

Celebrating 25 Years supporting caregivers

Welcome to  
**Connect**  
Newsletter



Cowichan  
Family  
Caregivers  
Support  
Society

December 2025 - Holiday Issue (#58)



Photo Credit: Snowy Owl, stockcake.com

*From all of us at Cowichan Family Caregivers,  
We Wish You a Peaceful Holiday Season.*



Please note our office will be closed  
December 22nd to January 2nd.  
Happy Holidays!

## Our Free Support Services Include...

### Support Groups

Our facilitated support group meetings offer caregivers the opportunity to meet other caregivers and share their experiences, feelings, strategies, and helpful resources. These support groups allow caregivers to expand their community and connect with other people who understand the emotions and unique challenges that caregivers experience. We offer eight in-person support groups per month. Please contact us if you are interested in joining a support group.

### One-to-One Support

We meet with caregivers individually to provide confidential support. During a one-to-one support meeting, caregivers can ask questions, share their feelings, and receive helpful information and resources for their specific caregiving situation. Support can include receiving emotional support, assistance navigating the healthcare system, referrals to other local services in the community, and caregiver educational resources. Individual support can be provided through in-person meetings, by video call, on the phone, or by email.

### Connection to Community Services

Caregivers need community support. Providing information and referrals to other local services can help caregivers manage their daily responsibilities and challenges, in the way that best supports their caregiving situation. Various programs and services are specialized to help caregivers address specific needs. This can include information on seniors services, financial assistance, food resources, advocacy support, employment support, shelter, and more.

### Healthcare System Navigation

A diagnosis can be scary and overwhelming. Many services are available through Island Health. Our staff can help provide basic information about these services and how to access them. Understanding the healthcare system empowers caregivers to make decisions and access the support they need.

### Caregiver Resources, Education, and More....

To refer yourself or a caregiver you know, please call **250-597-0886**  
or fill out the new referral form on our website contact page at [Caregiver Referrals](#)



United Way  
British Columbia



*FCSS and the Family & Friends Caregivers Support Program is funded by the BC Ministry of Health through the generous support of The United Way of BC and Island Health.*

[www.familycaregiverssupport.org](http://www.familycaregiverssupport.org)

## Caregiver Reflections

When caregivers share their real stories, it encourages all caregivers. Though each experience is unique, most caregivers find they have many thoughts and feelings in common. This common connection and understanding helps caregivers feel less alone on their caregiving journeys. Our reflection this month, titled *'The Loneliness of Being a Caregiver'* was generously shared by Penny.

*Facilitated by Lynne, Caregiver Support Lead*

### **Could you please share a little bit about yourself and your caregiving journey for the readers?**

"It's not a sprint. It's a marathon". I don't exactly remember who said that originally. I first heard it at one of my caregiver support group meetings, and I think it was likely the facilitator. It's a good place for me to start.

Listening to the others in my group, it seems that most have been on this marathon we call "caregiving" for a long time - years, in fact. In my case, it was somewhat different. My caregiving journey started as something of a sprint.

My husband of close to 50 years, went from having the "winter blues" in mid-January (and who doesn't get those?) to experiencing a confusing, frightening, and terrifyingly rapid decline in his mental state. He went from "normal"...to anxious...to full-on panic attacks...to becoming suicidal. By the end of the first week of March, my husband had been hospitalised on the psychiatric ward. He was borderline psychotic.

I was traumatized and struggling desperately to find out what the heck had just happened. Somehow, my intelligent, funny, kind, and loving husband, had become an unrecognizable, neurotic shell of his former self. I kept wanting to shake this alien being, and demand *who he was, and what had he done with my husband?* There were no answers yet, I only knew that something in his brain had gone sideways. And couldn't we just shove it back to where it was supposed to be? Apparently not.

This stranger came home. He was stabilized but not the same. My husband was no longer chatty, no longer sociable, no longer helpful around the house. The loss of my partner, my lover, my best friend was immeasurable.

### **How has your caregiving role evolved over time?**

My 'two-person' life no longer exists. I am a single person, but I live with a stranger that I have to look after. He gets up most days to walk the dogs with me, and then spends the rest of the day horizontal; in the bed, on the bed, or on the couch. In July, a medical assessment was completed by a Neuropsychologist. In mid-August, we received the diagnosis: "Major Cognitive Disorder due to vascular disease". In other words: vascular dementia.

The sprint had ended. The marathon had begun. And with that came the recognition of just how lonely a place this caregiving role actually is.

### **What kind of self-care do you find essential while caregiving?**

I have wonderful, generous, and incredibly kind friends. I can talk to my friends. They will listen and they will offer me a shoulder and a large box of Kleenex, a cup of tea, a glass (or two!) of wine. But, however sympathetic and understanding they are, they go back to their lives and I go back to being alone. Because the person I love most in this world is standing in front of me...yet isn't there anymore.

*Caregiver Reflections continued on page 4...*

Caregiver Reflections continued from page 3...

## Have there been any gifts in the caregiving journey for you?

I had to (metaphorically) be pushed, shoved, and finally kicked in the butt, before I contacted the Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society. I will be forever grateful to the person who gave me the push, the shove, and the kick. I have finally met people who get it. They are in the same boat, but have been in this boat for much, much longer. There are so many things that resonate with all of us in the support group, but the one thing that stands out for me - is that we all talk about the loneliness we feel.

## What do you find useful when accessing support from CFCSS?

There is, oddly, great comfort in knowing that I'm not the only one who feels like this. It is something all of us feel deeply. And, somehow, knowing this, and being with these amazing people (and they are amazing) lifts the weight a bit, for a little while. The marathon goes on and the weight settles back in; but I know the next time the group meets, it will lift that weight just a little bit, and it's enough. Just enough to get me through.



*If you would like to learn more about our caregiver support groups, or contribute a caregiver reflection to our newsletter, please email [hello@familycaregiverssupport.org](mailto:hello@familycaregiverssupport.org)*



## Pet Companion Program

This amazing program continues to grow, providing much needed robotic companion pets to isolated seniors and caregiving families who are supporting loved ones with a dementia diagnosis. We have received incredible stories of transformation and joy from our caregivers and are excited to continue offering pets to our community.

A huge thank you to the Eldercare Foundation for providing backbone support for the development of this program and for their generous support again this year!

If you are interested in adopting a companion pet, please call 250-597-0886 or email [office@familycaregiverssupport.org](mailto:office@familycaregiverssupport.org)



Cowichan  
Family  
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**Cowichan Family Caregivers - Support Groups Meeting Schedule**

**Pre-registration is required for all support groups**

**Dogwood Support Group (in person - Duncan)**

Facilitator: Lynne

2nd & 4th Mondays / 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

*Accepting registration / Sponsored by The Lions Club of Duncan*



**Arbutus Support Group (in person - Duncan)**

Facilitator: Cindy

1st & 3rd Tuesdays / 1:00 - 2:30 pm

*FULL - please call to be added to the waitlist*



Available for  
Sponsorship  
Your Logo Here

**Willow Support Group (in person - Duncan)**

Facilitator: Jacqueline

1st & 3rd Wednesdays / 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

*Accepting registration*



Available for  
Sponsorship  
Your Logo Here

**Maple Support Group (in person - Chemainus/Ladysmith)**

Facilitator: Lynne

2nd & 4th Tuesdays / 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

*Accepting registration*

Sponsorship  
Pending

**Spruce Support Group (in person - Shawnigan/Mill Bay)**

Facilitator: Cindy

1st & 3rd Mondays / 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

*New this year - Accepting registration*



Available for  
Sponsorship  
Your Logo Here

**NEW: Virtual Caregiver Support Group**

Facilitator: Jacqueline

1st & 3rd Thursdays, Thursdays / 10:00 am - 11:30 am

*New this year - Accepting registration*



Available for  
Sponsorship  
Your Logo Here

**Java Social Journaling Group (in person - Duncan)**

Facilitator: Linda

1st & 3rd Mondays / 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

*For caregivers in transition - Accepting registration*



*For support group registration or community sponsorship opportunities  
please call: 250-597-0886 or email [hello@familycaregiverssupport.org](mailto:hello@familycaregiverssupport.org)*

## Caregivers - Surviving the Holidays

Holidays and special occasions can bring out the best and the worst in us. The prospect of wonderful, happy times abound, filling us with somewhat unrealistic hopes for our relationships. We are often disappointed by how these special occasions turn out. Add to the normal tensions of holidays, the image of someone you love being ill or incapacitated, and you have the makings of very difficult times. Many times we wish we could just disappear until the holidays are over.

Caregivers may have unusually high expectations during holidays and special occasions. Knowing that this might be a last birthday, anniversary, Thanksgiving, Hanukah etc., caregivers may feel enormous pressure to make this time especially significant. The care giving family faces the normal tensions families experience in the holiday season, but their resources are usually depleted, energy levels are low and free time is limited.

Some thought and careful planning can make these times easier. First and foremost, we need to try and think about what we really want to happen. Are you looking to have a quiet day? Is it important to have anyone in particular with you? If you are a caregiver you must ask yourself, "What am I up to doing?". Honor your answer by not doing more than you feel you are comfortable doing.

If you choose to have company at these times, make it as easy as possible. Don't assume all the responsibility. Ask your loved one what he feels up to. Most people usually like to have those they love, and feel comfortable around, with them. Limit these occasions to family members and a few close friends.

Encourage honest communication between the entire family including close friends. Although your loved one may not seem to know exactly what is going on, try to remember that most care recipients have a real sense about themselves, their illness and what is going on in their world. Don't allow the person's illness to replace their identity.

Families can share their sadness and disappointments by openly communicating about them. And, while you do not need to force cheerfulness, don't forget that humor makes many of the difficulties of life easier to bear.

Keeping your level of expectations realistic will make the day go more smoothly for you, your loved one, extended family and friends. Remember that whatever you choose to do this year does not need to be the same as the past or the same in the future. If sandwiches on paper plates served in the bedroom are all that is possible, don't try to cook a turkey dinner.

The best advice for caregivers is to be realistic. Expect the normal tensions of family togetherness. Let others know how they can make the holidays easier for you. Don't overdo it. Recognize that you may be physically and emotionally depleted. Try to read, exercise, eat well and get some time alone. Try to stay in the here and now; anticipation is always worse than the actual event. We cannot predict what tomorrow will bring for anyone, so enjoy this day without needing for it to be perfect. Let yourself dispense with the "institutional" nature of the holidays and look for ways to make the day meaningful for yourself and for your loved ones.

By Jennifer Kay, L.C.S.W.

Reprinted from Caregiver.com: <https://caregiver.com/articles/surviving-the-holidays/>





*You are invited!*

# JAVA SOCIAL



The caregiving journey changes over time. You loved one may no longer live with you, or may have passed away. Java Social is a unique opportunity for caregivers in transition to explore the next phase of their journey through journaling, reflection, and guided meditation. Each week features a different theme with writing prompts, offering a chance to reflect, connect with others, and share experiences.

*Join us we would love to see you!*

**Pre-registration is required.**

**Date: 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month  
(excluding statutory holidays)**

**Time: 1:00 - 2:30 pm in Duncan.**

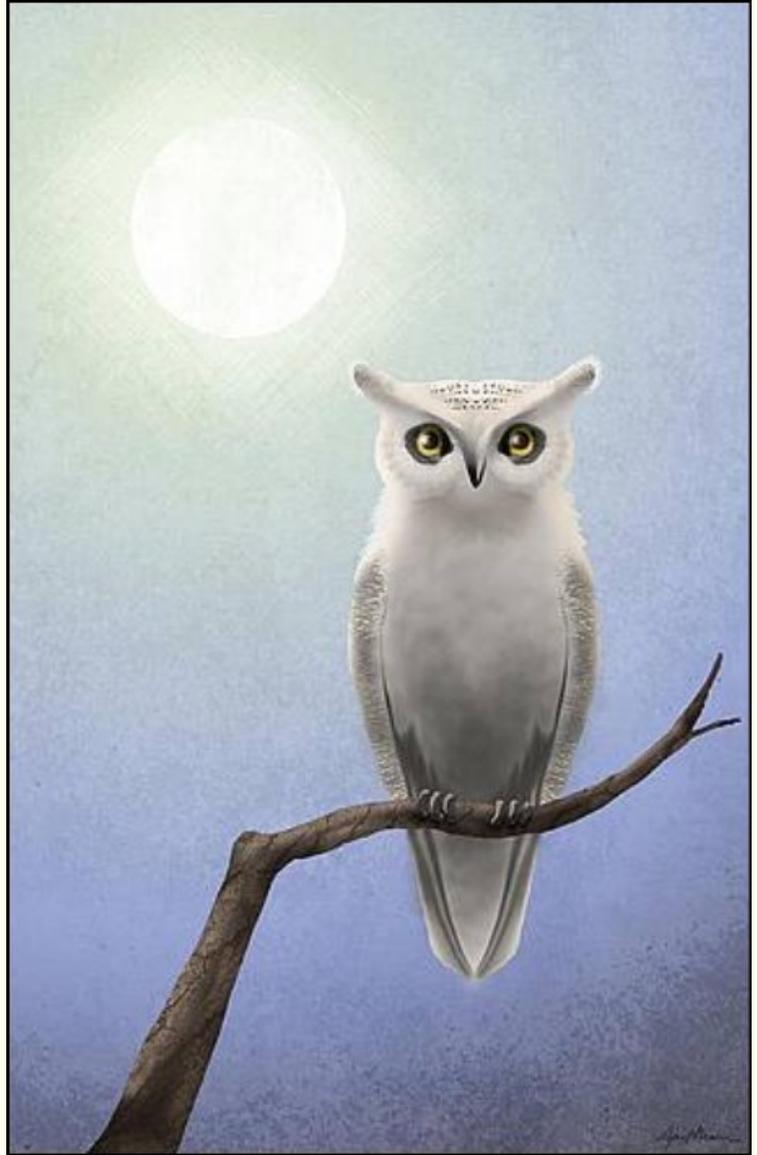
To register please call 250.597.0886

Or email [hello@familycaregiverssupport.org](mailto:hello@familycaregiverssupport.org)

**Snowy Owl by Mary Oliver**

*Last night, an owl  
in the blue dark  
tossed  
an indeterminate number  
of carefully shaped sounds into  
the world, in which,  
a quarter of a mile away, I happened  
to be standing.  
I couldn't tell  
which one it was –  
the barred or the great-horned  
ship of the air –  
it was that distant. But, anyway,  
aren't there moments  
that are better than knowing something,  
and sweeter? Snow was falling,  
so much like stars  
filling the dark trees  
that one could easily imagine  
its reason for being was nothing more  
than prettiness. I suppose  
if this were someone else's story  
they would have insisted on knowing  
whatever is knowable – would have hurried  
over the fields  
to name it – the owl, I mean.  
But it's mine, this poem of the night,  
and I just stood there, listening and holding  
out  
my hands to the soft glitter  
falling through the air. I love this world,  
but not for its answers.  
And I wish good luck to the owl,  
whatever its name –  
and I wish great welcome to the snow,  
whatever its severe and comfortless*

# Poetry Corner



Your Christmas recycling can support local caregivers. Take your bottles to any Island Return-It facility and donate the cash to proceeds "Cowichan Caregivers". Account #146. Thank you for your support!



**Thank You to our 2025 Funders!**



We gratefully acknowledge financial support from:

- United Way of British Columbia
- Island Health
- Eldercare Foundation
- Chemainus Healthcare Foundation
- Chemainus Healthcare Auxiliary
- Ladysmith Healthcare Auxiliary
- Duncan Dabbers Bingo Society
- Duncan Lions Club
- Ladysmith Kinsmen
- Municipality of North Cowichan
- OUR Cowichan Communities Health Network
- Fraternal Order of Eagles Ladysmith
- City of Duncan
- Rotary Club of Chemainus
- Ladysmith Rotary



**United Way**  
British Columbia



Duncan Dabbers Bingo Society



**ELDERCARE**  
**FOUNDATION**



*Chemainus*  
*Health Care Auxiliary*  
since 1899



CFCSS newsletters are made possible through the generous funding of BC Community Gaming Grants.



**BRITISH**  
**COLUMBIA**

# DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT!

By making a donation this holiday season, your generosity will double! From now until March 31st, 2026 all donations will be matched up to \$60,000 by generous private donors and a caregiving family.

## Ways to make a Donation Today...



1. Online at [canadahelps.org](https://canadahelps.org)
2. E-transfer to: [donations@familycaregiverssupport.org](mailto:donations@familycaregiverssupport.org)
3. By cheque to: Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society  
135 Third St. Duncan, BC.  
V9L 1R9

*The Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society is a Canadian registered charity. (Registration number 867610446RR0001)  
As a Registered Charity, we issue tax receipts for any donation of \$20 or more.*

The Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society has been providing free support services to caregivers in the Cowichan Valley since 2000.

To Learn more about our Society or explore our online resources, please visit:

[familycaregiverssupport.org](https://familycaregiverssupport.org)



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**Happy Holidays!**