

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

### **VWR Thanks the Volunteers of Waterloo Region National Volunteer Week is April 24th to the 30th**

National Volunteer Week is set aside each year to thank volunteers in our communities across Canada. 12.7 million Canadians give their skills, time and passion to formal charities and community organizations, nearly 24 million Canadians volunteer to help family members, friends and neighbours in need of support for everyday activities. Our country and more particularly our region's communities rely on volunteers to keep our cities, towns and rural areas thriving.

In the turmoil of the last few years, volunteers have stepped up to help on so many fronts and we are grateful.

The theme from Volunteer Canada for this year's campaign is that 'Volunteering is Empathy in Action'. "I recently read a quote from a young artist, Morgan Harper Nichols," shares Jane Hennig, the Executive Director of Volunteer Waterloo Region.

"Empathy: Let me hold the door for you. I may have never walked  
In your shoes, but I can see your soles are worn and your strength  
Is torn under the weight of a story I have never lived before. So  
Let me hold the door for you. After all you've walked through it's  
The least I can do."

"I think that this quote sums up the empathy that we experience with volunteers everyday here in our region." Whether volunteering with people who are struggling or helping staff at the many community organizations with programs and services, volunteers are exhibiting empathy in all of their actions.

Following are some great volunteer stories that exemplify the contributions happening across the Region of Waterloo.

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The Gap Factory Staff  
Cambridge Shelter Corporation – The Bridges



The Bridges, an emergency shelter run by Cambridge Shelter Corporation, takes in people from the cold and gives them a place to stay. This can make a huge difference to someone who is struggling, even for just one night. The employees at GAP factory in Cambridge started out with donations and helping to serve and prepare food for the people staying at The Bridges.

After some time, they started to truly come to know what this place means to those who use it. They saw how the individuals that come to this place are strong members of the community, regardless of circumstance. They started to feel empathy towards the people staying there, and the living conditions in The Bridges; The staff there already work so hard just to keep the place running. The volunteers from the GAP factory felt a need to help with repairs, especially when it came to the situation of the bathroom. The volunteers sprang into action, working with their company to both raise funds and provide volunteer hours for these repairs.

The community at the GAP factory in Cambridge are proud of their community outreach programs and volunteers. They have really come together and shown how volunteers are empathetic and back it up with action. “Once they see how much these few hours mean to so many, and how much fun we have volunteering, they are more willing to sign up,” says the team community leader, Michelle Stanley.

Brice Balmer  
Muslim Social Services



Muslim Social Services is an organization that focusses on providing and giving information on social services to the Muslim community. With many of the services provided in the current environment being geared to catholic and Judeo-Christian people; they want to make sure that people of the Muslim faith have equal access and fair treatment in society.

Brice has been a volunteer for many years, using his talents to learn about and fight for justice. He saw, through his many different experiences, how people need to be heard, and that most things that divide us shouldn't make us dislike each other. Within his search for justice in the Interfaith Community, he learned about the struggles of the Muslim community in the region. "It's very different for Muslim people to access healing and services through traditional means," he says, "For them, healing is a very spiritual and religiously integrated process. Most of what we provide, both private and public, don't really account for that." Inspired by this gap in service, Brice took up a board position with MSS. He continues to fight and educate others in what it takes to help serve the Muslim community better.

Having empathy for those who are like us is much easier. However, showing empathy for the struggles unfamiliar to us are just as important. While Brice's actions go above and beyond the call, it is possible for everyone to be able to stand up for and support people who are different from us. Brice's history has given him a depth of perspective that many of us lack, but we could learn so much from. "My father used to say, 'you should welcome and accept everyone,' and I took that to heart," Brice says.

Duaa Al Aghar  
KW Access Ability



KW Access Ability is an organization dedicated to social justice and accessibility for all. They want to make sure that there are no barriers to inclusion for anyone and promote health and well being in physically disabled communities.

Duaa came to Canada in 2006 from Iraq. Being a newcomer, she wanted to get in touch with the community through volunteering. Her technical and computer skills were very much in need. She eventually learned about KW Access Ability and the work they did in their community. She felt a real connection to the social justice aspect; providing a sense of inclusion that did not see barriers. Not only did they make an impact on her, but she also made a big impact on them, and was offered the paid position of Project Manager within just 3 months. She says that for volunteering, “There are a lot of motivators; one of them is to give back to the community because my passion is building communities, social justice and social services.”

Being a newcomer can stir up anxiety, social isolation, and disconnection in your new home. It is important to understand that there are struggles everywhere in the world, and a need for help. If you can show empathy for people in a new place, and turn that into action, you will start to have a feeling of belonging and community. “I love helping people and seeing them happy,” Duaa explains, “This is why I strongly recommend volunteering and encourage all the newcomers to volunteer, because the first step to understanding Canadian culture is to be involved in the community and make connections and build your network.”

## Volunteer Presents:

This is where you'll find a showcase of our outstanding volunteers' skills and talents.



Finding ways for our generous volunteers to continue sharing their time and talent with us during the pandemic has been challenging. We have been forced to rethink our traditional volunteer roles and create positions where volunteers can connect with us from a distance. Our volunteer spotlight focuses on our “Volunteer Presents” Blog found on our website at <https://sunbeamcommunity.ca/volunteer-presents> .

Volunteers showcase their knowledge, talent, skills and abilities through blog submissions for everyone to enjoy on our website. Sunbeam volunteers are incredibly talented in a variety of ways. They share recipes, art, creative writing, crafts, stories about their pets, ideas for places to visit and so much more. Our volunteer bloggers range in age from five years old to senior citizens. We have people sharing things just for fun and students creating blog articles to meet their high school volunteer hour requirement.

We are also lucky to have many students from Wilfrid Laurier University submitting articles as part of their community service-learning placement. Students shared articles about everything from successfully growing house plants to painting tutorials, places to visit, craft instructions and much more. New material is added on a regular basis. Let our volunteers help you beat boredom by visiting our “Volunteer Presents” blog on the Sunbeam website today.

Ed Zurawski  
THEMUSEUM



Ed has been an outstanding volunteer with THEMUSEUM, an experiential museum –a premier cultural destination dedicated to presenting fresh, inspired content from around the globe in unique and immersive ways designed to showcase art & technology at play. Ed joined us as a volunteer for our exhibit Unzipped: Rolling Stones. He came to the organization as a big Rolling Stones fan and enjoys sharing his knowledge about the band with museum visitors. Visitors constantly reach out to let us know about the wonderful experience they've had at the museum thanks to Ed. He perfectly manages the role of being informative while giving guests space to explore. Ed definitely brings the heart to volunteering, we could not be more thankful for his kindness.

Nei Jayson Santos  
Kind Mind Family Wellness

Kind Minds Family Wellness is an organization that is focussed on making sure that Black and other marginalized communities of Waterloo Region are given the best possible access to the services that they need. With their leadership of Black professionals who have been working towards providing this indispensable service to this community, they have been raising these communities for over 15 years. Volunteer Waterloo Region has been instrumental in helping improve their reach within these communities.

Nei Jayson Santos has been a volunteer with the organization for over a year now as a Project and Research Coordinator. He feels the passion and commitment that this organization puts into their community and connects with it on a personal level. He remembers one project where he worked with the LGBTQ+ community in improving the safety for sexually active gay men. This really resonated with him, being a member of the community and understanding that there needs to be guidance and information out there to keep them safe. The project (known as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis or PrEP) helped keep countless members of the gay community safe.

Nei really appreciates the opportunities that volunteering gives him, allowing him to feel more grounded and productive. He feels empathy for the communities he serves and is a part of. He believes that recognizing that everyone has a story will teach people a valuable lesson; what we learn can help guide people towards taking action in causes that are close to them. "I was inspired by [former President Bill Clinton's] challenge to his readers that, no matter where you are from or whatever your background is, anyone can help and volunteer" Nei Says.

