

# The Beacon

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## Hello caregivers, community partners and friends

We are grateful to have added **two new staff members** to our team over the last few months. Ana Merkureva joined our team as our full-time Communications Coordinator and more recently Emily Gallant joined as our Education Coordinator. We warmly welcome them both and look forward to all the knowledge, experience and talent they bring to our organization.

We are wrapping up our **first program for Young Caregivers** with immense gratitude to the Young Caregivers Association and Petro-Canada CareMakers Foundation. We had an amazing group of young caregivers join our 6-week program facilitated by Carla Chambers with support from Guan Huang. We are excited that we had this opportunity and look forward to future opportunities to support young caregivers.

**This holiday season**, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all caregivers. Your dedication, compassion and tireless efforts make a profound difference in the lives of those you support.

As you give so selflessly, we hope you find moments of peace, joy and rest during the season's celebrations. May this time bring warmth to your heart and remind you how deeply you are appreciated.

Thank you for all that you do. Wishing you and your families a holiday season filled with love, light and happiness on behalf of the staff and board of Caregivers Nova Scotia.

Jenny Theriault  
Executive Director



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Thank you to the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care for their support

# Caregiving for persons with intellectual disabilities

by Sheila Landry



Caring for someone with intellectual disabilities involves love, affection, worry, guilt, stress and sometimes a sense of loss, similar to other caregiving roles. However, this type of caregiving often begins at birth and may last a lifetime. This long-term commitment brings unique challenges and perspectives for caregivers.

For parents and family members, caregiving is a lifelong responsibility. This role brings distinct challenges, from navigating complex systems and combating stigma to dealing with social isolation and managing everyday tasks. And while many caregivers face these hurdles, those caring for people with intellectual disabilities often have specific needs that require additional planning and support.

With the right tools, support and mindset, caregivers can not only survive, but thrive. Here are some key strategies for caregivers of people with intellectual disabilities.

## Identifying needs: a person-centered approach

The caregiving journey starts with identifying your loved one's needs. A person-centered approach places the person receiving care at the core of all plans and decisions: their needs, preferences and aspirations guide all caregiving strategies.

For caregivers, this means taking the time to understand the specific challenges and strengths of the person you are caring for. Shifting the focus from the diagnosis to the person as an individual - their personality, interests, goals and what makes them feel empowered. This information will help you advocate more effectively for them, ensuring that their rights, dignity and desires are prioritized.

As a caregiver, you often serve as their voice, advocating for inclusive education, navigating the healthcare system and ensuring access to accessible services in your community.

## Creating a support circle

A support circle is a group of people who support the person receiving care. This includes family, friends, healthcare professionals, teachers, community members and the person themselves. The key to a person-centered support circle is making the person receiving care an active participant in all decisions.

Regular meetings will allow the support circle stay aligned on goals, dreams and challenges, always centering on the care recipient's progress, desires and input. This empowers the care recipient and allows them to actively contribute to the planning process.

Through a person-centered support circle, caregivers can identify both short-term and long-term goals, identify resources and opportunities and help create an environment where the person receiving care can grow and succeed.

## Advocating: empowering through action

Advocating for your loved one is crucial. As a caregiver, you play a key role in accessing services, resources, opportunities and accommodations that help your loved one thrive.

Advocacy often includes seeking out services, advocating for inclusive educational settings, ensuring the health providers understand your loved one's needs and securing funding for specific services or equipment that improve quality of life. Advocacy can extend to breaking down the stigma that surrounds people with intellectual disabilities.

In Nova Scotia, the Disability Support Program (DSP) can connect you to several organizations that help individuals live more independent and integrated lives. Nova Scotia Residential Services Association (NSRSA), L'Arche Nova Scotia, Directions Council and Inclusion NS offer valuable resources on housing, education, employment and community inclusion.

## Planning ahead

Planning proactively ensures your loved one is ready for greater independence and a fuller integration into society. Think about your loved one's future, the goals they want to achieve. This could include living independently, getting a job or engaging in community activities. It's essential to create opportunities for your loved one to build skills and foster relationships.

This also means ensuring that the community is ready to support their inclusion. Identifying suitable housing, employment and social opportunities is an important step. Support from organizations like Inclusion NS and local advocacy groups can help you navigate available resources and help prepare your loved one for life outside the family home.

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## Self-care: you matter

As a caregiver, it's easy to forget about your own needs when you're focused on caring for someone else. However, self-care is essential for long-term caregiving.

By prioritizing your own well-being - through hobbies, maintaining friendships and rest - you improve your ability to support your loved one. Maintaining your physical, mental and emotional health helps you better navigate the challenges of caregiving.

Remember, you don't have to do it all alone. Delegating tasks to other members of your support circle makes caregiving manageable and sustainable, helps you recharge.

Joining a caregiver support group can provide both emotional support and practical advice.

## Thriving through a person-centered approach

Caregiving for a person with intellectual disabilities is a lifelong journey - one filled with challenges but also with immense potential for growth and success.

By focusing on a person-centered approach, caregivers can ensure that the needs, preferences and goals of the individual are always prioritized. Building a strong support circle, advocating for opportunities and planning ahead are all important steps in ensuring a fulfilling life for both you and your care recipient.

Self-care is equally important. The caregiving journey is best navigated when you are healthy, supported and empowered.

Remember, you are not alone in this journey. There is support, there are resources and there is always hope for a brighter, more inclusive future.

### Community Partner Highlight

by Leanne Taylor

In this edition, I am happy to highlight a valuable March of Dimes Canada program: "After Stroke."

Strokes can happen at any age, but the risk increases as we get older. In Canada, there are more than 89,000 new strokes each year - that's about one every six minutes. Fortunately, better and faster treatment means there more stroke survivors than ever before.

The effects of a stroke vary widely. Survivors may face challenges with speaking, understanding, swallowing or mobility. A stroke doesn't just affect the individual - it impacts their loved ones and caregivers too.

"After Stroke" is a free, nationwide program that supports both stroke survivors and their caregivers. The program develops a personalized recovery plan, connects to support, educational opportunities and innovative programs. "After Stroke" also offers peer support, including one-on-one support for survivors and support groups for both survivors and caregivers

There are three ways to connect to the program:

- 1-888-540-6666
- [afterstroke@marchofdimes.ca](mailto:afterstroke@marchofdimes.ca)
- [www.afterstroke.ca/contact](http://www.afterstroke.ca/contact)

## Dementia vs. Delirium

As we age, confusion and disorientation can increasingly affect our daily lives. These symptoms are very often associated with types of dementia, but sometimes they can be misdiagnosed. In many cases, they may be the result of the condition delirium.

Delirium is considered a medical emergency and many factors can trigger its onset. These include dehydration and poor nutrition, disease (severe pain), sleep loss, changes in vision or hearing, infections and certain medications. Key signs of delirium include confusion, difficulty focusing, agitation, restlessness, incoherent speech, disinterest in previously enjoyed activities, inappropriate behaviour and hallucinations.

Once testing to identify potential causes is completed, treatment options may include administering fluids, nutritional support, antibiotics and pain management. Caregivers play an important role in this process, as their intimate knowledge of their loved one can help them recognize subtle personality changes. Early intervention in delirium can lead to hugely improved results.

Recovery from delirium varies from person to person. For some, it may take only days, for others, the recuperation period can extend to months. Recognizing delirium as a condition separate from dementia, with its own set of causes and treatments is key for navigating the condition and supporting not only the person affected but also those providing support and care.



article by Kim Henry

# What is sensory grounding and how can it help me?

by JoAnne Connors

In today's fast-paced world, especially for caregivers, finding ways to improve mental health and manage stress can feel overwhelming. Balancing caregiving responsibilities often leaves little time for self-care, but prioritizing practices to reduce stress is essential—particularly during crisis situations.

Simple strategies can make a big difference. Deep breaths are a great starting point. Another helpful technique is QTIP—Quit Taking It Personally. This mantra can help you pause and reflect rather than reacting emotionally. As my mother used to say, “The only thing we can control is our reactions.”

## Understanding sensory grounding

Sensory Grounding involves using the five senses to reduce anxiety and stay connected to the present moment.

While grounding might sound like lying on the ground, it's more about focusing your senses to ease tension. For example, walks in nature, such as at a beach or park, can be revitalizing.

This approach is particularly valuable because it recognizes that everyone experiences anxiety differently. While therapy and medication are helpful for many, sensory grounding can offer quick relief in moments of heightened stress.

Research highlights that mindfulness practices like these can alleviate symptoms of anxiety, depression and even physical pain.

## The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique

One popular method is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique, which involves focusing on your surroundings through your senses:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

This exercise shifts your focus from racing thoughts to the present moment, creating space to listen and respond thoughtfully.

It helps you stay present and engaged.

It's also an activity you can share with the person you're caring for, regardless of their age or cognitive abilities.



## Specific sensory exercises

Each sense can be engaged through simple exercises:

- **Sight:** Focus on the details of a photograph or observe the movements of a tree in the wind.
- **Touch:** Alternate between warm and cold water or notice the texture of your clothing.
- **Hearing:** Tune into sounds like birds chirping or distant traffic.
- **Smell:** Use calming scents, such as candles (a chocolate-scented candle is my personal favourite) or flowers.
- **Taste:** Enjoy the flavours of gum, tea or a favourite snack.

## Practical tips for grounding

To make grounding effective:

1. Start as soon as you feel strong emotions building.
2. Avoid judging what you notice, just observe.
3. Focus on the present moment.
4. Reflect on how your mood changes before and after.

Grounding is a versatile tool that can be as simple as observing your environment or actively engaging your senses through purposeful actions.

## Resources for caregivers

If anxiety remains a challenge, consider reaching out to a mental health professional.

Additionally, free tools and resources are available;

- **Apps:** Nova Scotia Health offers Mindwell and Tranquility, which can be accessed online at [mha.nshealth.ca](https://mha.nshealth.ca)
- **Workshops:** The Community Health Teams provide [free workshops](#) on topics like self-care and self-compassion.
- **Caregivers NS:** This organization offers support for caregivers through resources and guidance.

Exploring techniques like sensory grounding, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or guided visualizations through podcasts and videos can also be helpful. Remember, taking small steps to care for yourself benefits both you and the person you're supporting.



# Qu'est-ce que la mise à la terre sensorielle et comment peut-elle m'aider ?

par JoAnne Connors

Dans le monde d'aujourd'hui où tout va très vite, en particulier pour les aidants, trouver des moyens d'améliorer la santé mentale et de gérer le stress peut sembler insurmontable. La conciliation des responsabilités d'aidant laisse souvent peu de temps pour prendre soin de soi, mais il est essentiel de donner la priorité à des pratiques visant à réduire le stress, en particulier dans les situations de crise.

Des stratégies simples peuvent faire une grande différence. Respirer profondément est un bon point de départ. Une autre technique utile est le QTIP-Quit Taking It Personally. Ce mantra peut vous aider à faire une pause et à réfléchir plutôt qu'à réagir de manière émotionnelle. Comme le disait ma mère, « la seule chose que nous pouvons contrôler, ce sont nos réactions ».



## Comprendre la mise à la terre sensorielle

La mise à la terre sensorielle consiste à utiliser les cinq sens pour réduire l'anxiété et rester connecté au moment présent. Bien que la mise à la terre puisse ressembler au fait de s'allonger sur le sol, il s'agit plutôt de se concentrer sur ses sens pour soulager la tension. Par exemple, les promenades dans la nature, comme à la plage ou dans un parc, peuvent être revitalisantes.

Cette approche est particulièrement utile car elle tient compte du fait que chaque personne vit l'anxiété différemment. Si la thérapie et les médicaments sont utiles pour beaucoup, l'ancrage sensoriel peut apporter un soulagement rapide dans les moments de stress intense. Les recherches montrent que les pratiques de pleine conscience comme celles-ci peuvent atténuer les symptômes de l'anxiété, de la dépression et même de la douleur physique.

## La technique 5-4-3-2-1

L'une des méthodes les plus populaires est la technique 5-4-3-2-1, qui consiste à se concentrer sur son environnement par l'intermédiaire de ses sens :

- 5 choses que vous voyez
- 4 choses que vous pouvez sentir
- 3 choses que vous pouvez entendre
- 2 choses que vous pouvez sentir
- 1 chose que vous pouvez goûter

Cet exercice vous permet de vous concentrer sur le moment présent plutôt que sur les pensées qui se bousculent, créant ainsi un espace pour écouter et répondre de manière réfléchie. C'est également une activité que vous pouvez partager avec la personne dont vous vous occupez, quel que soit son âge ou ses capacités cognitives.

## Exercices sensoriels spécifiques

Chaque sens peut être sollicité par des exercices simples :

- **La vue :** Concentrez-vous sur les détails d'une photographie ou observez les mouvements d'un arbre dans le vent.
- **Le toucher :** Alternez entre l'eau chaude et l'eau froide, ou remarquez la texture de vos vêtements.
- **L'ouïe :** Écoutez le gazouillis des oiseaux ou les bruits de la circulation au loin.
- **L'odorat :** utilisez des parfums apaisants, tels que des bougies (une bougie parfumée au chocolat est ma préférée) ou des fleurs.
- **Le goût :** Appréciez les saveurs d'un gomme, d'un thé ou d'une collation préférée.

## Ressources pour les aidants

Si l'anxiété reste un problème, envisagez de consulter un professionnel de la santé mentale.

En outre, des outils et des ressources gratuits sont disponibles :

- **Apps :** Nova Scotia Health propose Mindwell et Tranquility, accessibles en ligne sur [mha.nshealth.ca](https://mha.nshealth.ca)
- **Ateliers :** Les équipes de santé communautaire proposent des ateliers gratuits sur des sujets tels que les soins personnels et l'autocompassion. Vous trouverez le dépliant de leur programme [ici](#).
- **Caregivers NS :** Cette organisation offre un soutien aux soignants par le biais de ressources et de conseils.

L'exploration de techniques telles que l'ancrage sensoriel, la thérapie cognitivo-comportementale ou les visualisations guidées par le biais de podcasts et de vidéos peut également s'avérer utile. N'oubliez pas que le fait de prendre de petites mesures pour prendre soin de vous est bénéfique à la fois pour vous et pour la personne que vous soutenez.

## Conseils pratiques pour la mise à la terre

Pour que la mise à la terre soit efficace :

1. Commencez dès que vous sentez monter des émotions fortes.
2. Évitez de juger ce que vous remarquez - contentez-vous d'observer.
3. Concentrez-vous sur le moment présent.
4. Réfléchissez à l'évolution de votre humeur avant et après la séance.

La mise à la terre est un outil polyvalent qui peut être aussi simple que l'observation de votre environnement ou l'engagement actif de vos sens par des actions ciblées.

# The value of caregiver support groups

by Therese Henman-Phillips

When I text “Anne” to remind her of the date of the next caregiver peer support group, her response is often that she is looking forward to “being with the family”.

Anne isn't related by blood to any of the other caregivers in her group, but like family, they share a deep connection. This “intentional togetherness” is vital to her caregiving journey.



## Power of connection, community and learning

Caregiving can feel very isolating. At caregiver peer support groups, you can meet others who understand what you as a caregiver are going through, your needs and challenges. It is a place where you can share in a safe, confidential and non-judgmental atmosphere and where you can ultimately feel validated and supported.

As Anne suggests, these groups provide more than just support – they create a community. We know from psychology that humans are wired for connection. Social connection and community support help us reduce emotional stress, allow us to cope and gain acceptance.

Anyone familiar with caregiving knows, sometimes it takes a village! These groups connect participants with others who truly “get it.” While friends and family might be supportive, perhaps they have never been caregivers or don't quite understand the magnitude of the role. Maybe they are not able to offer an informed perspective. At the heart of the group is the caregiving community.

Peer learning is another powerful aspects of the groups. Some who attend support groups are just starting in their journey, while others have been doing this for some time now. All of them are sharing their knowledge and experience, and all the participants take away as little or as much as they need to support them on their journey.

## Support group format

As a facilitator, it's a privilege to watch support groups unfold. Our facilitators – who are current or former caregivers themselves — learn so much from these groups. Although we come from various backgrounds, we are not trained medical or mental health professionals. Support groups provide peer support rather than counselling. If a caregiver needs professional counselling or treatment, we can help connect them to the appropriate resources. The facilitator's role is to guide the support group process.

Support groups at Caregivers NS are open groups. As a result, new caregivers can join at any time and decide when they wish to present. Caregivers can come once to see what we are about or every time a group is offered. Perhaps they only come in times of stress. Participation is optional and there is no pressure to attend. Some caregivers come because they want to express themselves while others come to just listen initially. Sharing is encouraged but not required. If you are thinking about attending a support group, we would welcome your curiosity and participation.

Facilitated sessions are free and open to all caregivers, regardless of age or the health condition of your care recipient. We can also connect you to other types of support groups if this does not seem to be a fit.

## Our support groups

We offer over 25 support groups across the province, with both in-person and virtual options. We strive to enhance caregiver support, especially for underserved populations. We have a French Caregiver support group as well as a pilot for Young Caregivers. Hopefully, you can find one group that fits your caregiving journey. We do understand attending support groups can be challenging, but caregivers often find benefits outweigh difficulties. We welcome any feedback that would make the groups even more supportive and inclusive.

You can explore our support groups [online](#) at or contact our office at the toll-free number **1.877.488.7390** for more information.



# Musings on community care

by Jennine Wilson

I've heard many stories about communities struggling – things are more difficult than they used to be, systems are stressed and needs are unmet. I get revved and dejected as these stories pile up. But then I hear stories about community care – acts of kindness, mutual support and connection – that deeply move me. They have me musing over community care: what is it and how do we create more of it?

I came across a powerful quote from Bryan Garcia in his article [Some Thoughts on Community Care](#): “While self-care can sustain us, community care can help us thrive.” This resonated with me deeply and I found myself diving deeper into the subject.

In a [recent webinar](#) hosted by the Coady Institute, Cormac Russell and John McKnight presented a synopsis of their book *The Connected Community*. Here's what I learned.

## Building community care

John McKnight explored communities that were working together to make things better. His research focused not on their needs, but their assets, resources. His work asks: “What have people in this community done together that has made things better?”

He identified six key resources that communities can leverage to make things better:

1. [Residents](#) – the skills, capacities, passions and knowledge of local people.
2. [Associations](#) – groups and organizations that help connect.
3. [Local institutions](#) – the further away the institution is from the neighbourhood, the less impact it has on it.
4. [Exchange](#) – sharing, trading, bartering and selling within the community.
5. [Places and spaces](#) – the most significant aspects of a place are often invisible from the outside.
6. [Stories](#) – building blocks of culture. A way of capturing what has been done, what worked and hasn't in the community.

Everyone must be included to build a strong community. Contributions from young people in associations benefit community care and build it as an integral part of culture.

## Principles of abundance

Karri Lynn Paul, educator at the Coady Institute, reflected on the indigenous approach to community care. Pre-colonial indigenous nations practiced community care for generations. The communities of today are reclaiming the concept, rooting it in abundance, not scarcity.

These are the indigenous principles of abundance:

1. Every person and community have gifts within.
2. Start with what we already have.
3. Start with spirit.
4. Relations and connections are always at the centre.
5. Asking, listening and sharing our stories is key.
6. Indigenous leaders involve others.
7. Shared vision and decision-making that honours the commitment to future generations.

## Principles of abundance

Cormac Russell shared that when people look at what they might do together and why, they will discover, connect, and mobilize.

The heart of community care lies in what people care enough about to act on together. Moving from “ego to eco,” from “me to we” and from being self-reliant to being other-reliant is at the core of building a thriving community.

The clearer we are about the roles we can play as citizens in our neighbourhoods – whether on the street, in the village or in the broader community – the easier it becomes to identify the resources and assets available to us.

Russell outlines seven community care functions to make a better life:

1. Enabling health
2. Assuring security
3. Stewarding ecology
4. Shaping local economies
5. Contributing to local food production
6. Raising our children
7. Co-creating care

## Personal reflections

I see these principles come to life in my own community.

- Gathering together at the community oven.
- Sharing meals and stories at Soup and Sides Mondays.
- Delivering delivering local ingredient, frozen meals from the market to a neighbour in need.
- Playing games with the neighbourhood kids.
- Participating in work parties and being a part of memory cafes.

All of these small acts connect us in a meaningful way.

I know I'm not alone in these musings. When I shared the idea of writing about community care with my director, she excitedly mentioned that she had just attended a conference where Cormac Russell was the keynote speaker. She even bought his book *The Connected Community*. Guess what I'll be borrowing?

I care deeply about these principles, and in the words of Moses Coady, I believe in “a full and abundant life for all.” This is why I'll continue to reflect in my musings and look for ways to grow these actions with others in my community.

Imagine a world where children are raised in environments rich with community care – where this sense of connection and support shapes their lives and where everyone's needs are creatively taken care of.





# Welcome!

## Ana Merkureva | Communications Coordinator

As a newcomer and a former caregiver, I know how important it is to have a community that truly gets what you are going through. Ups and downs, highs and lows, challenges and triumphs.

As a communicator, I make sure that our social media and website are informative and uplifting. Platforms where you feel seen, understood and supported.

When we run events, I connect with as many people and organizations as I can to reach those who will find them useful. I did this with the Young Caregivers Pilot, and that's only the beginning.

I'm thrilled to be a part of this fantastic team!

# Welcome!

## Emily Gallant | Education Coordinator

I have admired the work that Caregivers Nova Scotia does for some time now and am so delighted to join this team of wonderful, dedicated people.

Drawing on my studies in Gerontology, Women's Studies and Social Services, as well as my life experiences, I hope to create educational content that empowers and supports caregivers throughout our beautiful province.

As a caregiver myself, I know the challenges and rewards that come with caring for a loved one. Growing up, my Gramma and I were attached at the hip, and as we navigated the challenges presented by stroke recovery and Alzheimer's disease, she taught me the value of advocacy, knowledge, compassion and community. I carry these values with me today as I support other family members in caregiving roles and feel passionate about helping caregivers access the tools, support and recognition they deserve.



## Our team

### Office

- Jenny Theriault
- Kim Henry
- Ana Merkureva
- Emily Gallant

### Coordinators

- JoAnne Connors
- Therese Henman-Phillips
- Sheila Landry
- Lyn Stuart
- Leanne Tailor
- Jennine Wilson

## Our board

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- Wendy Menczel - Vice-Chair
- Brittany Keough - Treasurer
- Lindsay Jones - Secretary

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- Kelli MacDonald
- Mary Elizabeth MacLellan
- Sherri Mitchell
- Steven Neatt
- Maggie Roach-Ganawayn