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Lending an ear to Peninsula seniors



Alli Rickson gives back, respecting her elders by offering them time and an ear.

Christine van Reeuyk/News sta
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By [Christine van Reeuyk - Peninsula News Review](#)
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Alli Rickson is mastering the art of listening.

Rickson is a member of the student council at Parkland secondary school. The Grade 11 student was part of the healthy schools committee and environment club during middle school. She's a member of the Interact Club at Parkland.

What set her apart from other nominees, and ultimately earned her the 2011 Hearts of the Community award for service to seniors is her five-plus years of spending Saturdays listening — and calling bingo.

Rickson spends portions of her weekend at Rest Haven Lodge.

"It's like my sport. Most teenagers will play soccer or whatever. This is what I do," Alli said.

"We use so much of the community, of non profit groups ... it's important to make sure to give back," she said. "As a person you should be able to do good for others. You really don't understand the feeling of volunteering until you get out there and do it."

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Myrna Fox, activities coordinator at Rest Haven, sees the value of volunteers — at any age.

“Through the summer, (Alli and her sister Melissa) helped on the bus trips, getting them ready, getting jackets on and loading and unloading the bus, passing out treats, coffee and tea,” Fox said. “As staff we do the necessities, but volunteers allow us to do the extra things.”

Rickson and her younger sister started visiting the senior’s residence after Melissa’s class took a trip there in elementary school.

“My personal favourite thing to do with the residents is to sit down and talk with them — some of them do remember parts of their life — and just seeing them relive those memories,” Alli said.

“We also call bingo every Saturday and Sunday,” she added with a laugh. “It’s kind of fun to help them out and see them win their chocolates.”

“She is so faithful about coming,” Fox said. “For being such a young girl, and dealing with people with dementia, she’s faithful, energetic and she’s matured so much.”

Working in a place where dementia, and death, are around every corner takes a certain type of person.

“A lot of our residents have dementia and it’s different ... These girls are amazingly mature,” Fox said. “They always sit with somebody and listen to them or share stories. It takes quite a lot of skill.”

For Alli the response is immediate, whether vocal, or just a visual cue.

“If you go in there and you watch you get immediate response. If you took a person to the lounge or something. You can see them thank you right away,” she explained.

“For me it connects me to my community. It makes me feel like I have a purpose and that I have a voice as a youth,” Alli added. “It makes me feel I have a purpose. It’s a good self-confidence booster, you’re interacting with people.”

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