work of House of Compassion. He served on the board for nearly eight years. He was instrumental in leading the capital fundraising campaign to purchase the adjoining property which enabled House of Compassion to expand its capacity to twenty-one residents. He was unfailing in encouragement and enthusiasm. He was a big man in stature and in spirit. We miss him greatly.

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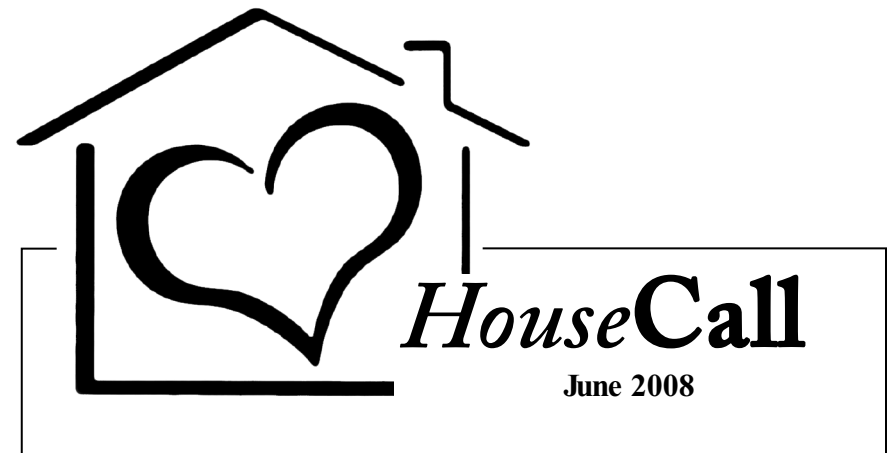
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HouseCall is the newsletter of the HOUSE OF COMPASSION of Toronto, a Christian ministry providing high level supportive housing to residents with severe mental illness in need of a caring and secure home environment.

Please send donations to House of Compassion, c/o Administrative Office, Suite 1410, 40 Richview Rd., Toronto, ON M9A 5C1. Donors will receive a receipt for income tax purposes.



GLADNESS

Serve the Lord with gladness: *Psalm 100:2*

Some of the things that delight us are the glad moments that occur in daily life at House of Compassion. Visitors to the House comment on the pleasant atmosphere which they notice as soon as they walk in the door. There is an easy camaraderie between the residents and staff who live and work at House of Compassion that is rooted in trust and genuine respect for each other. Staff set the tone of the House in the cheerfulness with which they serve the residents. In their daily work, they are serving the Lord with gladness.

This gladness is contagious. Staff foster a community spirit among the residents, encouraging them to leave their private rooms and spend time together. Residents get to know each other and learn to care about their housemates. They eat meals together. Sometimes they sit in quiet companionship and other times strike up conversations. Sometimes there are smiles all round, and laughter breaks out on occasion. This sense of ease in each other's company is so important when people spend a lot of hours together. A community spirit lifts hearts and brings joy to workers when they witness gladness in the lives of the residents.

Our residents live with severe and persistent mental illness. Of course, due to the nature of their illness, there are many anxious moments in the lives of our residents. But trained staff quickly become aware of a response, or lack of one, that signals "a bad day" for a resident and to take steps to help early on. Coping with mental illness is often trying and exhausting for those who have it, but there are also good days or, at least, good moments, for our residents. We all rejoice when things are "good" for our residents, when there is some stability of mood and anxieties are, for a time, in abeyance. Staff members like to record the "good" moments as well as (necessarily) recording the times of crisis.

Sometimes it's showing off a new piece of clothing or hairdo (or beard) that invites comment, but it is made clear that only positive comments are acceptable. Improvements in appearance are admired and everyone is called upon to notice the change. Sometimes it's a visitor or friend arriving which brings out the hospitality gene. Everyone seems to want to participate and to welcome the visitor, especially those who infrequently have their own visitors. One resident rarely participated in conversation, but he would position himself in a swivel chair in the middle room the better to take in all of the to-ing and fro-ing. Some visitors are particularly welcome. A young student who volunteered one summer is particularly well liked and her return visits always draw the residents around.

Sometimes a group activity spurs the community spirit. One night around a game of Snakes and Ladders, conversation is stimulated and a sense of playfulness is fostered. There is laughter as residents have fun together around a simple game. Sometimes in the evening a story is read aloud by a staff member. Although it is quiet companionship, it is a shared time for the residents who enjoy the reading so much.

Another night, a staff member brings in her stereo and a stack of old records. The scratchy voices of the singers are soon joined by other voices until many are

singing along, some tuneful, some not, and some with great volume! Three people add harmony! The oldies bring laughter, wistfulness, nostalgia and snippets of history: "I used to go dancing every Saturday night." A resident dances in the dining area where there is some floor space.

A similar party broke out on New Years Eve. After dinner, when residents were glad to celebrate with the noise makers and funny hats that staff had provided, it became clear that some were not too keen on the party breaking up early. When asked if they wanted to stay up and see the New Year in, residents were quick to get excited about a proper party. It was easy to quickly reset the furniture to accommodate a dance floor, put on the music and the impromptu party was on. A staff member went out to the nearest convenience store and bought party food, pop and chips and popcorn. Before midnight the television was turned on to Times Square and everyone joined in to count down the last seconds of the old year. Then there was much delightful noise as the partiers wished each other a Happy New Year, some hugging and kissing, and then the celebrants were content to call it a day, having brought in the new year with much good cheer.

The House is always decorated appropriately for celebrations. Each resident's birthday is an occasion for celebration and a favourite meal is planned for the birthday. Halloween ghosts and goblins and pumpkins adorn the walls at the end of October, valentine cards and hearts abound in February, there are chocolate eggs for Easter and spring flowers and, of course, a tree for Christmas. Residents volunteer to participate in the decorations and in the celebrations. Residents host a Christmas Tea in December. Family members and friends and social workers and case managers are all invited. Residents are glad to welcome visitors and enjoy a social gathering where they are the welcoming hosts.

The new garden is a place of quiet but deep joy. Residents love to sit there with the sun warming their faces, enjoying the vivid colours of the seasons, currently the very green grass and colourful spring flowers. Sometimes a love of animals and birds brings joy. A resident sits still, with a lovely smile on her face, as she watches neighbouring kittens playing in the yard. The Program Director's dog, a very large puppy, visits often. Residents join in his "training" concentrating on getting him to learn his routine before a treat is produced. Then, laughter when he is obedient and gets his reward. Our residents are fond of animals and birds and like to put out food for neighbourhood birds and strays. This hospitality has attracted some unwelcome guests, and so some restrictions have had to be set, but little creatures do bring out the smiles and it is a challenge to decide which course is best for all.

Sometimes, the illness is severe and residents have to be hospitalized. Staff visit to comfort. Depression is often present. On such a visit in early spring, our resident was temporarily distracted as she pointed to the hospital window and excitedly exclaimed, "Oh, I saw the first bird." Staff looked and saw a beautiful bird perched on a tree limb just outside the window. For the rest of the visit, the resident ignored the visitors and gazed out of the window, her depression and