

Kelowna branch:

Teamwork and innovation make a winning combination



Although Bayshore Home Health's Kelowna, B.C., branch opened just two years ago, it's already a well-respected health care agency, and its staff prove daily that teamwork and innovation make a winning combination.

The branch provides nursing, personal care, home support and other services across the Okanagan Valley. Clientele include private clients and people referred by national insurance companies, WorkSafe BC and the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC). The branch also provides infusions and intravenous drug therapy to clients throughout the B.C. Interior.

Meeting the needs of such a vast area requires steadfast commitment from all of the branch's employees, who include five administrative staff and 46 field staff. "We will travel great distances, or hire nurses and certified care aides in outlying areas. Whatever it takes – we never turn down a client," insists Sharon Hughes Geekie, Area Director of the branch.

Administrative staff are encouraged to build new skills and explore opportunities that will grow the business. As a result of her recently acquired business planning skills, Naazra Khan, Client Service Manager, launched a cleaning service with a twist: no cleaning products. Instead, workers use steam, micro-fibre cloths and toilet sticks with tiny disposable pads in order to avoid transferring dirt and germs between clients' homes. Through this service, the branch has tapped into a market that is something of a departure for Bayshore: healthy, able-bodied people. These clients are typically busy professionals or part of the "sandwich generation," simultaneously caring for children and aging parents. "They simply don't have time to focus on their own needs," says Hughes Geekie.

Human Resources Manager Vance Schneider has similarly stepped outside of his job description and is honing his marketing skills by focusing on building a client base in Kamloops, a community approximately two hours away from Kelowna. He has already recruited a nurse in the area who is actively helping promote Bayshore's services.

Hughes Geekie credits the positive energy in the branch office to a "can do" attitude and the practice of putting people first. "If a client stops in, no matter how busy we are, a staff

member sits and talks with them. On the days field staff drop off their timesheets, we make sure there's a pot of coffee on and someone is available to find out how they, and the clients they care for, are getting along."

Hughes Geekie cites a basement flood early one Sunday morning as a practical example of the branch's "clients first" philosophy. "Elderly clients of ours had a washing machine hose that had been leaking. The couple doesn't have any family and were understandably very upset. Sophia Ali, Client Service Coordinator, who took the frantic call, wanted to know what she should do to help them. I went over, turned off the water and sat with the clients while Sophia called for quotes and organized restoration services. Our staff sincerely care about the people we serve."

Hughes Geekie also heaps praise on her branch's field staff. "We are really fortunate. For most of our caregivers, it's not just a job. They are always doing little extras and some of them – no matter when or how often we call – will rearrange their plans to accommodate our clients."

Employees take part in seniors' fairs, health clinics, Hike for Hospice (in support of Central Okanagan Hospice Association) and Alzheimer Society of British Columbia's Walk for Memories. Staff also enjoy each other's company at Halloween and Christmas parties, and they're even walking to China together!

"It's a program that our Manager of Clinical Practice, Amanda Seib, introduced," explains Hughes Geekie. "We provided the staff with pedometers, which encourages people to be active. Everyone adds up their miles on a website. Once we have enough miles to hit China, we'll go out for a big Chinese dinner."

Seib also started The Happiness Team, which is operating the "Walk to China" and is exploring other social activities, such as a book club. Hughes Geekie hopes these opportunities will help field staff deepen their connection to the branch and to each other. "Our caregiver work in isolation – they have a relationship with their clients, but don't regularly see their colleagues."

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Left to right: Naazra Khan, Vance Schneider, Sharon Hughes Geekie and Sophia Ali. Missing from photo, Amanda Seib.



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