

Volunteers at Knysna Sedgefield Hospice

The vision of establishing the Knysna Sedgefield Hospice was brought into existence by volunteers who worked long and hard before there was enough money for paid positions. These volunteers established an organisation which had high professional standards, with advice from the Hospice Association of South Africa and from St Luke's hospice. The first funds raised were spent on delivering care and meeting the needs of patients. From the start, fundraising was of a high standard, with meticulous accounting for every cent raised.

From that visionary beginning in 1986 until now, we have been privileged to work with dedicated volunteers who contribute hugely to the care that can be given to patients and their families. In 2014, we conducted an exercise of estimating the hours that our volunteers contribute to hospice. A conservative account of the hours donated made us recognise that if each volunteer were paid R100 per hour, their time would be worth over R1.2 million per year.

Apart for increasing the scope of work that hospice can deliver, what else do volunteers bring to hospice?

- Our profile in the community is raised by each volunteer whose friends and family become aware of the work of hospice. Volunteers are the face of hospice.
- The staff are affirmed in the value of the work by the fact that volunteers support them.
- Patients are offered a range of services and resources which would not be possible without our volunteers.
- There is a real sense of a hospice family which is created by having volunteers as part of our team.
- Good ideas as well as constructive criticism come from our volunteers so that we remain open to any suggestions about ways of doing things better.

The areas in which our volunteers contribute range from providing wisdom and strategic vision on the Board of Directors, raising funds by putting on events, working in one of our charity shops or street collections, keeping our hospice garden beautiful, caring for patients by driving them to day care, making soup and sandwiches for day care, putting on a programme of activities for day care, visiting patients at home, helping at reception, doing household maintenance, managing our fleet of vehicles and many more ways of helping as the need arises. An unusual activity for hospice volunteers is the horse riding lessons offered to our child patients by the South African disabled riding association local branch.

People often ask hospice volunteers "Isn't it depressing?"

We hope that being a hospice volunteer is a rewarding undertaking. The feedback we get from volunteers is that it is rewarding to use their skills and develop new ones, it is an opportunity to meet people outside of their normal social circle, that giving enhances self esteem and that it is fun to work with a team towards a common goal. We recognise that volunteers need to be comfortable with what they are asked to do and that they also need time off, even if we think we can't survive without them.