

# CARING FOR THOSE THAT CARE FOR OTHERS

by TONI O'KEEFFE

Growing up in Duncan, BC, Faith Magwood was introduced to the concept of philanthropy and community service at an early age. Her parents, both active community volunteers, inspired Faith's volunteer efforts and her commitment to community, which has now spanned eight decades.

At 80, Faith continues to give of her time, talent and her voice to the Family Caregivers of BC (FCBC).

For over 30 years she has been a passionate advocate in support of family caregivers. Family caregivers are those unpaid heroes that care for adult children, parents, spouses, relatives or friends that are unable to safely care for themselves due to a sudden or gradual disability brought about by accident or illness.

Faith's involvement with FCBC began in the early '80s when she and colleague Helen Simpson co-founded the organization. To this day, FCBC continues to provide information and emotional support to those caring for family members and friends across BC.

Faith was working as a social worker in the Gorge Road Hospital in 1983. "The residents were well cared for and I provided what support I could in my professional capacity, but I could see that more was needed," she says. "Family caregivers were emotionally and physically fatigued from trying to care for those they loved while still managing the busy day-to-day aspects of their own lives, jobs and other family obligations."



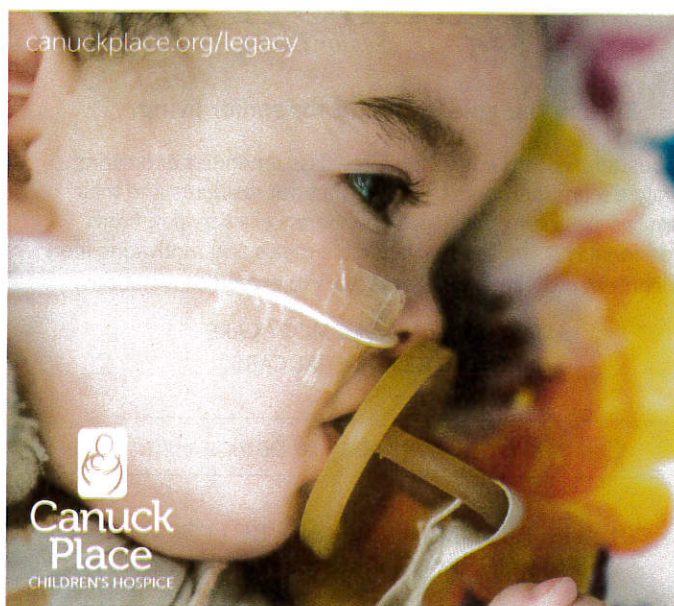
She recalls a day when a young woman walked into her office and burst into tears. "This woman was struggling with the decline of her father's health," says Faith. "Like many caregivers, she felt guilt, resentment and stress as she struggled to balance her and her mother's life with what was happening with her father." Faith was touched and knew she had to do something.

After years of researching, holding information meetings and working from her kitchen table over many cups of tea, the Family Caregivers Network Society (FCNS) of Victoria was born. In 1989, the first Board of Directors was put in place and a Director hired.

Although the name changed along the way, the thrust of the organization remains the same. They continue to provide information, referrals, a lending library, a bi-monthly newsletter and educational events for those in need.

According to Barb MacLean, Executive Director, "When an individual's health deteriorates the first person they turn to for support is a family member or close friend. These individuals become the primary caregiver, coordinating physical, emotion-

ABOVE | Faith Magwood and Helen Simpson co-founded the Family Caregivers of BC in the '80s. Photo: Barb MacLean



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al, financial and personal care. Without support and assistance, the role of family caregiver can become a lonely and isolating job,” says MacLean. “Thanks to Faith, this support is now in place in BC.”

Faith acknowledges Island Health (previously VIHA) and its efforts to recognize the need and provide funding to support family caregivers. “Both Island Health and the Ministry of Health have been incredibly supportive of our efforts. They have recognized that the need will continue to grow as the population ages and society deals with more complex health issues.”

According to information provided by Island Health, currently over one million people in BC are struggling to provide care for a family member or friend. Information available from the Mayo Clinic in the US suggests that one in three adults in that country provide care to family or friends as informal caregivers. The clinic also cites caregiver stress as an emerging health issue across North America.

“More caregivers are struggling and are exhausted trying to care for aging, ailing or disabled loved ones,” says Faith. “Care at home has become much more complicated. Caregivers are providing injections, monitoring and managing intravenous lines, medications and personal hygiene. At the same time, they have jobs to go to and other family and life responsibilities.”

“Faith has been a loyal champion and advocate to improve support for caregivers,” says MacLean. “Although she retired from her social worker position in 1999, she has continued to support FCBC.”

“As both a volunteer and donor, Faith inspires others by doing,” MacLean continues. “She has been a pillar and cornerstone for the growth of FCBC. She is a lifetime member and has been a donor for the entire life of the organization. It is because of her vision that we exist at all.”

In 2016, Faith was presented with the Valued Elder Recognition Award (VERA) for her 30-year commitment to FCBC. The nomination for the award acknowledged Faith for her energy and persuasive style in influencing hundreds of health professionals and community agencies, so family caregivers and their well-being would be recognized as just as important as the patient’s.

Faith says she is not quite as hands on as she used to be. She now enjoys time in her garden and relishes days spent with her 13 great-grandchildren, six grandchildren and two children. She is also a bell ringer and has travelled the world bell ringing for weddings, church services, funerals and competitions.

“It’s important to stay active and involved,” she says. “I will continue to be an enthusiastic cheerleader for FCBC. We will all need care at some point in our lives. Knowing that the people caring for us have the support they need to cope will make all the difference for them – and for us.”

Family Caregivers of British Columbia is a registered non-profit dedicated 100 per cent to supporting family caregivers. |

*To find out more about FCBC or to volunteer or donate, visit: [www.familycaregiversbc.ca](http://www.familycaregiversbc.ca) To find more information related to care for caregivers and seniors, visit Island Health’s website at [www.viha.ca](http://www.viha.ca)*



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