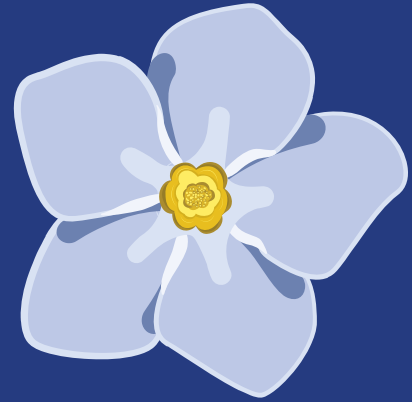


# Connections

Linking a community of dementia support

**Let's change  
the future.**



## Changing the future this Alzheimer's Awareness Month

“Everybody’s experience is different, but there’s solidarity in numbers.” Naomi Mison, a caregiver to her mother who lives with dementia, has been sharing her experience and advocating for other families affected by dementia since she began caring for her mother Frances over a decade ago. Naomi is now a member of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.’s Leadership Group of Care Partners and one of several people from around the province sharing her experience with dementia as a part of January’s Alzheimer’s Awareness Month campaign.

“People [may] feel alone and may not understand why the people in their life aren’t around,” says Naomi, a long-distance caregiver to Frances, who lives in a care

home in Alberta. “You can explain it but that doesn’t negate the loneliness. It’s having a negative impact on people’s symptoms.”

Since the onset of the pandemic, Naomi has been finding new ways to stay connected to Frances and sharing what she learns to help other care partners. This month, she’s joining other advocates for a virtual conversation on dementia, long-term care and COVID-19.

Read Naomi’s story on page 3 and find more stories from people affected by dementia, as well as how you can get involved to change the future of dementia, at [alzbc.org/future](https://alzbc.org/future).

**Read and  
learn more**

For a full catalogue of COVID-19-related resources for people living with dementia, caregivers and health-care providers, visit [alzbc.org/COVID-19](https://alzbc.org/COVID-19).

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# Resolve to change the future of dementia

The start of a new year is a time we often take stock of where we are and where we want to be by making new goals and resolutions. January is also Alzheimer's Awareness Month and this year the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is asking British Columbians to consider simple actions we can all take to help change the future for people living with dementia, for caregivers – and ultimately for everyone in the province.

How can we be present for people affected by dementia in a time when COVID-19 has delivered unprecedented challenges? Small actions can have a huge impact. Find ways to stay in touch with the people affected by dementia in your life. Learn how to advocate for the support families in B.C. need. Invest in our cause by making a donation to help change the future for people facing the disease. This month we're sharing stories of people affected by dementia, and inviting everyone to play a role in changing the future of dementia in B.C.

This issue of *Connections* features ideas on how to relieve stress through mindfulness as well as an interview with Naomi Mison, a caregiver and advocate taking part in our panel discussion on advocating for better long-term care on January 27. We're also proud to announce our reimagined *Breakfast to Remember*,

a virtual breakfast fundraiser featuring a talk and Q&A with keynote speaker Chris Hadfield, slated for March 4!

Long-time readers of *Connections* may be wondering who I am. While I stepped into the role of Interim CEO following Maria Howard's departure in October, I have been with the Society for over 20 years, starting out as a volunteer lawyer offering legal support to families before eventually joining the staff, spearheading our advocacy strategy and ultimately leading both the Advocacy & Education as well as Marketing & Communications teams. In my role, and in every position at the Society, the needs of people affected by dementia are at the heart of each decision we make.



*Barbara Lindsay*

Barbara Lindsay, LLB  
Interim Chief Executive Officer  
Alzheimer Society of B.C.

## What is your hope for the future?

What are you doing to make it happen?

Visit [alzbc.org/future](http://alzbc.org/future) to learn more.



**First Link**<sup>®</sup>  
DEMENTIA HELPLINE

### Questions about dementia or memory loss?

English: 1-800-936-6033

Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007

Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003

English: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



# Changing the future: A caregiver's perspective



Naomi Mison with her mother Frances and brother Nathan.

*You can help change the future by raising your voice as an advocate. Naomi Mison of Kelowna, B.C. – a member of the B.C. Leadership Group of Care Partners – is raising her voice as part of Alzheimer's Awareness Month. Naomi's mother Frances is living with dementia in long-term care in Alberta.*

## **What happened when Frances was first diagnosed?**

She was 53 and living in England when we noticed changes. She was experiencing delusions. My brother and I moved her back to Alberta, where a crisis team assessed her. Initially she was treated for bipolar disorder, but a brain scan found evidence of atrophy. She was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia. She was at a point where she needed a level of care we could not provide, and we moved her into long-term care.

## **How has the pandemic changed caregiving?**

I used to visit every few months. I went in March, but they'd just gone into lockdown. I couldn't hug her because there wasn't enough PPE. I've found innovative ways of connecting, like a tablet for video calls. There's something special about seeing her smile.

## **Were you able to get essential visitor status?**

For the first three months, the care home only allowed essential visitors in palliative care. In June, they began allowing window visits, and in August, I got my first in-person visit. It was the first time I had been able to

hug her since Christmas 2019. I did not realize how important touch was until it was no longer possible.

My most recent trip was in October, for her birthday. It was the first time I was permitted in her room since the beginning of the pandemic. I wanted to enjoy it but had to focus on taking care of necessities – getting rid of old clothes, changing batteries, exchanging books. All the things I hadn't been able to do for eight months. You can't provide the level of care needed when you are unable to access their room.

## **How are things going now?**

On October 22, my mother's care home declared an outbreak and went into quarantine.

Thus far, 104 staff members and 68 residents have tested positive. Eighteen people have died. It's surreal.

I was at work the other day and the home called to ask me to encourage her to stay in her room, because she'd become restless. They are struggling, with so many staff in isolation.

## **What is the biggest issue for families affected by dementia right now?**

People [may] feel alone and may not understand why the people in their life aren't around. You can explain it but that doesn't negate the loneliness. It's having a negative impact on people's symptoms.

## **What helps you cope?**

Hearing from other people. Everybody's experience is different, but there's solidarity in numbers.

### **Become part of the conversation**

Naomi is joining other advocates for a virtual conversation on dementia, long-term care and COVID-19 on January 27. Learn more at [alzbc.org/future](https://alzbc.org/future).

# Stress relief and mindfulness: Techniques for caregivers

Caregivers, health-care providers and people living with dementia continue to tell us that this is an incredibly stressful time. If you feel this way, you are not alone. Health Canada recently estimated that due to the pandemic, roughly 11 million Canadians will experience high levels of stress in family and work settings, and close to two million Canadians are predicted to show signs of traumatic stress.

If you're feeling extreme stress, you may wish to seek extra support beyond the techniques we share here, such as speaking to a trusted friend, calling our First Link® Dementia Helpline or connecting with a mental health professional.

## The impact of stress

Stress is not merely experienced in our minds. When someone is stressed, their brain releases a stress hormone called cortisol which causes a physical reaction throughout the body. Their heartbeat speeds

up, their breath quickens and their muscles tense. Visit our webpage on reducing caregiver stress to read the 10 warning signs of stress and the caregiver stress checklist: [alzbc.org/caregiverstress](http://alzbc.org/caregiverstress)

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply paying attention to the experience of the present moment through our senses without judgement. We all possess this ability, but it becomes easier with practice – like strengthening a muscle.

Mindfulness can be developed through formal practices like meditation or through informal practices such as focusing on the experience of performing a household task like doing the dishes.

Mindfulness meditation has been of particular interest to the scientific community. Studies have found that engaging in mindfulness meditation can reduce stress,

### Try this 5-minute mindfulness activity

During periods of intense stress or anxiety, people often report their mind racing and feeling consumed with worries. One way to combat this is to bring our minds back to the present moment by focusing on our physical experience of the world around us.

Focus on slowing down your breathing and notice:

- **5 things you can see.** Notice the little details of the world around you, such as the worn spine of a book on the shelf or how the light reflects off the glossy surface of a mug.
- **4 things you can touch.** The weight of your feet planted on the floor. The soft texture of a cotton shirt. Wind blowing against your skin.
- **3 things you can hear.** Distant traffic or construction noises. An ambient sound from your central heating system. A conversation coming from another room.
- **2 things you can smell.** Dinner in the oven. Chapstick on your lips.
- **1 thing you can taste.** The flavour of coffee lingering on your tongue.

## Mindfulness continued

decrease rumination, boost focus and lower emotional reactivity. To get started, you can follow along to guided meditations on websites such as Insight Timer, Smiling Mind or Headspace (all of which also have smartphone applications as well), or take a course in mindfulness-based stress reduction, such as this course: [palousemindfulness.com](https://www.palousemindfulness.com)

## Gratitude

Have you heard of the “negativity bias?” Humans are thought to have evolved to remember negative events more strongly than positive or neutral ones, and we are more likely to believe negative versus positive news. While this helped our ancestors survive and remember to run from a predator, it’s not so helpful in our modern context.

The good news is the brain continues to re-wire itself in an ability known as neuroplasticity. We can use

this to our advantage by focusing more intently on our positive experiences. In turn, we become better at noticing and recalling future positive experiences.

### Try this 10-minute journaling activity

Once or twice a week, try writing a list of up to five things you feel grateful for. They can be small things, “The pasta dish I cooked tonight was delicious,” or larger, “I had a wonderful conversation with my loved one today.” The goal is to recall a person, event or experience, and savour the positive emotions you feel from remembering it. The physical act of writing helps to cement it in your mind, and it helps to be as specific as possible. Some days, this may feel more difficult. You may wish to look for the small wins or silver linings if it’s a particularly difficult time.

## Additional resources

To explore these topics further, we recommend our two recent webinars with guest Dr. Elisabeth Drance on building caregiver resilience for the dementia journey. Session 1, “The gift of mindfulness” is available at [alzbc.org/mindfulness-webinar](https://alzbc.org/mindfulness-webinar) while session 2, “The skill of self-compassion” is available at [alzbc.org/selfcompassion-webinar](https://alzbc.org/selfcompassion-webinar)

Book and resource recommendations from Dr. Drance:

- *The Mindful Caregiver* by Nancy L. Kriseman

- *Caring for a Loved One with Dementia* by Marguerite Manteau-Rao
- *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion* by Christopher K. Germer
- Presence Care Project (mindfulness-based dementia care): [presencecareproject.com](https://www.presencecareproject.com)

Check back on our Summer 2020 edition where we covered self-care tips and free resources to support your mental health: [alzbc.org/connections-summer2020](https://alzbc.org/connections-summer2020)

# Join us for a Breakfast to Remember

## Astronaut Chris Hadfield to speak at virtual breakfast fundraiser that supports people affected by dementia

This March, take action and change the future for the estimated 70,000 people living with dementia in B.C. at *Breakfast to Remember*, a virtual fundraising breakfast event featuring a keynote address and live Q&A with astronaut Chris Hadfield, the first Canadian to walk in space.

Annual *Breakfast to Remember* events bring B.C. business leaders together with communities across the province to hear inspiring talks and help raise critical funds for Alzheimer Society of B.C. programs and services. Funds raised also enable dementia research in B.C. This year, at a time when people affected by dementia need support more than ever, everyone in B.C. has the opportunity to join the *Breakfast* and show people affected by dementia that they're not alone.

“The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is thrilled to welcome Commander Chris Hadfield, one of the most inspiring Canadians of our time, to *Breakfast to Remember*,” said Robert Piasentin, Chair of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.’s board of directors. “Chris is a remarkable man who has taken on many challenges and achieved great heights in his life. As we navigate the new normal, Chris’ experiences can inspire us to unite virtually, support people affected by dementia and bring us one step closer to a world without the disease.”

We hope that people in all corners of the province will make the most of this opportunity to participate in a one-of-a kind event that also helps provide vital support when it's needed the most.

### About Colonel Chris Hadfield

Astronaut | First Canadian Commander of the International Space Station



Chris Hadfield  
Photo by Max Rosenstein

Referred to as “the most famous astronaut since Neil Armstrong,” Colonel Chris Hadfield became a household name as the first Canadian commander of the International Space Station. Formerly

NASA’s Director of Operations, Hadfield is a heavily decorated astronaut, engineer and test pilot whose many awards include the Order of Canada and the Meritorious Service Cross. Hadfield is also a three-time bestselling author, an acclaimed musician, an adjunct professor at the University of Waterloo, chair of the board of the Open Lunar Foundation and host of two internationally acclaimed television series. In addition, Hadfield leads the space stream at Creative Destruction Lab, one of the world’s top tech incubators.

***Breakfast to Remember* is set for March 4, from 7:30 – 9 a.m.** Tickets include access to an exclusive research event, featuring a live discussion with leading dementia researcher, Dr. Alexandre Henri-Bhargava. To learn more, or to purchase tickets, visit [BreakfastToRemember.ca](https://BreakfastToRemember.ca).

# Island couple raises more than \$65,000 through music trivia fundraiser



A music trivia fundraiser for the Alzheimer Society of B.C. started in 2013 by Vancouver Island couple Don and Theresa Bodger has now surpassed \$65,000 since its inception.

The Georgina Falt Memorial Mind Games Music Trivia Tournament, named after Theresa’s mom who lived with Alzheimer’s disease, started with proceeds of \$2,125 the first year but has grown steadily ever since, reaching a peak of \$15,293 raised in 2019. The pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the in-person gathering, but didn’t shut it down entirely with participants banding together to still raise \$6,777 through an email game in 2020 to push the overall total to \$65,030.

It’s taken a lot of hard work to get to this point, but the Bodgers wouldn’t have it any other way and the participation from music trivia buffs around the Island – from Victoria to Courtenay – and even a few from the Lower Mainland has been outstanding. Businesses in the region have also gone above and beyond to provide prizes for silent auctions or draw

prizes and the addition of corporate sponsors the last two years has taken the event to another level.

The Bodgers started talking about doing a fundraiser in early 2013 and when they decided on the music trivia, had hoped to have Georgina there. Unfortunately, she passed away before that could happen.

“We thought there was a huge void in terms of fundraisers for Alzheimer’s and all the statistics we were seeing projected exponential increases in the number of cases occurring in the years ahead so we wanted to do something,” said Don.

“Having the personal connection with Georgina and the fact she loved music and we knew there was a huge following out there for music trivia, we decided this is the approach we wanted to take to raise funds.”

The trivia nights saw groups of eight gather to identify song titles and artists, with all genres of music covered from the 1950s to present. When COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, the Bodgers reimaged the event into the Georgina Falt Memorial Match Game tournament, conducted by email instead of a personal gathering. Teams of two sent in their responses to try and match those determined by the Bodgers for song titles, just like on the famous Match Game on TV. Nearly 40 teams of two participated.

Files courtesy of the *Chemainus Valley Courier*.

## Thinking of hosting your own virtual fundraiser? You can do Anything for Alzheimer’s!

You could host a virtual coffee break, take on a challenge, clean out your storage and sell items, or you could do any other creative idea you dream up – you can truly do *Anything for Alzheimer’s!* Given the current need for physical distancing, we have

created a **2020 fundraising kit** that highlights some ways you can adapt your idea into a virtual event. Visit [AnythingForAlzheimers.ca](https://AnythingForAlzheimers.ca) to check out the toolkit and get more fundraising inspiration.

# Give back in 2021 as a volunteer

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is now recruiting volunteer committee members in support of the 2021 IG *Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*, happening throughout the month of May, and culminating in a virtual celebration on May 30, 2021. Few people know the role as well as Leanne Nakamura, Vancouver *Walk* organizing committee co-chair. When asked to share a few words about her experience as a volunteer for the last 10 years, Leanne said:

“A personal connection to dementia isn't a requirement. I joined the *Walk* to become actively engaged in my community. During the event you meet inspiring people including volunteers, Society staff and families impacted by dementia. An honouree once told me that attending the *Walk* was the first time they truly realized they weren't alone on the journey — that moment still inspires me. You get to meet participants and donors and learn about their families. You discuss why they walk and why it's important to show support year after year. Those conversations galvanize my commitment and I cherish the relationships I've fostered in my community.



Leanne Nakamura (right) with Vancouver *Walk* committee co-chair Monica Wallani.

In my first year as chair, the task admittedly felt daunting. I had never considered myself a leader and wasn't sure I had the ability or experience to be successful – until I attended *Walk* chair training and met the team. You receive incredible support from the Society, committee members and the other *Walk* chairs. You have an entire network of resources helping you develop and unlock new skills.”

The Society is incredibly grateful for Leanne's contributions, as well as those of all volunteer committee members who make this critical fundraiser possible each year. Committees across the province are in need of volunteer support. If you have the time to help, and if you're looking for a volunteer role, email [volunteer@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:volunteer@alzheimerbc.org), call 604-742-4937 or visit the special events volunteer section of our website at [alzbc.org/eventvolunteer](http://alzbc.org/eventvolunteer).

## About Connections

*Connections* is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Articles cannot be reproduced without written permission.

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- **Email** [newsletter@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:newsletter@alzheimerbc.org)
- **Call** 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- **Mail** to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.  
300-828 West 8th Avenue,  
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

Help us reduce costs by subscribing to *Connections* by email.

## Are you a person living with dementia?

We also publish *Insight*, a publication for people living with dementia or cognitive impairment. For more information, visit [alzbc.org/insight-newsletter](http://alzbc.org/insight-newsletter).



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