

The SMART approach to health care

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is committed to supporting healthy lives in healthy communities with our partners through care, education and research. VCH's SMART Fund* does just that.

"We support community-based organizations who work with their communities to create their own solutions," explains Lezlie Wagman, SMART Fund Coordinator.

One such organization is Friends For Life, which provides complementary health services free of charge for people with a life-threatening illness. They also provide support for the primary care giver.

"Our mission is to enhance the lives of people living with a life-threatening illness by providing psychological, spiritual, practical, physical and emotional support," says Juliet Correia, Executive Director. "We believe that with proper support and access to our healing services, members can delay the progression of illness and minimize the need for institutional care."

Friends For Life is located in a heritage home leased from The City of Vancouver for \$1 a year. They offer acupuncture, acupressure, aromatherapy massage, chiropractic service, cranio-sacral massage therapy, healing touch, shiatsu, and reiki to name a few.

They also have a unique resource library featuring books, reference materials, audiotapes and videotapes on wellness, healing, spirituality, and coping with a life-threatening illness, as well as general fiction, non-fiction, popular movies and television comedies to provide entertainment, education, and healing through laughter.



Views of the interior and exterior

But that's not all – they also provide three home-cooked meals each week: Sunday Night Dinner With Mom, and Monday and Wednesday Brunch Club. All meals are prepared by specially trained volunteers at no cost to members.

"We also have a Group Support Program that gives our members the chance to connect with others to share experiences, learn about coping with their own circumstances, and overcome personal problems," says Correia.

At a time when emotional support and understanding can be critical for survival, talking to others in similar circumstances helps individuals feel less isolated and discover strategies for taking control of their health. One member had this to say: "This is a place you come because you can become a part of your healing journey - it gives you tools to move you along."

The organization operates with only four staff, and runs primarily with the help of volunteers – they cook the food, do the clean up, run the programs, and provide all of the healing services at no cost. "We have over three hundred volunteers," says Correia, "we couldn't operate without them."

To be eligible for membership, you must be a person living with a life-threatening/terminal illness. Your physician will have to sign a medical information form to verify your condition. Membership is also available to the primary care givers of a member who is living with a life-threatening/terminal illness. For more information, contact Friends For Life at 604-682-5992.

** VCH's SMART Fund supports cost-effective, innovative strategies for promoting and improving population health. The projects typically improve health determinants and build community capacities, skills and assets so communities can better identify and manage their own health needs.*