

Continued recognition of our “Hidden Allies”

Informal Caregiving Research in NB

By Samantha Steeves and Emily MacEachern

Hearing the Voices of an Invisible Population

Since September 2017, St. Thomas University Social Work students Emily MacEachern and Samantha Steeves have been completing their Social Action Placement at the Collaborative. Working under the supervision of Dr. Michelle Lafrance and her research on informal caregivers in the province, Emily and Samantha transcribed 25 qualitative interviews to learn more about the daily realities of informal caregivers. After completing their data analysis, the students presented their findings to St. Thomas Gerontology students and attendees of the 2017 Summit, alongside other academics in the province. Students have been working diligently to create awareness around the experiences and challenges related to informal caregiving in the province.

Findings Uncovered

1. Burnout/compassion fatigue
2. Feeling invisible in their caregiving role
3. Financial strains
4. Inconsistent information across sectors
5. Lack of community resources/supports

Recommendations

Short term:

Recognition of the importance of informal care work. Over 165,000 people in New Brunswick are informal caregivers. They are an invisible population and the work that they do often goes unnoticed.

Keep the conversation going - One must remember that informal caregivers can never be over-acknowledged. Let them know that their voices are heard! If you know someone who is providing care to a loved one, ask them how they are doing or what they need. Be supportive!

Long term:

Creation of an accessible **one-stop-shop** with a list of all services that are available in a community. This is important because informal caregivers often do not know where to start when looking for services, resources, or support. They want to know what is available. As they are often overworked, having all the necessary resources in one location is essential to this population.



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Providing services and resources that are **adequate and meet the needs** of informal caregivers in the province. Far too often they are provided with services that do not meet their needs. Use a bottom-up approach, listen to what they need as opposed to telling them what they need.

Policy reform of both governmental and independent agencies. With many stakeholders involved, all must be careful to review how their policies both hinder and help caregivers. Again, connect with your community and speak with informal caregivers. They will tell you what they need.