

## THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF PELHAM CARES INC.

It all began **1982 April 07** when **Eric Bergenstein**, the then Mayor of Pelham received a letter from **Janet Hassall**, Social Worker with Niagara Regional Home Care. In her letter Janet made a request that a **Social Service Committee** be formed in Pelham to act as a resource to the Home Care Program. This means that if an agency had a particular need not being met by existing programs then the Social Service Committee would attempt to mobilize community resources to meet that need. She went on to say that other communities in the Region had Social Service Committees composed of church parishioners or members representing each denomination in the community.

Janet described the kinds of needs the Social Service Committee could address such as visiting a patient confined to home, transport patients to doctor's appointments, etc., take disabled socially isolated people on an "outing", spend a half day/week with an elderly person who requires supervision, provide funds to cover a piece of equipment to aid in a person's functioning, e.g. brace and make or repair equipment required by Physio and Occupational Therapists.

**Eric** responded by informing **Canon J. Nowe**, Holy Trinity Anglican Church concerning this issue. This resulted in a letter sent to the Pelham Clergy Fellowship dated **1982 May 10** signed by both **Eric and Canon Nowe** which referenced Janet Hassall's letter and stated that the Parish Council of Holy Trinity Anglican Fonthill "would like to work with other churches and suitable groups to bring into being such a Social Service Committee in Pelham." The letter went on to list the steps needed to implement such a proposal.

The next letter sent by **Eric** dated **1982 May 14** went to the different organizations in Pelham that function to meet people's needs, announcing a meeting to be held at 7:30 p.m. **1982 June 17** at the United Church Hall in Fonthill. The purpose of this meeting was to hear how Social Service Committees were functioning in other parts of the Region. **Eric** arranged for representatives of these committees to come and talk to the group. He suggested that each organization who might be interested in learning about the proposal and participating in it send a representative to this meeting. **Eric** emphasized that he was acting only in a personal capacity and this was not a Town Council involved project. **Eric** also sent a memo to the Members of the Town Council inviting them to attend the June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting so they would be informed of the developments.

**Eric Bergenstein** chaired the June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and some of the presenters included **Janet Hassall, Social Worker, Niagara Regional Home Care, Margaret Anderson, Newark Neighbours, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Doreen Hutchinson, Community Care Lincoln, West Lincoln Grimsby and Robert McDowell, Community Legal Services**. Gloria Katch from the Welland Tribune was present and the majority of people who attended were church representatives.

Subsequent meetings attended by those interested in organizing a Social Service Committee in Pelham were held in June, each chaired by **Eric Bergenstein**. By the end of June 1982 the following was identified:

- a Steering Committee: Audrey Barton, Eleanor Fisher, Diane Hubbard, Rev. Keith Tudor, Ellen Herbeson, Ken Dunton, Phyllis Stone, Rev. Robert Sinclair, Jim Davis, Eric Bergenstein and Peter Guetter

- the name of the committee – Pelham Cares
- a list of the services to be offered: “It is believed that a serious effort should be made to create an organization that will provide such services in Pelham as: visit with the lonely, the shut-ins, at home, hospital or on an outing ; run errands for those who are “stuck”; step in, in emergencies, or regularly, to free a parent or spouse who can’t otherwise get a “break”; in emergencies, provide food, clothing, furniture, medicine and other necessities”
- a need for a Board of Directors from which an Executive would be either appointed or elected
- a process to recruit volunteers and how to train them
- the office equipment required
- how to raise money for operating expenses
- the need to comprise a complete listing of all available services for referral

A letter, **dated 1982 August 27** was sent by **Eric** to all the churches and organizations in Pelham who had indicated interest in the formation of a Social Service Committee informing them of what had been accomplished and “respectively asked them to sponsor this endeavour and appoint your representative to the Board of Directors”.

A meeting chaired by **Eric** was held **1982 November 03** that resulted in the following:

- Motion carried to call the organization “Pelham Cares”
- Secretary, Ruth Legate and Treasurer Ken Dunton appointed
- Barbara Robinson offered to pursue getting a charter for Pelham Cares by making an application to the Ministry of Revenue
- Phone list made
- Organized list of volunteers established
- Ken agreed to open a bank account to deposit the donation money received to date.
- Committee struck to establish what services were already available in Pelham with Ruth Legate as Chair

The next meeting was held **1982 November 16** chaired by **Eric** and the Committee discussed;

- the need to develop a constitution
- a client and volunteer sheet
- the need to have guidelines for volunteers and an orientation – referenced Family & Children Services Manual
- the geographical boundaries of service
- the need to search for a permanent place of operation

Ken Dunton reported that a bank account had been opened.

Meetings held **1982 December 07 & 17**, chaired by **Eric** established the following:

- 50 volunteers were confirmed – orientation – 1983 January 13
- The Annual Meeting date was set – **1983 January 12**
- The Constitution was discussed.
- A Client Referral Committee was formed – Chairperson, Eleanor Fisher
- The geographical boundaries of service were decided.

The first official meeting, which was also the first Annual Meeting of Pelham Cares was held **1983 January 12** with the following results:

1. The Constitution was revised and accepted.
2. A review of the membership
3. The Executive Committee Officers were elected:
  - Chairperson: Phyllis Stone
  - Vice-Chairperson: Eric Bergenstein
  - Recording Secretary: Barbara Robinson
  - Corresponding Secretary: Ellen Herbeson
  - Treasurer: Ken Dunton
4. The program for Orientation Night for volunteers was developed.
5. A press release was prepared.

### **Eric Bergenstein:**

Special recognition must be attributed to Eric Bergenstein regarding the formation of Pelham Cares. He took the idea of a Social Service Committee for Pelham and through communication with the churches and service organizations, led interested volunteers to develop a vision of how this committee would work in Pelham. He laid the foundation by bringing in knowledgeable people as references, chairing all the meetings, and communicating the process of development. In an informed, organized manner he, along with the Steering Committee devised strategies to make the vision of Pelham Cares a reality.

### **Sequence of Events:**

#### **1982**

- After receiving the letter from Janet Hassall in April, Eric communicated the idea to the churches and service organizations in Pelham.
- He called an information meeting for those who expressed interest, June 17, with experts present to expand the idea.
- He chaired subsequent meetings in June of interested parties which resulted in the formation of a Steering Committee that went on to define the structure of the organization i.e. what services would be offered, a means of recruiting volunteers and a training plan, how to obtain money to support the organization, finding a temporary meeting place with office equipment, organizing a Board of Directors with Executive, and choosing a name.
- Subsequent meetings chaired by Eric in November and December produced a Constitution for Pelham Cares as well as the geographical boundaries of service.

#### **1983**

- Eric chaired the first official Pelham Cares Meeting, its first Annual Meeting, **1983 January 12** at which the Constitution was accepted and an Executive was elected.

Within less than a year, through Eric Bergenstein's motivation, guidance and leadership Pelham Cares was formed.

### **Please Note:**

The above information was taken from the Pelham Cares Inc. Archival materials presently held by the organization.

Caroline F. Toffolo

Pelham Cares Inc. Archives Committee Convener

