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Mamaroneck Volunteer Cares For The Terminally Ill

by Laurie Lawless Neighbors 08/29/12 Comment



Lena Sjunnemark of Mamaroneck is a volunteer with Hospice and Palliative Care of Westchester, caring for terminally ill patients.

MAMARONECK, N.Y. – Lena Sjunnemark of Mamaroneck has donated countless hours over the last 15 years helping the terminally ill and their families spend their last few months in peace.

"It's very rewarding to do what I am doing," said Sjunnemark. "I feel like I give a little and get back a lot."

Sjunnemark volunteers twice a week, sometimes more, with the non-profit Hospice and Palliative Care of Westchester in White Plains. She visits patients in their homes, nursing homes, relative's homes and sometimes hospitals. She spends time with them, takes care of them, both physically and emotionally, communicates with their primary caretakers and doctors and makes sure that their last few months are as comfortable as possible.

"We are so grateful for Lena and all the years she's put in here," said Holly Benedict, director of development and public affairs.

Sjunnemark moved to Mamaroneck from Sweden in 1980. She began volunteering with Meals on Wheels, where she met an older man who was very sick. She ended up taking care of him until his death, and decided that was something she wanted to continue doing.

"It's never been difficult for me," she said. "I love what I do."

Hospice and Palliative Care of Westchester is a free service for patients of any age who are given six months or less to live. According to Benedict, they currently have patients ranging in age from 1 to 103 in their care. The philosophy is to give a dying person the best quality of life they can have after treatment has failed. A lot of the program focuses on pain management and emotional and spiritual support for all those involved.

"People are really brave to call us, because it's a hard decision," said Mary Jane Schaumann, director of volunteers and complimentary care.

Sjunnemark said she will continue to work with the terminally ill because it is rewarding for her to help others through their difficult times. She said even after a patient dies she is available for continued support for family members. Each volunteer receives a 30-hour training course to learn how to deal with all aspects of being a hospice caretaker.

"We could never do what we do without our volunteers," said Benedict.

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