

We're Here as Long as You Need

Supporting Widow's & Widower's

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Earlier this year Parkinson Association of Alberta (PAA) offered our first support program directly aimed at helping widow and widowers who had lost their Person with Parkinson's. The aim of this program is to provide support and education relating to the grief that surrounds the loss of one's partner. Long-time PAA clients Della, Karen, and Rita all participated in the program, and agreed to share their perspective of this unique new Care Partner program. This is what they had to say:

*The quotes have been modified for brevity.

What was your experience with the Widows program?

Rita:

I felt like when I was expressing my feelings that people understood what I did or what I was talking about. I never felt judged, and I thought that was very important. I live in a 55+ and a few people have lost their loved ones in the last year here. And they have no help. They just have nobody to talk to except their kids, and when you talk to your kids, they feel like they've got to fix it. And I never felt like, when I was talking at these groups, that you were going to fix it. You were just going to listen to me and that was very good for me. I hope that it'll carry on forever.

Why was it important to start a widow's program for Parkinson's specifically?

Della:

It is not because the person has passed, that they are no longer here, they are still a big part of our lives. It's a natural progression that we could have a group like this to continue to help us grieve and remember our loved ones and speak with people who understand our journey. Because, yes, there are a lot of other support groups and a lot of other grief counselling, and even though everyone's Parkinson's journey was different there are a lot of shared experiences. As Rita said, nobody fixed anything for me, but just listening and sharing did help me through a lot of decisions and a lot of tough times. So, it's just a natural progression that we should continue to care for and help each other along with this.

Karen:

I think it is a great comfort in everyone being in the same boat as we have all been through the Parkinson's journey. If you've experienced another grieving group, which I did once - I went to one meeting, and no one there could really understand what the other person was going through except that we were grieving the loss of a loved one which is extremely traumatic on its own. But, with the Parkinson's grieving group, we've all walked the same journey, we're all in the same boat, and it's very much a comfort to me to speak to others who are in the same situation as I am and know exactly what you're going through.

Rita:

I think I can pretty well say ditto on both Della and Karen's points. I just feel like when you get down – we look forward to our meetings. You know what date its going to be and I knew I was going to be having some support when that date came. And the feeling of not being alone. You can be down today, and you get into a meeting and if others have made it, you can make it. You feel like you fit in.

What do you think the most valuable aspect of the program is?

Della:

I always appreciated the fact that you would present articles for us, food for thought, and I found those wonderful jumping off points. It wasn't structure that "This is what you have to talk about today." If something came up for somebody it was so open and welcoming and non-judgemental. We could all just identify with what they were saying and help them. And I found that very rewarding, because we were all caregivers and we were all in that position so long, there is kind of an emptiness afterwards. If there was anything, I ever said that was able to help somebody for two minutes then I felt really nice about that. It's great that I was able to say that and help someone, and vice versa anything that the group said that resonated with me was very valuable. So, that's what I got from it, camaraderie, sharing and feeling like I'm not alone, I've not been abandoned.

Karen:

I've had people comment when I tell them I'm with the widow's group, and they say they have had nothing. Except friends that don't really know how to react, if they haven't gone through it, or your children and they do want to fix it, quickly. They are very lonely if they haven't got a connection with others in the same situation.

So, I feel very fortunate and very blessed that we have got this group.

What would you say to someone who is considering participating in the next round of the program?

Karen:

Go! and if you need someone to come with you, let me know.

Rita:

I think the feeling that all three of us seemed to have experienced is that we were able to share our experiences and our hope, and that when you see someone who has lost their loved one, and it's been six months, and they can smile off and on, that's a good sign.

Della:

It may seem very overwhelming and scary, but through out my life I have found that if you just open yourself up to these experiences, be vulnerable, and express yourself, that you can gain an awful lot. You really can gain new friendships, gain insights, gain understanding of your self in many ways, and how to carry on. You don't have to go through this alone.

Thank you, ladies!

The Widow's and Widower's program will be an important part of the support services provided by PAA going forward.

As you have heard from Della, Karen, and Rita, it is extremely valuable support system for anyone who has lost their Person with Parkinson's.

I also want to emphasize that this program is not just for people who have lost their spouse recently.

Due to the sensitive nature of this program, we don't have any "set schedule" for when it will run next, rather when we have enough people who have indicated they would like to participate we will begin another session.

If you are a widow or widower who feels like you could use some support or would like to participate in the next round of the program, please reach out to your Client Services Coordinator or call us toll-free at 1-800-561-1911.

Thank you to Della, Karen, and Rita for agreeing to be a part of this article and sharing your experiences with us.

