

Personal care home residents able to be with loved ones again

Families reunite after visitation rules change

KEVIN ROLLASON

FOR months during the pandemic, Arlene Fages could only see her husband and one of her daughters at the Saul and Claribel Simkin Centre because of COVID-19 visitor restrictions at personal care homes.

But in recent weeks, Fages has not only been able to see her daughter there, but now also her daughter from Vancouver, other family members, and even just good friends thanks to changes in the visiting restrictions put in place by Shared Health last month.

"It's wonderful," said Mel, Fages's husband of 61 years.

"The daughter who lives in Vancouver couldn't come here for a long time because of restrictions, and even when she could, she wouldn't have been allowed to see her mother, except through a window. So we have Skyped on the iPad on a regular basis. Now she can come have a visit outside and my son-in-law can visit and play the guitar for my wife.

"A visit is a lot different when she can sit out there and hold her mother's hand."

The loosening of visitation restrictions was one of the changes Shared Health made on June 18, which included allowing general visitors, not just essential or designated family caregivers, to be able to go to personal care homes as long as they showed proof they were fully vaccinated from COVID-19. General visitors are family or friends who visit for social reasons, not to look after the resident.

The visitation guidelines allow up to two fully vaccinated visitors in the resident's suite and outdoor visits with up to four fully vaccinated visitors. An outdoor visit can only be on the care home's property or nearby — visits back home are not allowed yet.

Essential caregivers are still able to go to personal care homes without showing proof of vaccination.

To make it easier for families to distance themselves from other families, the Simkin Centre has painted blue

visitation circles on the pavement in its enclosed courtyard and on the sidewalk outside, said CEO Laurie Cerqueti.

"It has been really good," said Cerqueti of the new visitation rules. "There are people who haven't been able to see their loved one for some time, including grandchildren they may never have met."

"It has been quite a wonderful thing. We're not quite out of the woods yet, we still have mask rules, but it has been a hard year-and-a-half and this is looking a lot better."

The change in visitation is a step in the right direction after months of things going the wrong way, said Sherry Heppner, development co-ordinator at the Convalescent Home of Winnipeg in Fort Rouge.

"It's so nice to have a bit of normalcy," said Heppner.

"The residents are all smiling. Our biggest worry now is heat stroke, but we have to take advantage of these nice days."

Visitors can see residents outside on their property, or take them on a walk in the neighbourhood, Heppner said.

For the time being, the front door of the home will be locked so people coming in can be screened for the virus before entering, she said.

"We can't be complacent, the variant is out there, but this is so nice."

Mel Fages said his wife lives with Alzheimer's disease and moved into the Simkin Centre in September so having visits with more people is good for her.

COVID-19 restrictions meant his sister couldn't visit his wife because her husband was in another part of the Simkin Centre, but now they can, he said.

"We are able to be outside as a family. There's no question this is so much better."

A Shared Health spokesman said, while it is not the operator of PCHs, the feedback it has got back from residents and families shows "the change has been warmly received by residents and families."

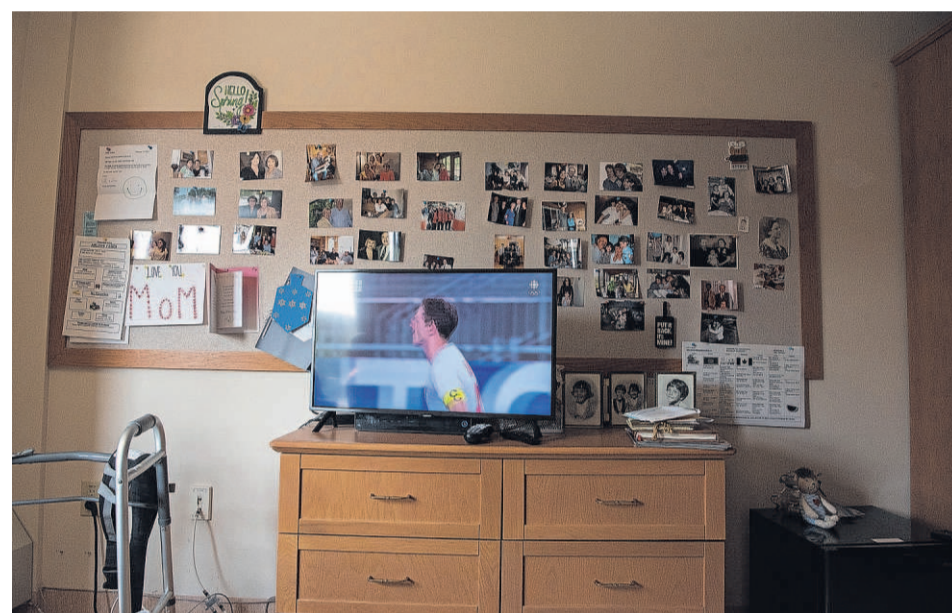
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Mel and Arlene Fages sit together in Arlene's room at the Saul and Claribel Simkin Centre Tuesday. Below, family photos adorn Arlene's wall.

'It has been really good. There are people who haven't been able to see their loved one for some time, including grandchildren they may never have met.'

— CEO Laurie Cerqueti



Sophia Stang, co-leader of Manitoba's youth ambassador advisory squad, celebrates after she cuts a ribbon and unveils the first mural created as part of The Re-Right Project Tuesday.



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Murals part of project aiming to boost children's rights

GILLIAN BROWN

CHILDREN have the right to play, rest and enjoy their lives.

That's the message of Manitoba's youth ambassador advisory squad, whether it's written down, spoken out loud or painted on a giant mural on Sherbrook Street.

Sophia Stang and the rest of the advisory squad, think the latter is the best way to do it.

"You can have it written, everyone can have a leaflet handed out, a brochure handed out to them, but not everyone's going to read that," explained Stang, co-leader of the project along with Rose Fontaine.

"This way, it's up on the city."

The murals, designed and painted by members of the squad themselves, are part of the "Re-Right" project, headed by Stang, which hopes to spread awareness about the rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in a different way.

"It's very inviting," she said.

"You look at it and you want to have fun, you want to be with your friends, and you want to play, rest, and enjoy your life the way you see fit. We hope that children looking at it are going to take that from it, too."

Full of colour and light, the mural is the first of as many as 42 murals across the province, each one depicting a different right outlined in the UN convention.

"This is a moment for them to recognize that they don't have to grow up so quickly," she said. The squad is an initiative of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth office.

Ainsley Krone, the acting Manitoba advocate, said that this right in particular holds a special place in the office.

"This one is all about letting kids be kids," she said, "making sure that we're protecting their abilities and spaces for them to just be kids, that they're not always training for adulthood."

For her, ensuring that is especially important

because of the way society interacts with kids, training them for their adult lives rather than allowing them to play.

Driving by, a person may recognize the painting of the Red River Ex, a snapshot of the advisory squad's experiences on a trip there with play and enjoyment, but it's upon a closer look that the details come out.

The mural's depiction of the 31st right, "the right to play, rest, and enjoy your life," is done through a lens specific to Manitoba and to Canada, with an emphasis on the province's relationship and responsibilities to Indigenous children and Indigenous communities.

The mural includes the seven sacred animals of the seven teachings, the medicine wheel, and the four direction colours.

Knowledge keeper Cheryl Alexander explained that the right has a special context, specifically with its application to Indigenous children's lives lost and to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

The viewer can see four red dresses in the painting and a child in an orange T-shirt, as well as silhouettes that represent those who have passed on to the spirit world, she said, along with people in all four stages of life.

Krone said the office prioritizes issues of decolonization and reconciliation.

"A lot of the work that we're doing is supporting young people who, because of those lasting legacies, are undeserved and overrepresented in a lot of the public systems that fall into our formal scope of mandate," she said.

Krone and Stang both look forward to collaborating with other organizations and buildings across the province to depict the 41 other UN convention rights.

"Our youth just grew closer in the process," said Stang, "I think everybody's ready for round two."

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