

## Increasing awareness of the demand for bilingual healthcare workers

by Patricia Roy

Recently, a worker recruitment toolkit was developed to attract bilingual healthcare and social services workers to the province and to make Island Francophones aware of the healthcare job opportunities on PEI. "There is a high demand for bilingual workers for the healthcare and social services sector on PEI," says **Caroline Currie**, projects manager for the **Prince Edward Island French Language Health Services Network (PEIFLHSN)**. This network was established in 2003 to improve access to French language health and social services.



*Caroline Currie is Projects Manager for the PEI French Language Health Services Network.*

"The toolkit will inform Islanders and people from outside the province that there is a vibrant, established French community here, including social activities, schools, daycare and other services," says Caroline.

### Need for bilingual workers could increase substantially over the next few years

Caroline says people in the six Island Francophone regions are encouraged by the new PEI government's election promise to fully implement the **French Language Services Act** during its first term in office. "If that happens, there is going to be quite a rush to get bilingual workers for services, especially in healthcare."

Another reason for the increased demand for bilingual healthcare workers is because of the aging population. One of the sectors which will experience the fastest growing demand for bilingual workers will be geriatric specialties in hospitals, public manors/facilities, private nursing homes, retirement homes and community care facilities. "People revert back to their first language when they are ill or as they age," says Caroline. "Other healthcare areas which will also need more bilingual workers include Speech Language Pathologists, Rehabilitation Specialists, and Autism, Mental Health and Crisis Centre Workers," says Caroline.

She encourages Island Francophones to begin now to ask for government services in French, so that government is aware that the need for bilingual services already exists. "I know that it can be frustrating to ask for services in French and to often be told, 'if you can speak English, why do you need services in French?' But if we don't ask for it, we won't receive the services."

### Important to sensitize health providers on the reasons for bilingual service

Caroline says the PEIFLHSN is hoping to work with researchers to collect concrete data on the differences in health status between minority French language clients and Anglophones. "We know that nationally, Francophones outside Quebec who are served in English have a poorer health status than Anglophones. Francophones living in a minority setting usually tend to access health services less often, so their health is poorer."

"We are also encouraging young people in French Immersion programs to get their bilingual certificates and to pursue French language studies and training so that they can work as bilingual service providers," Caroline says.

**Julie Gilman**, French Language Services Analyst with the Department of Health Corporate Services, says according to a 2005 survey, currently only about three per cent of provincial healthcare workers are bilingual.

Besides looking to the Island's Francophone population or outside the province for bilingual workers, Julie says there are also PEI Anglophones who have taken French Immersion. "Many of them are now working in healthcare sectors and are classified as bilingual. They are a wonderful resource and their linguistic capacities are excellent."

Caroline says provincial sector employees can take language instruction at the province's language training centre in Charlottetown. Courses begin in September with beginner French and first level French. Instructors will travel to other work sites on the Island when numbers warrant.

For more information on healthcare services in French visit [www.santeipe.ca](http://www.santeipe.ca)

To learn about positions in healthcare and social services, visit [www.gov.pe.ca](http://www.gov.pe.ca)

To find out what opportunities the Island Francophone sector has to offer, visit [www.monile.ca](http://www.monile.ca)

## Community care facility opens up self employment opportunity for Ontario couple

by Patricia Roy

**Patricia Ferguson** says opening a retirement home had been a dream of hers for many years. "When the opportunity came up to purchase an existing community care facility on Prince Edward Island, my husband and I packed our bags and moved east," she says.

Patricia is owner and Director of Care at the **Tyne Valley Community Care Centre**. She is a Licensed Practical Nurse with advanced practice skills. "I worked in long term care and acute care but long term care was definitely my forte," says Patricia.

The Tyne Valley Community Care Centre is located in a rambling former farm house. A section of the house is also home for Patricia and her husband, who does most of the maintenance work. She has three full-time employees besides herself and her husband, and one part time worker. Two students were hired part-time for the summer months to cut grass and do odd jobs around the property.

There were five residents when she took over the facility in mid November 2006, and currently Patricia and her staff look after seven residents. She is licensed for 11. "I plan to hire additional staff when we have a full complement of clients, and I like to hire local people whenever possible. I also like to have more than the usual required number of employees because people who do this kind of work can get burned out pretty fast if the workload is too heavy."

The Tyne Valley Centre is up to a level three facility, which means residents need some help with their daily needs. "Meals are prepared for them, and they may need help in managing their medications and with bathing," says Patricia. "Residents are free to come and go as they please, as long as we know where they are. We make the place as family oriented as possible and clients can have family members visit anytime and are welcomed at meal time."

### Need for community care facilities expected to increase

"As Baby Boomers age, there is definitely going to be an increasing need for this type of setting, no matter which province you are in," says Patricia. "But anyone thinking of opening a facility such as this has to be prepared for many hours of work. It's 24/7, 365 days a year. You have to be prepared for the ups and downs, because you might have a full house one day and lose a couple of people the next." She says a steady income is not a guarantee and could be a problem when trying to secure a mortgage.

Patricia says the requirements and regulations to open a community care facility have come a long way in the last few years. "Even a dozen years ago, the paper work consisted of one piece of paper sent to the appropriate government department. Now a 30-page document is required, including a business plan, a sample copy on how the place would operate, the staff to be hired, what kind of meals would be served, with a months' worth of meals all planned out. Then there are the educational checks, police checks and letters of reference from former employers. It was very overwhelming and it almost deterred me. But I persevered and was approved after it was presented to the provincial regulatory board."

About 40 level three community care homes are currently in operation across the province. These are inspected, unannounced, by the regulatory board twice a year. There are numerous other inspections as well. "We have building code inspections, occupational health and safety, food inspectors and registered dietitians inspections," says Patricia. You have to pass all these inspections in order to continue operating. The rules keep me and every other operator on our toes."

"I would not have been prepared to take on this position as Director of Care without a nursing background," says Patricia. "I believe owners and operators of community care facilities need a certain amount of training as well as the staff. As director, I give out blister-packed medication and I need to know the side effects and/or adverse reactions that can occur with certain medications."

### Training for staff

Patricia says that while it would be great to have more people trained as Resident Care Workers on staff, she is very willing to train the right people. "I'm currently training a high school student as a personal care attendant, to see if this is the kind of work she would like to do after graduation."

**Candice Millar**, who worked for the summer at the centre, is in Grade 12 at Westisle. "I really liked the work I did this summer and I plan to continue working here part time during the school year," says Candice. "This experience has been helpful in making me realize that a career in healthcare is what I would like to pursue."



*Standing on the deck of the Tyne Valley Community Care Centre are Patricia Ferguson, second left, owner and director of care at the facility, with employee Candice Millar, left, and residents Vera Hanson and Jennie Ross.*

