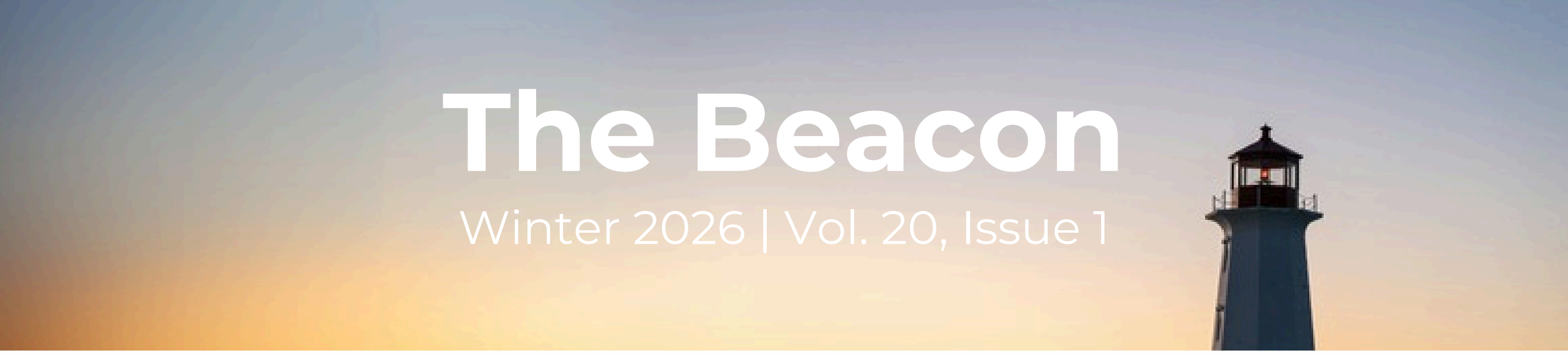

The Beacon

Winter 2026 | Vol. 20, Issue 1

Hello caregivers, community partners and friends

As 2025 comes to a close, I feel an incredible sense of gratitude for all we've accomplished this year at Caregivers Nova Scotia.

In May, we welcomed **Ben Robertson** as our new Outreach Coordinator. Ben has been busy connecting with community partners across the province and building relationships that will help us better support underserved caregiving communities. He's working directly with caregivers in Eastern HRM and hosting support groups in Eastern Passage, Musquodoboit Harbour and Cole Harbour.

We completed and published **the fourth edition of the Caregiver Handbook**, which is now being distributed across Nova Scotia.

We connected with and onboarded **ten new Social Prescribing partner sites**, a mix of pharmacies and healthcare clinics, who are now identifying caregivers and referring them directly to CNS for support.

This October, we were honoured to have Caregivers Nova Scotia **acknowledged** by the NDP at the **Nova Scotia Legislature**.

A major highlight was having our full CNS team, along with two of our board members, attend the **CCCE's Canadian Caregiving Summit** in Ottawa this November. It was an invaluable opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the country and learn about emerging initiatives, research and advocacy efforts happening nationwide. We left the summit feeling energized, inspired and hopeful.

From all of us at Caregivers Nova Scotia, we wish all of you the very best for the holiday season, the new year and the winter months ahead!

Jenny Theriault
Executive Director

In this issue

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

Reclaiming small pockets of time

by Nicole Byers

We often encourage caregivers to take care of themselves, too. One of the most common responses I hear is, “there is no time”. And it can certainly feel that way when you’re a caregiver. After cooking all the meals for the day, completing personal care tasks, doing several loads of laundry, attending appointments and finally getting your care recipient into bed, you’re exhausted – with nothing left in the tank for yourself.

I get it. I’ve been there.

What if you didn’t have to wait until everything was done to make space for yourself? What if you could reclaim small pockets of time throughout the day? Let me share **three ways** I’ve been able to do that.

While the coffee brews

In the morning, while my coffee brews, I do a few stretches at my counter. I stretch out my calves, do a modified standing downward dog and sometimes a little ragdoll pose, folding forward, letting my arms be heavy, then slowly rising back up. This little sequence takes about two minutes, it loosens my body and clears my mind for whatever the day is going to throw at me. You can also sneak in a few deep breaths during these stretches!

Gentle movement

I spend a lot of time in the kitchen. Like, a lot. When I am cooking or emptying the dishwasher, I’ve started to put on music to boost my mood and to encourage some gentle movement. Sometimes I shimmy between the trips from the dishwasher and the cupboard. Or, as I cut up my veggies for supper, I take a second to belt out a few lines of the song on the radio.

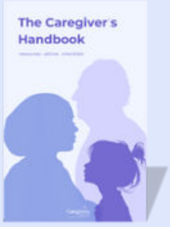
Lately, I’ve been tuning in to 96.5 FM for their non-stop Christmas music. It’s a real crowd-pleaser in my house. Just kidding – it mostly pleases me. My two-year-old is only happy with “She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain,” and my partner usually responds with a smile and a teasing eye roll. But it brings me joy, so I keep saying yes to this.

Finding time to breathe

Some days are packed with appointments, leaving little time to breathe. Even without medical visits, there can be a lot of rushing from here to there! So lately, as I walk from an appointment to my car, I try to take in my surroundings. The cool fall air on my cheeks, filling my lungs. It’s crisp and makes me feel alive. The wind, the street traffic, the people passing by – they remind me I’m not alone in this.

These are just three ways I’ve been able to carve out small moments for myself throughout the day.
Try them on, see if any of them work for you.

And remember: we’re all doing our best out here. You’re only one person, and you can only do what you can do. So please, go easy on yourself, and give yourself permission to take care of you, too. You not only deserve it, but your body demands it.



The Caregiver's Handbook

Did you know?

You can get the latest edition of our handbook on our website!
Inside, you’ll find even more useful tools, tips and resources to support you, the caregiver.

Get your copy

Saisir les petits moments de temps libre

par Nicole Byers

On dit souvent aux aidants de prendre soin d'eux-mêmes aussi. L'une des réponses les plus fréquentes que j'entends est « je n'ai pas le temps ». Et c'est tout à fait compréhensible quand on est aidant. Après avoir préparé tous les repas de la journée, pris soin de la personne dont vous vous occupez, fait plusieurs brassée de lavage, accompagné cette personne à ses rendez-vous et enfin couché votre protégé, vous êtes épuisé(e) et vous n'avez plus aucune énergie pour vous-même.

Je comprends. Je suis passée par là.

Et si vous n'aviez pas à attendre d'avoir tout fait pour vous accorder un peu de temps ? Et si vous pouviez récupérer de petits moments de temps libre tout au long de la journée ? Je vais vous donner **trois façons** dont j'ai réussi à le faire.

Pendant que le café infuse

Le matin, pendant que mon café passe, je fais quelques étirements sur mon comptoir. J'étire mes mollets, je fais une version modifiée de la posture du chien tête en bas et parfois une petite posture de la poupée de chiffon, en me penchant en avant, en laissant mes bras lourds, puis en me redressant lentement. Cette petite séquence prend environ deux minutes, elle détend mon corps et me vide l'esprit pour affronter tout ce que la journée me réserve.
Vous pouvez aussi faire quelques respirations profondes pendant ces étirements !

Mouvement doux

Je passe beaucoup de temps dans la cuisine. Vraiment beaucoup. Quand je cuisine ou que je vide le lave-vaisselle, j'ai commencé à mettre de la musique pour me mettre de bonne humeur et m'encourager à bouger doucement. Parfois, je me déhanche entre le lave-vaisselle et le placard. Ou, pendant que je coupe mes légumes pour le dîner, je prends une seconde pour chanter à tue-tête quelques lignes de la chanson à la radio.

Dernièrement, j'écoute la station 96,5 FM pour sa musique de Noël en continu. Tout le monde adore ça chez moi. Je plaisante, c'est surtout moi qui adore ça. Mon enfant de deux ans n'aime que « She'll be coming 'round the mountain », et mon partenaire réagit généralement avec un sourire et un clin d'œil taquin. Mais ça me rend heureuse, alors je continue à dire oui.

Trouver le temps de respirer

Certains jours sont remplis de rendez-vous, ce qui me laisse peu de temps pour respirer. Même sans visites médicales, je peux être très pressée d'aller d'un endroit à l'autre ! Alors, ces derniers temps, quand je marche de mon rendez-vous à ma voiture, j'essaie de profiter de mon environnement. L'air frais de l'automne sur mes joues, qui remplit mes poumons. Il est vif et me fait me sentir vivante. Le vent, la circulation, les gens qui passent… tout ça me rappelle que je ne suis pas seule dans cette situation.

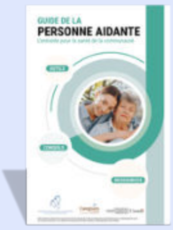
Ce ne sont que trois façons parmi d'autres qui m'ont permis de me réserver de petits moments pour moi tout au long de la journée. Essayez-les, voyez si l'une d'entre elles vous convient.

Et n'oubliez pas : on fait tous de notre mieux ici.
Vous n'êtes qu'une personne, et vous ne pouvez faire que ce que vous pouvez faire. Alors, s'il vous plaît, soyez indulgent envers vous-même et autorisez-vous à prendre soin de vous aussi. Non seulement vous le méritez, mais votre corps en a besoin.

Saviez-vous ?

Vous pouvez vous procurer la dernière édition de notre guide sur notre site web !
À l'intérieur, vous trouverez encore plus d'outils, de conseils et de ressources pour vous soutenir.

Procurer votre copie



Caregiver meets caregiver-friendly workplace

by Lyn Stuart

Every caregiver has a moment when life shifts in a direction you never saw coming.

For me, that moment arrived on March 23rd 2024, when my mom experienced a sudden medical emergency that placed her in the ICU and altered the course of our lives instantly.

What we assumed would be a short hospital stay quickly transformed into a long, complicated and still mysterious medical journey. She underwent multiple surgeries, faced repeated infections and battled episodes of sepsis that threatened her life more than once. It was an overwhelming, disorienting chapter none of us expected.

My mom had always been strong, vibrant, steady and fiercely independent. At seventy-three, she was still young at heart, needing little more than her daily vitamins to stay healthy. As a former nurse, she understood illness and recovery better than most, which made her sudden decline even harder to comprehend. Her body endured so much that she eventually had to relearn the simplest parts of living – walking, eating and trusting her body again. Some days brought incredible progress, others unraveled without warning, leaving us breathless.

Throughout it all, I stood beside her as daughter, advocate, cheerleader and steady presence. On good days, I was her Scrabble partner and crossword buddy. On the hard days, I was her voice when she couldn't speak for herself.

Caring for her was the honour of a lifetime. Yet, like countless caregivers, **I didn't stop being everything else I already was**. I was still a mother, a wife, a friend and a Caregiver Support Coordinator.

I was living the caregiving experience while supporting others walking their own versions of it, holding every role at once and trying not to lose myself in the process. I managed to keep going not because I was a superhero, but because of the support around me and what my workplace made possible during this impossible period.

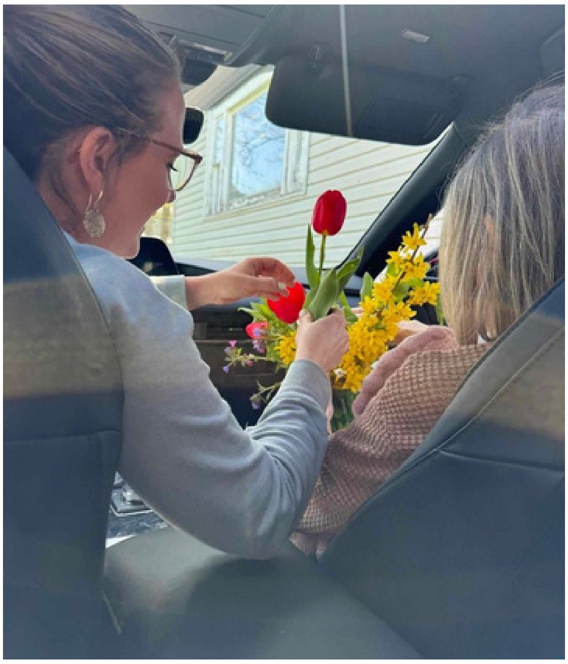


Photo: Lyn and her mom Wendy, on their first day pass, weeks into admission, arranging flowers from Wendy's garden

Four things, in particular, changed everything for me:

- First, they gave me **true choice**: the freedom to decide when, where and how I could work as my mother's condition shifted. That choice helped me maintain a sense of identity when everything else felt shaped by crisis.
- Second, they offered **unwavering trust**. They didn't question my commitment or ask me to prove anything. They trusted that I understood my responsibilities and would give what I could. That trust lifted enormous pressure and allowed me to contribute without guilt.
- Third, they offered simple but meaningful **human check-ins**, reminders that I wasn't carrying everything alone.
- Fourth, they allowed me to show up as **a whole person**. I didn't have to separate the caregiver from the employee, daughter from professional. They made space for all of it, and it gave me the strength to keep going.

Work looked very different during those months. I joined meetings from ICU family rooms, answered calls from quiet hospital hallways and caught up on notes at my mother's bedside while she slept. Some nights, when fear kept me awake, I worked a little to steady myself. Other days, when everything fell apart, I stepped away completely. My employer's support created a safety net that allowed me to keep choosing both caregiving and meaningful work without sacrificing either.

Supporting caregivers every day has given me a deep understanding of why so many continue working while caregiving, even when demands are overwhelming. For me, work became a lifeline. It reminded me that I could still be capable, still contribute and still exist in a world beyond the hospital walls. It helped me hold onto a sense of purpose and normalcy at a time when nothing felt predictable or secure. That was only possible because **my workplace created the conditions that made working realistic for me**. They adapted when I needed flexibility. They trusted me to recognize my limits. They believed I could hold multiple roles without failing at either.

Looking back on those nine months, I understand something essential: caregivers do not stay in their jobs because it is easy. **They stay because their workplaces make it possible**, because they are trusted, supported and allowed to be whole people carrying whole lives. I am profoundly grateful for the compassion that helped me survive that chapter, and I believe every caregiver deserves the same understanding.

Common misconception

Caregiving doesn’t end with long-term care

by Leanne Taylor

As Caregiver Support Coordinator, I often hear people say they are “no longer a caregiver” once the person they had been caring for moves into long-term care. **This is a common misconception.** While caregiving does change, it certainly doesn’t end. You continue to be an important person in their care team.

Before entering long-term care, many Nova Scotians rely on unpaid caregivers who support them at home or in the community. Some caregivers live with their care recipient or nearby, while others help from a distance – sometimes even outside the province.

When someone moves into a long-term care facility, **caregivers take on new responsibilities**, often while still managing many tasks they handled before placement. Some things are not covered by the accommodation charge, so caregivers often step in to fulfil these needs. They also remain **the primary contact** for medical decisions and incident reporting. When problems arise, caregivers continue to advocate for their person and play a vital role in the care team, helping others understand the care recipient’s needs and wishes.

I recently had the honour of speaking with Jean McComb, a caregiver to her husband who lives in long-term care. Jean emphasized how important it is to **build strong relationships with staff**, and to share information that helps them truly know the person they’re caring for. Jean knows she is an active member of her husband’s care team, and encouraged other caregivers to stay involved as well. The collaboration between staff and caregivers can be immensely helpful to **ensure compassionate, patient-focused care** and inform medical decisions. Jean also shared that remembering the good times you had with “your person” can make the harder times of caregiving a little easier.

Caregivers contribute many unpaid hours of care within the long-term care facilities, yet their role is not always recognized. **Make no mistake:** caregiving continues, even after someone enters long-term care, and it remains just as important.

WINTER

QUICK SELF-CARE BINGO

SAY “NO” TO ONE CHORE	ENJOY A QUIET MORNING	CELEBRATE A SMALL VICTORY	GET A TREAT	DO SOMETHING RELAXING	ALLOW SOMEONE TO HELP	SING ALONG TO YOUR FAVOURITE SONGS	WATCH YOUR FAVOURITE HOLIDAY MOVIE
GO ICE SKATING	TRY A NEW HOBBY	TAKE A NAP WHEN YOU NEED IT	TAKE A REFRESHING WALK	HUG A FEW PEOPLE YOU LOVE	LOOK AT HOLIDAY LIGHTS	ATTEND AN EVENT IN YOUR COMMINUTY	CATCH UP WITH A FRIEND OVER HOT DRINKS

No need to ‘soldier on’: supports for military families

by Jennine Wilson

Each year, on November 11th, I spend the day thinking about my father and my uncle Ted. I never met Ted, he was killed in action during World War II. My father survived, though he was seriously wounded.

In my childhood home, my father had a wall of memories: the picture of his regiment, a picture of Ted in uniform, portraits of military leaders, and his shovel. He never spoke about his experiences, but every D-Day, he called his surviving comrades – his military family, the people he could share his thoughts and feelings with.

My father relied on his military family for connection and understanding. When he returned home from the war, he received some support services. However, he did not seek any other form of support when he got diagnosed and died of cancer at home. I believe he was a ‘soldier on’ kind of man, someone who believed those services weren’t meant for him.

A story from the Summit

This year, before November 11th, I attended a session on Military and Veteran Caregiving at the CCCE Caregiver Summit. One story in particular made me think of my dad.

Retired colonel Russell Munn, one of five panellists, spoke about becoming a caregiver for his wife, Lucie, through 11 months of intensive chemotherapy. At the time, he was in service for 25 years, during which his family moved 20 times, before posting in Winnipeg. Far away from either home: his family was on the East coast, hers – in Montreal. Disconnected from traditional social network, they leaned on the military family, who stepped up with compassion. They changed his role, so he wasn’t on the road the usual 200 days of the year, and continuously supported both him and his wife. Lucie ultimately entered remission, and stood up from the audience, strong and smiling, at the end of the speech.

Specifics of military caregiving

Many military families find themselves in a similar position to the Munns. Moving a lot, which limits the social circle to the military family. Often placed in remote locations, miles away from another town. Dealing with high levels of stress, as risk is a daily part of being in the military. In many cases, being both caregivers and care recipients, living with PTSD and/or service-related disabilities.

One of the panellists shared that “spouses are assumed to become caregivers,” often without training. While military life relies on an economy of care – with family caregivers at its core – supports were not always designed with the caregiver in mind.

Thankfully, that is starting to change.

Resources for military and veteran families

Across Canada, **Military Family Services** offer a range of support for families, including resources on employment, parenting, health and education.

Their 24/7 **Family Information line** **(1-800-866-4546)**, connects caregivers to compassionate counsellors, who help families navigate whatever military life brings.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) offers programs that many families don’t hear about early enough:

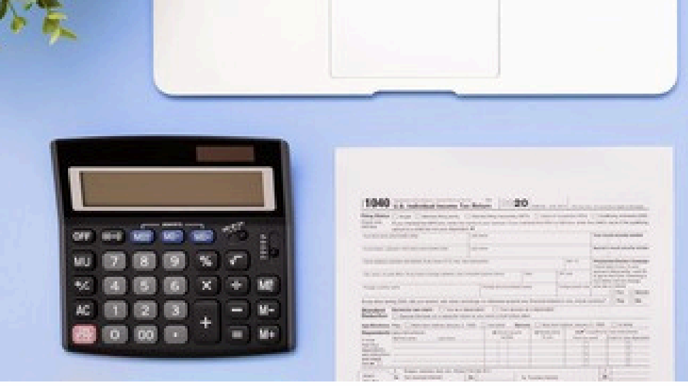
- **Veterans Independence Program**, helping veterans age safely at home,
- **VAC Assistance Line** **(1-800-268-7708)** for mental health support,
- **OSIS peer support** for both veterans and families,
- **DVA caregiver benefits** that acknowledge the often unseen labour so many provide.

Tools like **My VAC Account** make it easier to find and apply for these services, though many caregivers still need help navigating them. **The Royal Canadian Legion Service** officers can provide that help.

Military and veteran families are strong, resilient and resourceful. But strength doesn’t mean we need to ‘soldier on’ alone.

I hope we continue to move towards recognizing those who walk beside the uniform as the key to the large military family’s wellbeing.

And I hope more caregivers access the support that is in place.



Tax credits and benefits for caregivers

by Emily Gallant

Caregiving often comes with extra costs. Medications not fully covered by insurance, higher gas budget to travel to all the appointments, grocery bill rising every year, money to make the home safer – the list goes on.

Thankfully, there are a few tax credits and benefits that can support caregivers and alleviate some financial pressure.

Specifically for caregivers

Caregiver Benefit – a provincial program that provides $400 per month to eligible caregivers supporting low-income adults with a high level of disability or impairment (assessed through Continuing Care). Both you and your care recipient must qualify to receive the benefit.

Canada Caregiver Credit (CCC) – a non-refundable tax credit available for caregivers of a spouse, common-law partner or a dependant with a physical or mental impairment. The amount you can claim depends on your relationship to the person, their net income and other credits claimed for that care recipient.

Medical costs and home supports

Medical Expense Tax Credit (METC) – there are a few medical expenses you can claim on your tax return. You can find a full, searchable list on the CRA's website.

Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit (MHRTC) – a refundable tax credit that helps families cover the cost of building a separate, self-contained living space on their land for an adult who is either 65+ or eligible for the Disability Tax Credit.

Home Accessibility Tax Credit (HATC) – a tax credit that helps seniors or people with disabilities pay for renovations making their home safer and more accessible. The claim must be for the home the qualifying person lives.

Seniors Care Grant – provincial grant that helps low-income seniors with the cost of household services, healthcare services and home heating. Grants are $750 for each household. You can apply until 31 March.

Disability Tax Credit and related supports

Disability Tax Credit (DTC) – a non-refundable tax credit that helps reduce income tax for people with disabilities. If your care recipient qualifies, they may be able to transfer part (or all) of their credit to you as their caregiver. A medical practitioner must complete Form T2201 for CRA approval. Once approved, DTC can help you access other programs, such as the Canada Disability Benefit, the Child Disability Benefit and the Registered Disability Savings Plan.

Canada Disability Benefit – get up to $200 a month if you're 18-64 and approved for the Disability Tax Credit.

Child Disability Benefit (CDB) – a tax-free monthly benefit for families with a child under 18 with a serious, long-term physical or mental disability. Parents must qualify for Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and the child must be eligible for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC).

Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) – a long-term savings plan for people under 60 who qualify for the Disability Tax Credit. Anyone can contribute: family, friends, the plan holder and even the government through matching grants and bonds, depending on family income. It's primarily a retirement plan, but some money can be withdrawn before the plan holder turns 60. In that case, you may need to repay government contributions.

Canada Workers Benefit (CWB) – a refundable tax credit that can boost refunds or reduce taxes owed for low-income workers and families. Eligibility and the amount depend on your income and family situation. If you have the Disability Tax Credit, you may also qualify for the CWB Disability Supplement.

Remember: even if you earned little or no income, you should file taxes. You could get a refund for the taxes withheld or receive refundable credits even if you don't owe any tax.

Ana’s salted caramel

Ingredients:

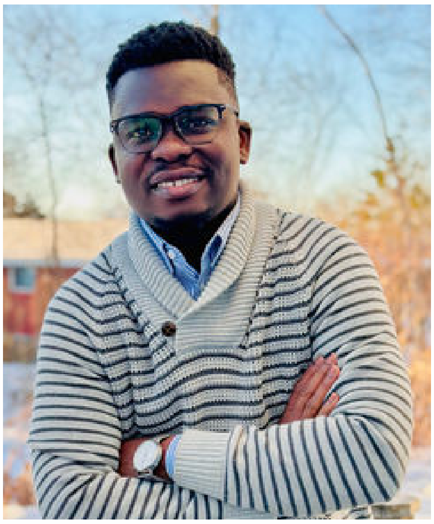
- 1 cup of sugar
- 5 tbsp of unsalted butter
- ¾ cup of whipping cream
- Sprinkle of sea salt

Perfect for:

- Sweetening your coffee
- Drizzling over pancakes, waffles, ice cream
- Mixing into popcorn
- Dipping fruits in

Instructions:

1. Take a saucepan with a thick bottom and pour the sugar into it in an even layer. Place it over just-under-medium heat.
2. For the first little while, do not stir. As soon as the bottom layer of sugar starts to melt, stir gently. Adjust the heat if needed to ensure the sugar doesn’t burn.
3. Warm the cream in a separate bowl.
4. As soon as the sugar melts fully and becomes amber-coloured, add cubes of butter and stir vigorously. The caramel will start to bubble and release steam, take it off the heat.
5. Add the cream and a sprinkle of sea salt, then stir. Let it cool completely – it will thicken.
6. Once it’s fully cooled, pour it into a mason jar. Keep in a fridge for up to a month.



Welcome!

Ben Robertson | Outreach & Caregiver Support Coordinator

I am elated to be joining Caregivers Nova Scotia.

My core value lies in connecting strategic, data-driven planning with the deep human reality of community care and service. I leverage my experience working as a care provider, along with my personal lived experience of caring for family and friends. This background anchors my work in empathy and understanding.

As a Caregiver Support Coordinator, I’m committed to listening to caregiver stories, offering meaningful support, helping people navigate healthcare and advocating for caregivers in HRM East. In my outreach role, I am particularly committed to ensuring that every individual living in Nova Scotia, regardless of the minority population they belong to, is aware of the support Caregivers Nova Scotia has to offer. I look forward to collaborating with all of you to further our mission.

Our team

Office

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

Coordinators

- JoAnne Connors
- Therese Henman-Phillips
- Ben Robertson
- Nicole Byers
- Leanne Taylor
- Jennine Wilson
- Lyn Stuart

Our board

Executive Officers

- Steven Neatt – Chair
- Wendy Menczel – Vice-Chair
- Brittany Keough – Treasurer
- Ruvi Norah Mugara – Secretary

Members at large

- Mary Elizabeth MacLellan
- Sarah Cluett
- Jenna Fralick
- Mary Protos