

Listening to Labrador

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association opens local branch office

BY JAMIE TARRANT
The Labradorian

For many people who suffer from hearing loss coming to terms and admitting your disability is often a difficult thing to do. No one understands this more than Canadian Hard of Hearing provincial President Myrtle Barrett.

"I had my first hearing aid at age 16. My earliest memories go back to around 10, but I would not tell anyone as I felt that I had done something bad. All I knew about hearing loss was that if children could not hear they would have to go to the School for the Deaf, so I kept my secret for many years," says Mrs. Barrett.

She along with Coordinator of Outreach Services Alison Day, were in Happy Valley-Goose Bay recently to open the first offi-

cial branch in town, which was a big surprise for Listening to Labrador co-founder Betty Parsons.

Her group was started last March along with her friend Darren Buckle. Their goal in starting this group was to provide a support system in Happy Valley-Goose Bay mainly because support services for the hearing impaired were limited. Both parents have children with hearing disabilities.

"We thought we would get together and see if we could make things better for our children and communities," says Mrs. Parsons.

During their first public information session last spring they sent out a needs assessment survey to all communities in Labrador. Some of the results that came back included issues such as travel costs to the island for treatment, in most cases to the children's

hospital in St. John's.

Others included the lack of audiologists and equipment here, as well as having the appropriate professionals handy to ask questions.

"We want, basically, to have people at our fingertips, friends to talk to about our issues, to lobby our government for equipment and stuff for our kids and our community," explains Mrs. Parsons.

When it was announced that a Canadian Hard of Hearing Branch was setting up in town, she was pretty excited.

"It is really exciting news, and since we started back in March everything that we have been hoping for so far is happening, which is really good news," she says.

Last week the CHHA also established a branch in Labrador City.

Their branch here is volun-

teer-driven made up of an executive committee of local residents such as President Cyril Peach, Vice President Dave Massie, Secretary Michelle Baikie and Treasurer Fred Loxton.

The goal of setting up a branch without a physical office location is to create a more grass roots approach that the CHHA feels leads to more motivation to advocate for services.

The goal, of course, is to eventually have an office with hired staff in both regions of Labrador.

There are different ways local volunteers can become involved, such as advocating hearing issues by way of school presentations, visiting seniors homes, and bringing brochures around to inform the local community about the associations activities and needs.

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LISTENING FOR CHANGE – Canadian Hard of Hearing provincial president Myrtle Bennett inspires the new volunteer executive with their latest branch opening in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Jamie Tarrant p

Local branch office opens

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Some of the challenges in Happy Valley-Goose Bay include limited support services, and helping people deal with their denial over their hearing disability.

"Part of the reason why we exist is to help people with some of these issues, and advise them towards things that will be helpful. There are so many things like the technologies that are out there to help people, and a lot of people don't know where to avail of them," says Mrs. Day.

She adds that group environments like this are helpful to bring people together so they can meet other people who are having similar problems.

Mrs. Bennett believes it was the CHHA that helped her cope with her learning disability, which she thinks would help people in Labrador as well.

"When I was 16 I bought a hearing aid! That hearing aid was my best friend for 10 years, but then I lost all my hearing due to a viral infection at age 26.

"It was at that time that I sought out the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association. It was their support that helped me regain my confidence."

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