



Gerry's Story - Ottawa Inner City Health Inc.

OICH – Gerry's Story

Gerry was brought for a tour of the Mission Hospice by his mental health worker. He was tired, asked to lie down, hopped into bed, looked around, smiled and said “now I'm home”. He was recently out of prison and was deathly ill from AIDS. Normal HIV/AIDS care had been denied to him on the basis of “non-adherence” which had nothing to do with his wishes and everything to do with his mental illness and the restrictions imposed on him by the criminal justice system. He had been living in a halfway house where he was being penalized by staff because of his diarrhea. He had lost 25 kilos in less than a month.

Gerry had faced many challenges in his life including developmental delays, ADHD, schizophrenia, injection drug use, hepatitis and AIDS. He had spent as many years living on the streets as in prison. Despite the challenges of dealing with his addictions, compulsive stealing and numerous medical complications, Gerry quickly became a favorite with clients, staff and volunteers at the Hospice. His medical care was complicated by the severity of his mental illness, poly substance abuse and compulsive antisocial behaviors but his sense of humor, flair for the dramatic and genuine affection for those around him made it impossible not to enjoy his presence. Despite the complex nature of his medical problems, the challenge of caring for Gerry was always keeping him out of jail. Not a normal end of life goal in most hospices but, often an important one at the Mission Hospice.

Gerry had spent most of his life excluded from the services he needed because of his behavior and illnesses. His violence had led him to be permanently barred from almost everywhere. The sense of belonging and acceptance that he gained at the Hospice brought incredible joy in his life. Having the Hospice staff available to deal with the challenges of caring for Gerry provided an opportunity for his previously estranged family to spend time with him and to resolve much of the conflict which had characterized their family life for many years.

Gerry told us that being at the Hospice was the happiest time in his life. Gerry died very peacefully holding his mother's hand, snuggling in his bed with a brother at sitting on either side. Shortly before passing away, Gerry thanked everyone for making his dreams come true. He said that he had finally gotten everything he wanted in life.