

Walk with them

By Joanne Dykeman

This fall, Sienna Senior Living partnered with the Change Day Ontario and Change Day BC movements that have been adopted around the world to improve quality of care and health systems. Change Day empowers people to make positive changes through personal pledges, large or small, which improve quality of care for residents.

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When a PSW reached out to me recently from one of our long-term care communities, extending an invitation to “walk with her,” this turned into a personal pledge for me to shadow her on the job. It also became part of a wider initiative that I believe will create positive change throughout Sienna.

I shared my Change Day Pledge internally within the organization, and other leaders from various departments made their own pledges. Many of these

were also to job-shadow frontline care workers with the intention of creating positive change.

PSWs, cooks, recreation aides and RPNs came forward with invites for Sienna’s support services employees to walk with them in their roles. The sentiment behind this was to see the work they do firsthand, and better understand a day in the life of someone who cares for residents face to face, every day.

Not often am I so awestruck and inspired that I struggle to find words. However, after following in the footsteps of personal support worker Angela Miller at Villa Leonardo Gambin in Woodbridge, Ontario, one Wednesday in October – that was exactly how I felt.

I made beds, worked at meal service, walked the halls and entered the rooms of residents, and generally provided hands-on assistance wherever needed.

My intention with this project was to deepen my understanding of the work a PSW does every day, and to express my deep appreciation and respect for them. Angela is one of thousands of care workers across Sienna’s 73 care communities and retirement residences in Canada, which make up the bulk of our workforce of more than 11,000 people.

While I have always admired the contributions of all people who work compassionately each day caring for the needs of others, I underestimated the skill and grace required to do this job. Despite the extra helping hands I was



Joanne Dykeman job shadowing Angela Miller, a PSW at Villa Leonardo Gambin.

providing to Angela, I can honestly say that the pace was non-stop.

Angela taught me so much that day. My belief has been reaffirmed that we need to always engage those people who work directly with residents in policy development. Decisions about care equipment, processes and policies can only be developed in consultation with the people who are doing the front-line work. I look forward to creating a space for their active contributions within policy, procedure and process development at Sienna.

Spending a day in the life of a PSW does not make me an expert. But it has allowed me to continue to understand their role and the contribution we make as one of Canada’s largest owners and operators of seniors living.

We need to continue to advocate for staffing levels in long-term care so that PSWs like Angela can not only do what they do, but sustain themselves as care providers and offer that extra attention to detail that enhances quality of life for residents. **LC**

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