



Husband-and-wife volunteer team makes a difference

FRIDAY JULY 13, 2007 -- DERON HAMEL

Volunteering does not have to be time-consuming – even pitching in a little to help a child with special needs can make a big difference, says Sheila Nagel, who volunteers with her husband John at Pathways Health Centre for Children in Sarnia.

“I think sometimes people think that it’s going to be too much of a time commitment, but (it isn’t),” says Sheila. “You can select what you would like to do and go from there.”

The Nagels are retired school teachers. Sheila, who taught primary school, has been volunteering at the treatment centre for four years. John, a former high school teacher, has been volunteering for three years.

Having worked as educators provided the impetus for the Nagels to get involved with volunteering at the centre.

“We used to be teachers and we taught students with special needs,” says John. “We were also (working with) students from Pathways.”

For Sheila, volunteering provides a vehicle for her to mix her interests with her love of helping others. Both former lifeguards, the Nagels help out with swimming programs as well as with the centre’s therapeutic pool.

The Nagels have also helped with horse-back-riding therapy programs, and were involved with the 2007 Ontario Para Provincial Summer Championship, a sporting competition sponsored by Paralympics Ontario. The event was held in Sarnia from June 22 to 24.

What makes volunteering an enjoyable experience for Sheila, she says, is seeing firsthand the impact her work has on the children she helps.

“It makes you feel helpful that you’re benefiting someone else’s life,” she says.

Annette Urban, volunteer co-ordinator at Pathways, says the centre gets people volunteering for a number of reasons.

“A lot of people want the experience for school or to get a job,” she says. “A lot of retirees are looking for ways to fill their time productively.”

Sheila has some advice for anyone thinking about volunteering at any of Ontario’s children’s treatment centres.

“I say get involved. You’ll love it.”

Anyone interested in volunteering at a treatment centre can get more information by calling any of the centres found at this link: <http://www.oacrs.com/treatment.php>.