

Venturing Out beyond Our Cancer



Supporting adolescents and young
adults affected by cancer

Celebrating 10 years of **Courage**



The VOBOC Foundation

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VOBOC IN ACTION



VOBOC's Adolescent Young Adult (AYA) Program:

VOBOC is a not-for-profit charitable organization based in Montreal which provides ancillary oncology services to the adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer population - 15 to 39 years of age.

Mission

VOBOC's (Venturing Out Beyond Our Cancer) mission is to provide newly diagnosed adolescent and young adult (AYA) oncology patients, with free diversions, resources and tools to help ease their cancer journey and to provide leadership in raising public awareness regarding increasing occurrences of cancer within the normally robust AYA population. VOBOC offers its free services to AYA patients through its unique membership as part of an oncology interdisciplinary team within leading cancer treatment centres.

VOBOC's three free services:

1) Vo-Pak program

VOBOC delivers free backpacks to oncology units to give to their new cancer patients on their first day of treatment. Each Vo-Pak (venturing out pack) contains tools and resources to help patients navigate through the cancer treatment experience.

2) Granting of Special Requests

At the request from medical teams, VOBOC considers and grants Special Requests to patients in palliative care whose circumstances require VOBOC's assistance in order to realize the request.

3) Education and Awareness

VOBOC supports and leads initiatives that raise awareness and public sensitivity to the occurrence of cancers in adolescents and young adults.



www.wipcr.ca

The West Island Palliative Care Residence is dedicated to quality of life and offering a support system of experienced people who assist both the patient and family in meeting their physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs through the dying and grieving processes.

Fondation de la Résidence de soins palliatifs de l'Ouest-de-l'Île
la compassion, c'est notre priorité



West Island Palliative Care
Residence Foundation
Compassion lives here

Letter from the Founder



Photo: Owen Egan, MUHC

As VOBOC celebrates its first 10 years of service in offering cancer patients free tools, resources and fun diversions, I am so grateful for this journey of growth and discovery. Thousands of cancer patients have crossed our path, be it through the granting of a Vo-Pak backpack, a Special Request, a Venturing Out Diversion or by sharing a moment from their lives. Their courage inspires us each day.

The idea to create The VOBOC Foundation in 2001, began with a vision. Like most ideas, only the ones that are nurtured, turn into something tangible. And of the entities that begin, only those that are supported by extraordinary people ever survive. For this, I credit my family and friends at the Royal Victoria Hospital and McGill University Health Centre (MUHC). They helped breathe life into a small idea.

A special group that I call the “2001 Originals” are being honoured for their willingness to step forward and support VOBOC since its fragile beginnings. Their wisdom and energy as well as their financial and emotional support led to our mission and visions of the VOBOC of today.

None of what VOBOC accomplishes would be possible without a solid army of volunteers. Over the years, their passion and dedication has continued to energize me. Each one is unique and essential in offering VOBOC exactly what is needed at just the right time. An example is our exceptional Gala committee led by Debbie Bridgman, who have worked tirelessly to make this is a memorable celebration.

Our dedicated volunteer board of directors leads VOBOC with great expertise, allowing us to forge ahead with great confidence as we look toward expanding into more cancer centers. Each year, as VOBOC matures, we are honoured as more donors, sponsors and volunteers join us in our efforts to bring our services to more adolescent and young adult cancer patients.

“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, I will try again tomorrow.” - Mary Anne Radmacher

Tomorrow, whether we roar or are quiet, let us continue together to ensure that VOBOC’s free services are available to every new adolescent and young adult just beginning their cancer treatment and that a Special Request is granted to every palliative care patient in need.

Doreen Edward
Volunteer, President-Founder

To honour the past 10 years,
VOBOC founder, Doreen Edward,
shares a few stories and reflections.



*"It takes **courage** to battle cancer.
Every cancer patient I've ever met has inspired me with their **courage**."
Doreen Edward*

A New found Life Purpose



Welcome to the story of VOBBC.

VOBBC is a story of responding to so many courageous cancer patients who helped define who I am today and what VOBBC has become.

My name is Doreen Edward and I am the founder of VOBBC.

Enclosed are some reflections and a few stories of patients who have forever changed my life.

Cancer changed my life

In 1994, I was diagnosed with stage 3 colorectal cancer. I was an active woman with a thriving career. I was graced with a loving husband and two wonderful young girls. But frankly, I didn't expect to beat this disease. While my faith was of great comfort, I just prayed that I would live long enough to spend more time with my children, Robyn and Jen, to help prepare them more for the future.

In 1996 I was declared cured. Some called it a miracle. Still, I felt a bit lost. Overcoming cancer should have set me free. But somehow, it didn't. From my safe place as a survivor, I looked back on my experience with one huge question on my mind: why was I spared and for what purpose? Did I have a purpose at all?

Some may find it odd that this existential question came two years after it had all begun. Especially since I had never asked the famed "why me?" Not even when I was first diagnosed. Still, I couldn't escape that thought. Why had I been so lucky to make it past this cancer when so many others had not?

Life until then had been more than fulfilling. I was blessed with a great family, wonderful friends and a nurturing church community. I had survived cancer and it had changed me profoundly. I tried to be active. I tried to help others. But something greater was missing.

Like most cancer survivors, I wanted to put my own survival to good use. I was just so thankful for it. I wanted to know why I was given this second chance. I wanted to honour it, but I feared that I wouldn't quite live up to it. So as you can well imagine, I did a lot of soul-searching.

Memories of the countless cancer patients I had met in hospital treatment rooms had left an indelible mark on my soul. I saw a lot when I went in every week for chemo.

I saw some smiles, but mostly I saw some terrified and worried patients with their family members just trying to cope. I also noticed that some were incredibly sad and lonely. Some looked very isolated.

Even though we know cancer isn't contagious, some people tend to stay away from us cancer patients. I knew of families torn apart by the strain that cancer had put on their relationships and their finances.

Cancer is a serious test for any relationship. It's also a true test of your inner strength. It asks that you accept losing control of your own future. For most of us there is nothing scarier than letting go. Some of us arrive to that reality quicker and with more ease than others.

In my searching, slowly it became clear that somehow there was a plan out there for me. What followed caused a dramatic shift in how I viewed life and the world.

Purely financial goals no longer mattered. Instead, I was driven by a desire to help other cancer patients in any way I could. Most cancer survivors do find their own unique way of giving back. Therefore, with the blessing of my loving husband, Ian, I decided to leave my career, and I never looked back.



Maryse Carignan, Monique Tremblay
CanSupport

I began volunteering at the Cedars CanSupport Program at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Thanks to the encouragement of its coordinator, Maryse Carignan, and assistant, Monique Tremblay, I created a fun craft program for oncology patients. You

could find me bouncing down the halls donned in brightly decorated, crazy hats and pushing a craft cart around the oncology floors.

I invited patients to create their own 30-second crafts. Patients and medical teams loved them. They put bright smiles on everyone's faces. These 30-second diversions were a great way to reach out to patients.



An Idea Takes Shape... and VOBOC is created

The day before Valentine's Day, while pushing around the craft cart at the hospital, I saw a young fellow (Andrew) with a bald head. I invited him to make a valentine craft while waiting for his treatment.

As the craft took shape I told him, "You're doing a really good job. Who are you making it for?" "My bride," he replied. As weeks and months passed, I got to know Andrew while he underwent chemotherapy. One day that summer, as I sat on the deck at my cottage, I couldn't stop thinking about him.

I didn't know the details of his medical case, but it was clear to me that he wasn't doing so well. I thought of his battle and about all the time he had to spend in the hospital. It just struck me how this young couple, so much in love, was being robbed of the chance to spend time together outside of this disease.

I decided to lend Andrew and his wife Andrea my cottage so they could escape the sterile hospital walls and spend some quiet time alone together in a beautiful and peaceful environment.

Gaby

When my father was diagnosed with cancer 14 years ago, I experienced firsthand the suffering of someone I loved so deeply. I will never forget the hours Doreen spent at my father's side. I will forever appreciate her strength, patience and the support she gave me and my family at that difficult time. So I decided that being a part of VOBOC would be my special way of giving back.

Gaby



Andrew and Andrea spent that weekend connecting as a couple while soaking up the great outdoors. At the end of their stay, they left me a generous batch of freshly baked blueberry muffins as well as this note:

The "Château Doreen" was wonderful! I can't even begin to tell you how wonderful it was for Andrew and I to get away together... Alone!! I think it was the first time in months we've been able to have a 'normal' evening! Many, many thanks, Andrea and Andrew.

Andrew lost his battle with cancer about nine weeks later.

That weekend had worked out so well, that it made me think: how could we do this? How could something like that work for others? How could it help, really help, even more patients and families escape their thoughts of cancer?

So I started thinking out loud as well as outside the box. I asked my family what they thought of this idea of offering cancer patients escapes and free diversions. When you think out loud, most people think you're crazy, but my brother-in-law loved the idea. So did my entire family.

Soon, I was laying the foundations of what would become VOBOC.

As the idea took shape, dear friends like Josée Legault, Gwen Vineberg and Dr. Ina Cummings, jumped on to form the first board of directors. Dr. Henry Shibata became our medical advisor. Then, with the help of legal counsel from Me Brian Sher, VOBOC quickly became a legal charitable organization.

With everything falling so quickly into place, one thing became crystal clear: this was meant to be.

At the time when VOBOC was being formed, I was reading *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho and took from it the lesson that you can go through a million struggles in your life, but if you are doing what you are destined to do, everything just falls into place. And so it was with VOBOC that I found my purpose for surviving cancer.

VOBOC Breaks Ground in 2001 and Helps Adults Venture Out Beyond Cancer

When VOBOC became federally incorporated in December 2001, then in February 2002 – a registered charitable organization - it became the first one of its kind in Canada.



Andrea & Andrew

One of my fondest memories of VOBOC was one of its earliest.

Shortly after being married in 2000, my husband Andrew was suddenly diagnosed with Lymphoma. He was only

31 years old and I was 27. We'd just moved into our own apartment and celebrated our very first Christmas.

Now as a married couple, we were simply looking forward to a long life together when our world came to a sudden stand still.

The next few months were spent in the hospital weeks at a time. I guess this was to be our new home. A single bed, a cot in the corner of the room, countless visits from nurses and doctors at all hours.

There, we'd watch the seasons pass from his window as he wondered if he'd live to see the next one. Friends would visit and we'd be reminded of how life outside the hospital continued at a fast pace while ours stood still. Frankly, we were just holding our breath.

I remember one evening Andrew telling me about a woman he'd met earlier that day. She was a volunteer. It wasn't long before I, too, met Doreen Edward AKA the "craft lady". She was just as he described. Full of life, energy, humour and quiet understanding. Her own personal battle gave us hope and her visits always left us in better spirits.

Over the months to come she would become our personal cheering squad and, mostly, a very dear friend.

On one of the few times Andrew was not in the hospital,

we went back to his parent's home for the weekend. There weren't any interruptions from doctors or nurses. Not a single person rushing in to take blood in the middle of the night. And no injections! Peace at last.

Soon after getting home, I remember standing in the front yard and getting a phone call. It was Doreen. She explained that we'd won a weekend get-away at a nearby cottage! She had it all arranged - food prepared, transportation by boat... We didn't have to think about a thing. All we had to do was say yes! We wouldn't have had the energy otherwise. Somehow, she knew exactly what we needed.

Cottage country had always played an important part in our lives. We couldn't have asked for a more perfect place for us to spend a quiet night. We sat on the sofa looking out at the stars through the large window. As a bonus, we watched the reflection of the moon on the water.

We talked for hours about what kind of cottage we'd have together someday. It was the first time in months we had an evening all to ourselves. It was the first time we didn't have to focus on "tumor talk" or "dark thoughts". For a small window in time we could actually see beyond the cancer. We could even envision living a life radically different from the one we were living - far away from what we feared the most.

This is what VOBOC, its many volunteers and supporters do best. They take lives that are being turned upside down by cancer and for moments at a time, they remind you that there is so much more to you, so much more to life than cancer. Those moments give you strength. They give your family and friends strength, too. It is for those moments I will forever be grateful.

*Thank you Doreen and the VOBOC Team,
Andrea Labrosse Schell*



Dr Ina Cummings, VOBBC launch at MUHC

VOBBC's mission was to provide all adult cancer patients with the opportunity to take a break from their illness. Cancer is emotionally paralyzing and often financially crippling. It leaves many patients unable to afford the extras – or even the basics – of life.

At the time of creating VOBBC and its Venturing Out Diversion program, I knew that VOBBC couldn't change the final outcome for the patients we encountered... But there was a definite joy and comfort in knowing that we could help patients create their own new memories for themselves as well as their families inside the cancer experience.

VOBBC offered simple treats and diversions, such as restaurant gift certificates and weekend getaways to hotels and resorts. Patients completed a free ballot and placed it into the VOBBC contest box at any of the adult sites of the McGill University Health Center (MUHC) hospitals. Winners were then selected by random draw.

Contests were held, on average, every seven weeks. In the years that followed, hundreds of venturing out gift certificates worth tens of thousands of dollars were awarded to patients in treatment through the help of our most generous donors and sponsors.



Josée Legault

VOBBC Begins Granting Special Last Requests to Patients in Palliative Care

The success of the Venturing Out Diversion's program led to the launching of a new free service as VOBBC began to receive demands to grant special requests for patients in palliative care. In 2002, I recall the medical team of a 42-year-old patient calling to ask VOBBC to pay for her ambulance ride to and from the hospital so that she could simply go home for a few hours. In spite



of being terribly ill, she wanted to go home to put her papers in order and say goodbye to her father. She didn't want her father to come to the hospital because he always got lost taking the bus.

It's very humbling being able to grant such a simple request as a ride home.

Within hospitals, VOBBC soon became known as a resource and a means to have such requests granted. We were able to respond to the needs of patients through the collective effort of countless family members, friends, volunteers, hospital staff, the community and fund raising initiatives.

Our goal was to make sure that we could and would fulfill every Special Request while still offering hundreds of patients fun free Venturing Out Diversions every year.

One contest winner in 2003 had a huge impact on me. She changed VOBBC forever. She was a young woman named Debbie.

She'd won VOBBC tickets to attend a figure skating competition. She was so excited that she wanted to thank me personally. I was called to her hospital room. She asked me how VOBBC knew that she had been a figure skater. She told me that of all the prizes being offered that month, this was the only one she had really hoped to win. Of course, I didn't know this. But I understood how thrilled she was to take along her youngest son to share in the experience and see what was once her passion.

Debbie asked me how VOBBC gives away all of these expensive prizes. "You must need money or help – I can help," she said. She told me she was a painter and that she reproduced some of her paintings to make note cards. She generously offered to let us use one of her paintings to make cards that we could then sell to raise more funds to help more patients. It was a great idea!

We also asked other people touched by cancer to submit their own works of art. The money raised from selling the note cards went to make holiday baskets for delivery to hospital patients who were too ill to go home for Christmas Eve.

This is a service we still proudly provide every year to the adult sites of the McGill University Hospital Centres (Royal Victoria, Montreal General, Montreal Neurological), as well as to the Jewish General Hospital, Lakeshore General Hospital and to several palliative care residences such as the West Island Palliative Care Residence.

Debbie



Patients tell us there is such a special feeling when you receive something so beautiful and so unexpected from a perfect stranger.

At VOBOC, we feel truly honoured to be of any assistance during such difficult times.

When Debbie's cancer came back for a fourth time in 2004, she began selling some of her paintings to secure revenue for her young sons. VOBOC purchased the painting that was used on the note card.

Debbie Fitzmaurice was incredibly courageous.

"You carry on," she would say, "you don't have a choice."



With Debbie's permission, the painting was named "The Village." It hangs proudly in the VOBOC office serving as a reminder that "it takes a village to support a cancer patient."

The Vo-Pak (Venturing Out Backpack) Program is created

In 2003 the older Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Oncology Program was set up by McGill University under the direction of oncologist, Dr. Petr Kavan. This emerging cancer population, aged 15 to 44, was a group Dr. Kavan called "The Lost Tribe". He named it so because of the uniqueness of this cancer population, their distinct needs and the services that were lacking for them.

Other cancer groups do not face quite the same issues regarding sexuality, fertility, school, peer pressure, independence and maturity. Older cancer patients are often better equipped to handle the many challenges of cancer. The AYA McGill Program was designed to meet the unique needs of youth by bringing in specialists and resources to help them through their whole cancer experience.



Photo: Owen Egan, MUHC

Dr. Kavan, and nurse Christine Leblanc, speak with McGill AYA patient Sebastien Daigle

One day, as I was passing out VOBOC entry forms at the hospital, I was approached by a nurse named Christine Leblanc. She was concerned about a cancer patient in her oncology unit, a young man who was 19 years old. She described him as almost homeless. She said that he wasn't always coming in for his treatments and was in need of some positive changes in his life.



I introduced myself to the young man. We chatted and I asked how things were going for him. "Ok but I hate coming here," he said. I told him that if he came in for his treatment the following week, I would bring him a surprise. I wanted to give him an incentive to come back.

He had scraps of paper hanging out of his pockets and a tattered old bag of some kind. So after leaving the hospital that day, I went out to buy him a backpack and other items. I filled the pack with pajamas, underwear, t-shirts, socks, a VOBOC cap, toiletries, gift cards to restaurants... Essentially, whatever I could find that would be useful to him. The following week, when he returned to the hospital for his next treatment, I handed him the backpack.

He opened it and started emptying its contents. As he was getting more and more excited by pulling out the pack's items, people started looking at what was going on. In the corner of my eye I saw another patient, who was just a couple of years older, look on with excitement and wonder.

He, too, looked like he could have used fresh pajamas and some gift certificates. I went home thinking about the delight on the boy's face, and the curiosity of the other patients. I thought: wouldn't it be cool to bring in backpacks for all the other young patients?

I asked Christine and some of the other nurses what they thought about VOBOC supplying backpacks to their young patients and asked them to suggest some good additions to the pack. The list grew and grew.

That's how the new Vo-Pak (Venturing Out backpack) Program began.

Vo-Paks were, and still are today, comprised of a Medical Education Kit, a Resource and Link Kit, a hospital Comfort Kit, an Awareness Tool Kit, and a Venturing Out Kit which has such things as iTunes gift cards, restaurant gift certificates as well as vouchers for free diversions to help youth escape their thoughts of cancer and just feel “normal” again.

It seemed that every week VOBAC was being asked to meet another new young patient, give them a backpack, or sadly grant them one last Special Request.

This brand new Vo-Pak program seemed to be a great way to welcome young patients to the hospital on their first day of treatment. It really set a different tone for the beginnings of their cancer journey.

New patients are scared. They often think that they’re going to be immediately sick from their treatment. But when someone shows up with a surprise and catches them off-guard, it helps them to feel supported because another person is thinking about them.



VOBOC Introduces its Three Free Services to a Fourth Hospital

In 2004, we introduced our Venturing Out Program, our granting of Special Requests and the AYA Vo-Pak Program to the Lakeshore General Hospital. Now we were serving four hospitals (Royal Victoria, Montreal General, Montreal Neurological and Lakeshore General Hospital).

Entrance into the Lakeshore was another way that I felt we could give back to a hospital, which had been so important to me when I was first diagnosed.

Just like the MUHC, the Lakeshore oncology team was thrilled to have their patients win weekend get-a-ways and gift certificates.



Edna Schell speaks with Lakeshore medical team at VOBAC launch

On special holidays at all the hospitals, when the treatment rooms were overflowing with patients, it made for fun conversations when VOBAC delivered a huge bouquet of flowers to every patient just because they were receiving treatment that day. It seemed to really take away any anxiety for that moment. It also brought big, bright smiles to everyone’s face.

VOBOC became very active within all four hospitals. It had great support from the medical teams and generous financial support from family, friends and the community.

Cancer Does Not Define You

The Venturing Out Free Diversions’ contest had a simple formula – complete a free ballot at one of the oncology units and enter it into the VOBAC ballot box.

Each contest typically offered patients the chance to win one of the following: a resort get-away, a spa day, fine dining, sporting or concert tickets, or the delivery of a gift basket. Chances of winning a prize depended on how many patients entered each contest, but the odds were approximately one in 200 to win one of the five prizes offered in each draw.

Excitement grew as patients spoke to one another about having won a prize and the Venturing Out contests quickly gained in popularity. Medical teams were thrilled that their patients enjoyed the diversions. It made for new conversations between clinicians and their patients.

In 2006, I had the privilege of meeting an extraordinary individual named Maureen. I was doing my rounds in one of the hospital, offering VOBAC contest entry forms to patients in waiting rooms when I encountered a woman dressed as a golfer.



Josie Pepe-Aylward, Doreen Edward, Dr. Shibata, nurses: Marika Swidzinski, Liz O’Hagan, social worker Aviva Tenenbaum

Being a new golfer myself, I was curious and asked the woman if she played golf. She said yes and told me that she had just played that morning. But, she added, that the “real golfer” was her friend who was in the radiotherapy room having her treatment.

She described her friend as a near-scratch golfer. “Can I meet your golfing friend?” I asked. “Sure, when she comes out,” she said. I waited and finally a woman with a cane in hand slowly made her way down the hall. She had a big bright smile as her friend introduced me to her. Her name was Maureen.

Well, I was pretty excited about meeting a really good golfer. So I began babbling on about how I’d just started golfing and how I loved the thought of swinging the clubs.

Maureen asked me to show her my swing – it was a baseball/soccer/java throwing kind of a swing. “You need a little help with that,” she said. “Could you help?” I asked. “Well I’m here at this time every day so come by one time,” Maureen replied.

Three days later I showed up with my 7 iron and really surprised her. “Why did you bring that club?” she asked. Now I was really embarrassed. I had never asked anything of any cancer patient before. I was angry with myself for taking advantage of such a quiet woman. “You don’t need a club – I have my cane,” she said, laughing.

With her cane she gave me my first golf swing lesson right there in the radio-oncology waiting room. Soon, everyone was watching. And before you knew it, Maureen was teaching a few doctors how to master a smooth golf swing.

I returned for a few more golf swing lessons and we soon became friends. I asked her once, “How did cancer change you?” She thought about it and finally said, “Well, you’re just never the same...”

To me, Maureen represents all the silent patients who quietly accept their treatment, never complain, never ask for anything, are always helpful to staff and make the best of whatever this difficult battle demands. Quiet, private courage.

Until that day when Maureen gave golf swing lessons in radiotherapy, no one knew of her golfing feats, nor much about her. But like all patients, she was definitely much more than the cancer.

After his own golf swing lesson, a young resident figured that out. “Wow,” he said. “I didn’t know all this time that she was, like, a golf pro.”

“The cancer experience is only a small part of the person’s life,” I told him. “So always connect with your patients on a human level.”

In 2006 VOBOC trims its free services to focus exclusively upon older adolescents and young adults (AYA) oncology patients

In 2006, VOBOC was offering its three free services at four hospitals: the Royal Victoria, Montreal General, Montreal Neurological and the Lakeshore General. VOBOC was being called to the Royal Vic more frequently to meet young adults who were in need of special assistance. It was tough to keep up with the growing demand from the AYA population and we seemed to have our resources and energy stretched to the maximum.

It was about this time that I met Louise. A tall, beautiful businesswoman whose eyes sparkled when she looked at you. I met her after her third bout with breast cancer. She’d heard about the quiet work that VOBOC was doing and she tracked me down wanting to become a volunteer.



Louise

Dear Doreen,

I wanted to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present my vision of the AYA potential for VOBOC to its Board of Directors.

Clearly your board has a great deal of appreciation and respect for the good work you have accomplished thus far.

As discussed, before you resides an opportunity to leave a lasting impression in the care of the AYA population and its dedicated health care team so desperately in need of your expertise and passion.

I am really thrilled to be of assistance to you, and to take a part in creating change in an emerging area of Oncology.

Louise

Louise had such enthusiasm, you couldn't resist her energy. She shadowed me at the hospital several times to see how we delivered our free services. She was taking notes of everything. "Why are you offering so many services?" she would ask me again and again. "You can't do it all," she'd always say. We became great friends and I valued her instincts and business acumen.

And so, at our five-year review, with Louise's assistance, the VOBOC board decided to narrow our services and focus on the underserved AYA population aged 15 to 39.

It was also at this time that Louise introduced us to the ad agency Cundari, which helped us to create our new mascot Léon – a lion that symbolizes the courage every cancer patient has within them.

When Louise's cancer returned for a fourth time, we spent a lot of time together. The night she was re-diagnosed she said that she wanted to be alone. Usually, I honour what a friend wants, but here it made no sense for a good friend to be alone.

So I showed up at her place with several bottles of wine and my pajamas. We talked all through the night about life, cancer, the unfairness of it, the courage it takes to battle it and the wisdom gained from the experience of it all.

Until her death in 2008, Louise fought cancer on her own terms. Her courage helped her regain a sense of power over a disease that often leaves us feeling powerless.

Louise had the strength and the courage of a lion.



Thanks and Congratulations VOBOC

Dr. Petr Kavan, Program Director



**PROGRAMME D'ONCOLOGIE POUR ADOLESCENTS ET JEUNES ADULTES
ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT ONCOLOGY PROGRAM**



Cancer Can Isolate Us

Some patients we meet open our eyes to new insights regarding the cancer experience. For me, one such young woman was Sarah, a bright promising 21-year-old engineering student. Tragically her cancer was winning its battle. Yet she tried her best to stay connected to her peer group. Her friends would come to the hospital and tell her about their shopping adventures, the new shoes they'd purchased and their plans for their graduation parties.

From her small hospital bed, Sarah listened with great interest. But inside her, another war was raging. Sadly, her friends couldn't relate to that war and as time passed she found it very difficult to talk to them about the fact that she was fighting for her life.

Gradually, she no longer had the energy for visits from her school friends and they no longer shared the same goals and dreams. Graduation dreams for her had ended long ago. Her fight for her life had become her immediate and total focus.

It's difficult for young people battling cancer to know what to say to their friends. Even though their friends may show them all of the love and caring in the world, they just don't have the life experience to know how to approach someone who has such a critical illness. As a result, loneliness and isolation become huge barriers for this cancer group.

At its best, VOBOC acts as a bridge linking isolated youth to the hospital's resources and support.

The medical teams embraced VOBOC as we quickly began delivering Vo-Paks, granting Special Requests and offering free diversions to their young patients.

VOBOC thrives as part of the McGill AYA Oncology Interdisciplinary team. McGill's AYA mission is to ensure that new adolescent and young adult cancer patients don't feel alone and that they are provided with the best medical care and equipped with the necessary support and resources to help them deal with the challenges that face young people with cancer.

As part of the McGill AYA team, VOBOC found opportunities to support the successful young adult programs set up by Cedar's CanSupport and Hope & Cope. In a modest way VOBOC actively helps sponsor 4C Retreats (Central Canadian Cancer Community) and their workshops.

VOBOC is known to give away fun free diversions to support group participants through random contest draws. It is a joy to collaborate with CanSupport and Hope & Cope. Our distinct entities share a dedicated passion to ease the cancer journey for young adult patients. This, in turn, enables us to work together, share our gifts and pool our collective resources for the benefit of patients.



Erica Nadler, CanSupport and patient
Bonnie Garellek

Cancer Redefines Your Life's Direction



Weifun, Émile (6 months old), Frédéric

While many AYA patients are students, others have finished

school and are just beginning exciting new careers. Some are newly married and starting their families when they're struck with cancer.

Cancer stops everyone in their tracks. But in the adolescent and young adult population, it presents a whole set of psychological and emotional challenges unknown to other age groups.

Issues of fertility, body image, intimacy, sexuality and independence are, of course, paramount. Yet, their life experiences and independence are in effect often limited. Even though many young adults have moved out on their own, they're really just beginning their independent lives.

VOBOC Expands into JGH

In 2008, VOBOC expanded and introduced its two services for the AYA population into yet another McGill oncology centre: the

Segal Cancer Centre at the Sir Mortimer B. Davis of the Jewish General Hospital.



Scott Adams, Hope & Cope
and Gwynneth Gorman,
Cedars CanSupport at 4-C Conference

Weifun & Fred

VOBOC helped us maintain 'adjusted normalcy' during my wife Weifun's cancer journey. Sponsored gifts from Yves Rocher, Cirque du Soleil and restaurants, made Weifun and I feel special and helped us believe that life could go on. When things were bad, Vo-Pak blankets kept us warm in the bleak atmosphere of hospitals. But more than the gifts themselves, VOBOC helped us realize that someone out there was thoughtful enough to provide these to us. This was a real comfort.

Thanks a thousand times.

Fred Messier

Two years ago I had the privilege of meeting a young mother, Weifun, her husband and their 8-month-old baby. Weifun's contagious smile brightened up every room she walked into and her articulate communication skills allowed for very easy conversation.

This young couple was establishing themselves and finding parenting to be a joy beyond description. They were a team working together. They were battling cancer and caring for their young son. But as the months passed and Weifun's brain cancer progressed, she lost more of her mobility and precious independence.

Yet, she never let it destroy her spirit or even stop her from going out to dinner with her husband and friends – "It just takes longer," she would say.

I recall one day when the young couple told me how they felt comforted to be surrounded by the new friends they'd made through the cancer support groups held by Cedars CanSupport and Hope & Cope, as well as by attending retreats. They spoke of finding understanding with other cancer survivors. "They get us," said Weifun and her husband.

VOBOC tries to encourage patients to take full advantage of all of the resources they are offered.

Helping to connect a bridge between patients and support groups, VOBOC often offers free diversions to those who participate in hospital-based psychosocial support programs.

On one such occasion, Weifun won tickets to the Cirque du Soleil. She was so excited just to be able to invite her mom to such a unique outing. Such simple outings offer memories beyond description.

VOBOC - Venturing Out Beyond Our Cancer - is about simple diversions to bring simple joy into the cancer experience.

Cancer Steals Independence

For most patients, maintaining independence and privacy is paramount. Such was the case for a young man I met in one of the hospitals.



Alston was a very private person. In his thirties, he had been out on his own for quite some time. His family didn't live in Montreal, so he was somewhat isolated from their support. Even when no more treatments were possible, he refused to give up.

When the cancer came back, he struggled to survive financially after he lost his promising new job. Alston didn't take up a lot of space, but he had a strong undercurrent that was captivating. He used his very intense intellect and a tremendous amount of energy to keep his guard up.

Young people, in particular those who are trying to make it on their own, don't often know how to let people in to help them. Not even when they really need it. Sometimes, not even when they're dying.

VOBOC gives away free diversions without any strings attached. Because of that, some kids trust us enough to talk about what's really going on with them. It is through their trust that we are able to help direct young patients back to their medical or psychosocial team for support.

Shortly before he died, Alston won a gift card to a restaurant. He was able to treat a close friend as a "thank you" gesture for helping and keeping an eye on him. His Facebook thank you note to us was simple and direct: "I could never have afforded such a nice restaurant on my own. Thank you VOBOC."

For some, even through their treatments, they'll still need to earn money to survive. So they'll bail on a treatment in order to work just so they can buy food.

At times adherence to the treatment plan can become a big struggle for this cancer group. To help support the medical teams when such cases arise, VOBOC offers gift certificate incentives to patients who stick to their treatment plans. Youths with cancer have a lot to contend with and acceptance is not easy ...at any age.

It's really hard when you see some patients lose their heating and electricity because they can't pay their bills. It's heart wrenching to know that they're stuck somewhere in a dark apartment... VOBOC tries to offer what it can to help.





Lara

Inspired Lessons

Some patients inspire you to be better at what you do. Such was my experience when I met a young teacher named Lara. She was just beginning her dream career when she was diagnosed with cancer. Admitted to the hospital as

a new patient, Lara received her Vo-Pak from her medical team.

She was thrilled with the gift. She went out of her way to let us know by asking VOBBC to visit her. I didn't recognize her at first. Then, I recalled that she played ringuette as a youngster when I was a referee. Now she was all grown up and so beautiful. But she also had serious cancer.

Lara's active mind was forever thinking of items that could be added to the backpack to make it even better. As days of hospitalization turned into weeks and weeks into months, Lara and her dad would play a very special game late at night. They would name more essential items that needed to be part of the Vo-Pak.

When Lara would see me on the hospital ward, she'd call to me with great excitement. She wanted to share their new list of must-have items. Of their many suggestions, three new key items stood out: ear plugs, a soft wrap for the port lines and colourful boxer shorts.

Lara's strength and determination shone brightly. She shared her compassion with other patients and everyone she encountered. She inspired people around her to be better.

When she died shortly before Christmas in 2009, her family raised money for the "Friends of Lara Fund" and they donated it to VOBBC. The funds are being used to create a resource kit called the "Lara Information Kit." It will contain tools and resources to help patients navigate through the cancer experience.



Frédérique

For me, VOBBC is all the tenderness of the world contained in a backpack After the anguish of the first visit to the oncologist, the anxiety caused by the diagnosis, I remember my crazy uncontrollable laughter in discovering the contents of the bag.

As if a little bubble of happiness had burst in the waiting room ... Someone had thought of welcoming me into this strange club. I was not alone!

*Thank you Doreen!
Frédérique*

VOBBC – Why We Do What We Do

VOBBC is successful in supporting AYA patients because of its close relationship with the medical oncology teams. To ensure Vo-Pak delivery, teams call to let us know how many new patients are coming in each week. They let us know which of their patients are the most vulnerable so that we can be of additional assistance.

A young girl originally from Afghanistan really touched my heart. She was in the hospital and non-responsive to the nurses and doctors. She refused to speak or even acknowledge anyone. She hid under her blankets. Her poor mother, who spoke neither French nor English, would arrive at the hospital everyday at 7 a.m. and leave at 7 p.m. The worried woman sat still on a chair beside her daughter's bed.



Day after day she saw her daughter fading away.

The staff tried to communicate with the young patient but she chose to stay within the tight walls she had built around herself. They were at a complete loss. So one day they called VOBBC and asked if we knew what might help break through her isolation.

VOBBC brought in its welcoming Vo-Pak. The head nurse of the unit asked me to come with her to deliver it. When we entered the room, I smiled at the mother who was quietly praying while another nurse was hanging up more platelets and drugs.

The nurse introduced me to the young girl and I offered her the Vo-Pak. She was reluctant to accept it. Then we all stood watching her reach into the bag. The first item she pulled out was the VOBBC lion. Scoffing at it she asked, "Why give me a lion?" "Because we both know that it takes courage to battle cancer, don't we?" I replied. At this point, the young girl began to sob uncontrollably – she cried for more than 10 minutes. None of us in the room moved.

Hélène

When a young adult is handed a diagnosis of cancer, the disease can suspend and may even sometimes destroy relationships, projects, hopes and dreams. Health care teams request a lot of information from patients regarding their past medical history. It takes a lot of energy for patients to answer all their questions – they have to give so much of themselves to assist us in helping them. Treatments and side effects alter the normalcy of everyday living. There are so many losses. Our young adult patients give up so much and receive proportionally so little in return.

So, as an oncology nurse, accompanying young patients on their journey with cancer, it is so nice for me to start new relationships by welcoming a patient with a Vo-Pak. When I offer a young patient a Vo-Pak filled with useful items, this creates a warmer, more relaxed and welcoming approach so important in discovering my patients' needs and concerns. So it's not only young adult patients who benefit...I do too!

Hélène Deutsch, Nurse

We allowed her to unleash her pent up frustrations, sadness and fears about having cancer. Her anger of knowing that she was probably going to die from it was also very real.

Slowly, the room that was once filled with anger was being transformed into one of release and openness.

As her sobbing subsided, she reached into the backpack and pulled out more items: pj's, socks, the VOBOC blanket and all the other items that every backpack contains. Underneath it all, she pulled out an iTouch – and she screamed with joy. "My very own iTouch! But how will I get the music I want on it?" she asked. Without hesitation, the nurses offered to help and it became the means by which the nursing staff built a link with this young patient.

I'm told that many wonderful moments were spent with this young patient setting up the iTouch and seeing her enjoy talking with the younger nurses about the must-have apps. The barriers that were erected out of fear were replaced with the trust that the medical team was there to help and accompany her on her journey.

I heard that many great weeks were spent with the staff before she passed away.

It takes courage to battle cancer – the patient needs courage to trust the medical teams and the medical

teams need courage to creatively find ways to reach out to their patients. They do this each and every day. And on some occasions, VOBOC is asked to help.

In this as in other cases, we are truly humbled when we can be of any assistance at all. It takes tremendous courage to be part of the treating medical teams who witness such sadness each and every day. People who work in oncology and palliative care are exceptional human beings. Their gifts are a wonder to witness.

Cancer Forces Us to Put Things On Hold

Our vision for VOBOC was to expand into another hospital. As a board we were working towards that goal when I was struck again with cancer in June of 2010.

No one ever plans for cancer – and certainly not when you are busy doing other things.

Cancer forced me to the sidelines. But it allowed the VOBOC board to find its place, offering it room to grow and become much stronger. It is probably one of the best blessings that have come out of my new cancer experience.

The VOBOC Foundation appreciates the generous support of the following sponsors



2011 and Beyond

A passionate board of directors leads VOBOC. Their vision and wisdom ensures a solid future, well beyond our fragile beginnings.

A healthy group of volunteers brings life to VOBOC's programs and activities. Their dedication and gifts are beyond description.

VOBOC's new dynamic Program Director adds to our stability and consistency initiatives.

VOBOC's goal is to always improve our services and extend the delivery of our programs to AYA patients receiving treatment within leading cancer centers across Canada.

As resources permit, we will launch our public awareness and education initiatives regarding cancers in adolescents and young adults.

Over a 10-year span, thanks to the wonderful support of family, friends, volunteers, sponsors, hospital based teams, and the community, VOBOC has touched the lives of thousands of cancer patients in one way or another.

To meet the needs of the underserved vulnerable adolescent and young adult population, we know that it will take the support of the whole village.

VOBOC is committed to doing its part to help patients venture out beyond the cancer.

Doreen Edward
Volunteer, President-Founder

"A request that I couldn't pass up..."

In June 2010, as I sat beside Doreen, lying on a hospital bed battling cancer for the second time, looking so fragile but exuding the tower of strength that we all know Doreen owns, I felt humbled. I held onto her hand and asked if there was anything that I could do while I was in Alaska completing a half marathon in honour of all cancer patients diagnosed with Lymphoma & Leukemia cancers. Ever so quietly with a sparkly tear running down her cheek, Doreen asked me to plant a flag somewhere along the route with a special name written on it - Andrew.

Andrew had been one of the first recipients of VOBOC's services but, unfortunately, he lost his battle at the age of 31.

Deborah Bridgman



June 2010 on the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, overlooking Cook Inlet during the Mayor's Midnight Sun Marathon in Anchorage Alaska.



Clare

Photo: Marc Muri

Volunteering By Clare O'Hagan (VOBOC Volunteer)

Everyone has a story. Mine begins with my late husband who suffered from Juvenile Diabetes. As time went on and his health was more affected by the Diabetes we began to spend time in the hospital. While the early days did not allow the greatest insight into how caregivers and volunteers can affect you, as more time was spent in the hospital than out that would change.

It was during that year that I came to fully appreciate the people who offered their support. It came in many forms; a kind word, constructive advice or just the holding of a hand. The days were long and the nights even longer. While you are living the experience it does not hit home, however when the events eventually come to an end and there is only time for you and your thoughts those special people are remembered. They provided us with support and care and expected nothing in return. They didn't have the answers but were able to bridge us across to the next hour, day or month.

So here I am responding to a request from two people that I love, who have also experienced the touch of a volunteer at a time of need. Doreen and Debbie asked me to express what volunteering means to

me. The emotions run deep thinking about it. I felt a strong desire to give back and to do more for people in need. Not just a cheque at the end of every month to a charity but actually to be out there doing. This is where it started! Well, almost two years later and VOBOC has become a big part of my life.

Your plan is to give of your time freely with no thought of any type of reward, but that is not what happens. You feel the rewards in so many different ways in everything you do. Every time you pack a backpack, deliver a special request or a basket you know that it will bring a moment of joy to a person at a difficult time. The gratitude of the patients and their families is such an emotional reward. You are inspired by their courage, drive, lust for life, strength of character, love of family and true grace under such extraordinary circumstances. Even when I am doing the most mundane duties, such as shopping for supplies, inventories, filing etc., I still feel the reward of knowing that everything I do at VOBOC is all part of the bigger picture, giving a moment of diversion to a patient, a family member or even a staff member.

So in response "What does Volunteering mean to me?"

It completes me!



Oncologie Oncology

VOBOC IN ACTION



The VOBBC Foundation wishes to express its sincerest appreciation to all who have made our 10 Year Anniversary Celebration, Honouring Courage, a tremendous success. It takes a village!

We wish to thank the Gala committee members and volunteers for making this evening so magical as well as to our Emcee and speakers for their contributions this evening.

We are most appreciative of the supporters and sponsors who have honoured us with their contributions for ad sponsorships, messages of encouragement and gifts for our silent auction and raffle.

We are most grateful for donations received and to donors whose contributions enabled young adult cancer patients to attend these celebrations with us.

We are grateful to the Sheraton and their team for their attentive hospitality.

VOBBC extends its greatest gratitude to all of you who are here in attendance this evening. Your very presence has made this a wonderful celebration honouring the courage that it takes to battle cancer.

Thank You.

The 2001 Originals

photo: Marianne Larochelle, Voir



Josée Legault was one of the original board members of VOBBC in 2001, serving as a director until 2003. Her insights and wisdom brought much to the early development of VOBBC. On numerous occasions Josée has volunteered her talents as VOBBC's Emcee. She continues to be an active volunteer. Josée is a respected political analyst, speaker, author and media commentator both in French and in English.

photo: MUHC



Gwen Vineberg was one of the original board members of VOBBC in 2001, serving as a director until 2003. Her wit, passion and intuition offered a fresh perspective as VOBBC began defining its programs and services. Gwen, who continues to be an active supporter of VOBBC, is a longtime Cedars CanSupport and Hope & Cope volunteer as well as a patient advocate. Gwen formed the first Ovarian Cancer Support group in Montreal, over 12 years ago.



Dr. Ina Cummings joined the VOBBC board in 2001, serving as a director until her retirement in the fall of 2010. Throughout her tenure, Dr. Cummings offered incredible leadership and quiet wisdom. Through her committed presence, VOBBC grew in strength and consistency. VOBBC continues to gleam from her wisdom through her participation on VOBBC's Medical Advisory Committee. Dr. Cummings is a retired palliative care physician and former president of the Canadian Palliative Care Association.



Dr. Henry Shibata joined VOBBC in 2001 as a Medical Advisor and shortly thereafter began serving on the board of directors until his retirement from the board in 2008. Dr. Shibata's experience as a surgical oncologist, offered VOBBC a unique perspective as it developed meaningful services for cancer patients. Dr. Shibata is Professor Emeritus at McGill University and Medical Advisor to the Cedars Cancer Institute, McGill University Health Centre (MUHC).



Maître Brian Sher has been VOBBC's legal counsel since 2001. With Me. Sher's assistance, VOBBC quickly earned its charitable status and has benefitted from his wisdom and guidance throughout the past 10 years. Me. Sher and his wife, Nancy (prior to VOBBC's creation used to do crafts at the hospital with Doreen) have been active in supporting VOBBC since its inception. Me. Sher is a partner of Hanna Glasz & Sher in Montreal.



Gaby Morency was one of the first volunteers asked to assist VOBBC in 2001. With a passion to help VOBBC, Gaby spent a lot of her time planning BBQ's for its picnics and Treasure Hunts throughout the years. Her family also became very involved with the cause. Her husband Ray, son Raymond and daughter Kristin, are often seen at many VOBBC events offering their time and dedication to help make a difference in the lives of cancer patients.



Audrey Dalton was one of the first volunteers in 2001. Her willingness to offer her skills and talents to help VOBBC often involved recruiting her own family, Gary McCrory and daughters Krissy and Austin Lancaster. The passion to help cancer patients was shared by her daughters and their friends, Ashley Silvaggio and Kristin Mathieu, as they initiated a successful fundraiser called "Rock-4-A-Reason", the first event to raise over \$10,000.00 for VOBBC.

VOBBC Gala Committee



Photo: Marc Muri

Back Row: Johanne Bélanger, Cynthia Nadif Kouri, Clare O'Hagan, Chantal Lavendel, Joan Michetti, Michel Cloutier

Front Row: Jennifer Edward, Elyse Desforges, Doreen Edward, Deborah Bridgman, Patricia Bridgman

Missing: Allysyn Gordon, Gaby Morency, Mireille Alvo, Siobhan O'Brien, Susie Legault-Bourcheix, Teresa Izzo

Toutes nos félicitations pour votre 10^e anniversaire !

**Nos meilleurs voeux et sincères remerciements
pour le réconfort que vous apportez
à nos patients**

Congratulations on your 10th Anniversary!

**With our best wishes and
thanks for your support to
our patients**



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