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The Retired Teachers of Ontario Magazine

Fall 2019

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Photographed in the Philippines by
Melissa Baker, Bakephotography, for
Sleeping Children Around the World.

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and has close to 80,000 members.

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Views expressed in *Renaissance* are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of RTO/ERO.

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We asked contributors Ylva Van Buuren, Brian Jamieson and Melissa Baker how they're making a difference.

YLVA VAN BUUREN



"I gave up my car several years ago and now bike or walk around the city to help reduce greenhouse gases. Bonus: It's a great way to stay fit. I've also given up plastic — bags (I carry reusables), plastic wrap (I have a cupboard full of reusable food containers) and single water bottles (I tote my reusable container)."

BRIAN JAMIESON



"Making a difference? To me, it's giving your best self to the moment, writing a clear sentence (or fragment) that informs and entertains, offering parental support and guidance, sharing an idea to promote the Arts, acting responsibly with civility and kindness, and using your talent for the common good."

MELISSA BAKER



"I am a teacher and a professional photographer, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to travel to Africa and the Philippines with Sleeping Children Around the World. Documenting the work of this global charity has been a highlight of my career and my life. It has been incredible to be part of the team and connect with people around the world while making a difference."



Living Memories wants your stories!

We know you have compelling stories to share and we – and RTO/ERO members – want to hear them. Perhaps it's an inspiring story from your days in education. Or an unexpected experience at your high school or university reunion. Maybe it's about the joy of discovering a hidden talent after retirement. Or the challenge of moving from the home you raised your family. You don't have to write it; you just have to tell your unique or unusual story to one of our talented writers. So send us an email at renaissance@rto-ero.org. And we'll be in touch.

Readers letters

Loved the cover!!

Looking forward to my yearly calendar — it is so helpful!!
—Jane Hilton (District 8 London, Middlesex)

Great new content and direction! Congratulations!

—Angela Priede (District 39 Peel)

Thank you for sending a hard copy of Renaissance magazine!

I do appreciate the beautiful, easy-to-read hard-copy magazine! It also feels nice to hold!

—Cathie Boate (District 8 London, Middlesex)

I received the summer issue of Renaissance this week, and as usual, I found it interesting and enjoyable. I am working towards generating less waste, especially non-recyclable plastic. I am hoping you would consider either mailing the magazine without the plastic cover or offering it to members in a digital format. Imagine the power behind 78,000 members to change attitudes and actions to clean up our planet in the climate crisis it is in.

—Val Morse (District 31 Wellington)

Editor's Note

Like you, Val, we take our stewardship of the environment very seriously. We carefully chose the magazine wrap because it is not plastic, but rather a 100 per cent biodegradable, plant-based substance that you can put in your compost bin. The magazine is also printed on responsibly sourced paper. We do everything possible to produce Renaissance magazine using innovative, environmentally sound materials. If you'd like a digital copy of Renaissance, please email membership@rto-ero.org.



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Making a difference

We're committed to lobbying for change.

by **Martha Foster**



Martha Foster, Chair of the Board, and Hon. Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, at the 2018 Vibrant Voices event in Toronto.

The theme of this issue of *Renaissance* resonated with me.

We make a difference in the lives of our members in so many ways — our insurance plan, *Renaissance* magazine, the *Chair's Newsletter*, social media and all the activity in RTO/ERO districts.

Not quite as visible: our political advocacy. Over the past few years, we've increased our advocacy activity and have become recognized as an organization committed to lobbying on behalf of Canadian seniors.

Our Political Advocacy Committee is instrumental in ensuring we tackle the issues of most concern to our members. This group of seven politically astute RTO/ERO members, one of whom serves as a chair, does so much of the legwork for the Board.

We have been especially active in Ontario, where the majority of our members live. For the last two years, we have lobbied at Queen's Park on National Seniors Day and International Day of Older Persons, both of which are recognized on October 1. At these events, we met with MPPs and presented issues of concern to seniors. At our last Queen's Park day, we focused on the issues of Elder Abuse, Geriatric Training and Age-Friendly Communities. The Minister for Seniors and Accessibility made a presentation, as did a representative from each of the other parties. To find out more, visit rto-ero.org and search for Vibrant Voices.

In preparation for the fall federal election, we partnered with the Canadian Association of Retired Teachers and

National Association of Federal Retirees to host a conference attended by organizations representing seniors across Canada. Collectively, we established three topics we would support going into the federal election: a National Seniors Strategy, Secure Retirement Income and Pharmacare. For details, visit vibrantvoices.ca.

We spent a day on Parliament Hill addressing these issues with MPs and look forward to engaging with candidates as we approach the election.

We never stop. We continue to advocate on your behalf and are currently preparing our agenda for National Seniors Day and International Day of Older Persons this fall. Stay tuned to the *Chair's Newsletter* for further updates. ■

The power of giving

Celebrating the drive to make a difference.

by **Danielle Norris**



I am in awe of the selflessness of our members and the lengths to which they go to help change the world, at home and abroad.

This issue of *Renaissance* celebrates that drive to make a difference, in ways big and small, and we hope the stories will inspire you. They certainly inspired me.

Thinking about becoming an eco-advocate? Ylva Van Buuren shares what some members are doing to combat climate change and clean up their communities (page 40). In our feature on social activism (page 30), Stuart Foxman explores how members turned their passions into action. In this article, he unpacks an overseas project by District 3 Algoma to show how they helped over 3,000 young girls in 14 different countries.

If you're interested in volunteering, but don't know where to start, Alison LaMantia invites you to consider eight tangible ways to find the right fit and then introduces you to four members who talk about the paths they took to make an impact (page 23).

Sometimes, we forget that we need to advocate for ourselves, too. Stefanie Martin reminds us that self-care is not about being selfish (page 14). It's about recognizing how important we are and acknowledging our own self-worth. And she offers tips on how to do just that.

It is impossible, of course, for this issue to capture all the ways our members are making a difference every day. And stories keep arriving in my in-basket. While I was writing this letter, I received an email from **Linda Willis (District 9 Huron-Perth)** who told me she has raised \$1 million over the past nine years to help children in Malawi, Africa.

If one of the articles in this issue inspires you to take action or make a difference, please let me know. I'd love to hear from you. ■

Take care,
Danielle

renaissance@rto-ero.org

Building a quality organization

RTO/ERO members give back in many ways.

by **Jim Grieve**

RTO/ERO members are extraordinarily active at giving back.

In fact, over 70 per cent of our members volunteer in their communities and within our organization.

We have always believed in helping to secure better futures for children, for each other and for RTO/ERO.

Our careers in the education community have helped us to be present and authentic in our interactions.

Students, whether in our early-years centres, schools or post-secondary settings, are experts in determining when we're truly listening and understanding. And they're even more adept at recognizing when we're distracted and not really engaged.

My work in education was impacted by my commitment to remain connected with children and staff as a means of improving the learning environment. As a principal, I made a point of visiting every classroom, every day. I wanted to understand the nature of the interactions within the school and to be available to staff and students.

The same was true in my role as Director of Education. I spent one day every week in classrooms. The realities of the classroom and the experiences of the students and staff were vitally important messages to bring back to the school board trustees. In a direct way, I felt that my weekly visits allowed me to "give back" to the elected board and staff by presenting grassroots experiences and improving the health of our system.

The lessons we learned about human engagement from children transfer to our interactions with each other. With close to 80,000 interested and engaged RTO/ERO members, it's essential that Board members, staff and District leaders create opportunities to be present with members and to gather and "give back" improvements that serve all members.

RTO/ERO creates many opportunities to seek member input and learn about requests for service improvements. There are regular membership surveys,

workshops and monthly connections between members of the Board and the District Executive. Recently, when we considered major recent proposals, such as our governance structure and changes to the membership fee, Board members made presentations in each of their liaison Districts. The feedback

from these sessions assisted staff and the Board to customize and improve each initiative.

It is such a pleasure to work at RTO/ERO with education-community members who constantly provide input and give back to improve the quality of our organization. ■

"My work in education was impacted by my commitment to remain connected with children and staff as a means of improving the learning environment."

—
Jim Grieve



Chair of the Board Martha Foster and CEO Jim Grieve gathering input from RTO/ERO members from the newly formed District 50 Atlantic.

Social connectedness gets personal

Survey says one size doesn't fit all.

by **Brian Jamieson**



As important as social connections may be for longevity, it isn't as easy as you may think to bring people together.

Or so an RTO/ERO Foundation-funded research project in London, Ont., suggests.

Working on a Foundation grant of \$24,900 — supported by RTO/ERO member donations — researchers and facilitators from Western University and Neighbourhood Watch London co-directed a project with seniors living in a four-storey, 45-unit, south-end-of-town apartment building to increase social connectedness and a sense of community.

They learned that not everyone defines isolation in the same way and that social connectedness means different things to different people.

"The Foundation was wonderful in what they were willing to fund," says project co-lead Carri Hand, an assistant professor in Western's School of Occupational Therapy. "It takes time to

touch base with people to figure out what to do. The Foundation's requirements for what we could include in the budget were very reasonable and they showed great interest in the project."

The seniors, too, were tickled by the prospect of working with Western and co-leading the initiative, which lasted from September 2017 to December 2018.

"They were excited having us come in to support them with more engagement and connectedness," says Michele Sands, the former Executive Director at Neighbourhood Watch London. "It brought out some of their memories from their own academic journeys."

Because it was participatory action research, the residents co-designed questionnaires, helped conduct meetings, and planned and took the lead on various initiatives. A mix of 30 people — aged 50 and up, some still working, some long retired, some professionals, some speaking different languages — took part. Residents

were free to come and go. Some didn't engage at all. Hand still doesn't know why.

"People had relationships beforehand and their behaviours were coloured by what had gone on before."

Monthly gatherings were critical. "The focus was on having them identify what they wanted," says Sands. "They still wanted support from us, but some could see that they could be resources themselves."

"We tried to have some formality around the meetings, which gave us a platform to pull out dissension and put it in its place, so others could feel comfortable adding something."

Participants had definite ideas about how they wanted to connect. Some favoured potluck gatherings for the entire building. Others preferred small group activities. Some were open to ideas, others weren't.

"One of the questions I had before the project was, 'Do seniors become isolated or are they already isolated going in and maybe find themselves in circumstances

where it's easier to be isolated?" says Sands. "Do they know what they're missing if they're not introduced to something else?"

"Part of being socially connected is knowing you don't always have to be. If you're okay on your own, it's good to know the group is there if you want to join."

Collectively, they discussed how to find out more about what people in the building wanted to see and how to become more socially active with their neighbours.

One woman played piano and found lyric books — purchased with undesignated grant money — so she could host singalongs. She even had a piano delivered to the building.

While interest and membership wavered, everyone had ideas. Creating a residents' council, for one. Trying to arrange a community bus to serve the area and bringing people together via music and exercise classes were other ideas.

The council and exercise classes never got off the ground, but the residents saw to the removal of planter boxes at the

back of the property. Coffee get-togethers and potlucks continue. By project's end, 42 per cent said they were interested in doing more social activities in the building, and residents were still working with the city to secure a community bus.

Asked at the end, "Have you noticed any changes, positive or negative, since we've been here?" one participant said: "We sit outside, and we talk in the summer on the patio, and we get together in the craft room, and when we see each other in the lobby or in

the hallway, we talk. You know, we communicate." Another answered: "More people enjoy the outside ... different people, you know. You see different groups meeting and talking, which is nice."

For Hand, the highlight of the research was "the need to approach the issue of social isolation in older people with the lens that they're individuals. Some people prefer activity-based groups. Some people value an informal place to chat. One size isn't going to fit all." ■

The Retired Teachers of Ontario Foundation (RTO/ERO Foundation) aims to enhance the quality of life for aging adults through the funding of aging research, training in geriatrics and gerontology and community-based programs to address social isolation in older adults. The Foundation was established in 2011 with the support of its founding benefactor, the Retired Teachers of Ontario, and is inspired by the philanthropic spirit of retired teachers and other members of the education community.

Thank you to the many RTO/ERO members who made this project possible through their voluntary donations to the Foundation.

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Caregivers are on the frontlines

Supporting informal caregivers is one of our greatest health care challenges.

by **Alison LaMantia**

When we talk about aging, we don't always talk about the people in caregiving roles — the friends, children or spouses of the people needing care. But we should.

According to Dr. Nathan Stall, a geriatrician and PhD. candidate working with Dr. Paula Rochon, the RTO/ERO Chair in Geriatric Medicine, supporting informal caregivers is one of the most significant health care challenges of our generation.

“The reality is most older adults want to stay in their home — 95 per cent of them,” explains Dr. Stall. “And there’s a huge shortage of long-term care beds, which is the place where they least want to go. So really, it falls on family and friends to help these individuals, not only to stay in the community but also in times of crisis.”

The intersection of medicine, health policy and society is where Dr. Stall has focused his PhD. work with Dr. Rochon. He’s conducting breakthrough research by linking and analyzing large Ontario-wide datasets of patients with dementia and their caregivers.

His work is proving what he and other health care professionals notice in their practices: caregivers are experiencing significant health, social, career and economic consequences related to their caregiving role.

He’s also uncovering a link between caregiver stress and patient outcomes.

“We know that 40 per cent of caregivers in these roles experience



three ways you can take action on this issue



“It’s important with something like this to not just recognize it as an issue, but to have proper data to show where gaps are so we can invest our resources to help caregivers.”

Dr. Nathan Stall

stress. We also know when the caregiver is distressed, the person with dementia does worse,” says Dr. Stall.

Dr. Stall believes the research will help influence change. “It’s important with something like this to not just recognize it as an issue, but to have proper data to show where gaps are so we can invest our resources to help caregivers. There’s a huge problem, and it’s complex. That’s why proper evaluation and proper data will guide policymakers.”

We are starting to see movement in this area, according to Dr. Stall. Organizations like the RTO/ERO Foundation are helping to fund critical research and increase awareness of the need.

We’ve seen an increase in caregiver advocacy as well as community programs designed to support caregivers. There’s

also public policy work happening, including efforts to create flexible workplaces with caregiver leave, similar to parental leave. Tax credits are in place, though he’s concerned the program isn’t helping as many people as it could because of the structure and complexity.

According to Dr. Stall, we need more coordination. “We know caregiving will affect every Canadian at some point in their lives to differing extents. Despite everyone being affected, there are huge gaps in this area.”

It’s those gaps Dr. Stall aims to help fill by presenting policymakers, health care practitioners and other stakeholders with the research they need to address this significant and complex societal challenge. ■

ABOUT THE RTO/ERO CHAIR IN GERIATRIC MEDICINE

In 2014, the RTO/ERO Foundation endowed a Chair in Geriatric Medicine at University of Toronto. Appointed as the chair, Dr. Paula Rochon trains students in geriatric medicine and research. Her team conducts research and is taking the lead to make sure evidence-based approaches make their way to community organizations and front-line health care providers.

Since 2014, Dr. Rochon has trained numerous students in geriatric research and medicine. Her group continues to make contributions to the research community and is taking the lead on knowledge translation to make sure evidence-based approaches make their way to community organizations and frontline health care providers.

- Learn more about Dr. Rochon and her research group at womensresearch.ca/researchers/core-faculty/paula-rochon.
- Learn more about the RTO/ERO Foundation at embrace-aging.ca.

1

Share information. Talk about this issue with friends and family. Share this article or other materials you come across. It’s important to emphasize that this isn’t just something that impacts aging Canadians. It’s a national societal issue that will affect all of us.

2

Support the RTO/ERO Foundation or another organization that is working on this issue. The RTO/ERO Foundation funds aging-related research, the training of health and social care professionals in geriatric care, and collaborative community programs to address social isolation, the top emerging issue for aging Canadians.

3

Share your experience. If you’re a caregiver, it’s important to advocate for your own needs and recognize your important role in our system. You can speak with your health care provider about the challenges you’re facing. Watch for opportunities to participate in research studies or to share your story to support advocacy work. Your voice is important.

Become your own advocate

Focusing on your own well-being is important too.

by **Stefanie Martin**

We know what advocate means, right? To support, defend or promote a cause, initiative or person.

But when was the last time you advocated on behalf of yourself?

Practising self-care is a great way to advocate for yourself. Simply put, self-care means identifying your own needs — mental, physical and emotional — and taking the time to address them.

How you practise self-care is personal; it's an ongoing exploration of who you are and what you need.

Self-care is not about being selfish. And it's not about doing things you don't enjoy. It is about recognizing how important you are and acknowledging your own self-worth.

Jo Bennett, (solomojo.ca), a life coach credentialed by the International

Coach Federation, defines self-care as consciously taking care of your well-being, and she defines well-being as our resource to meeting mental, emotional and physical challenges.

"You need to take care of those resources to help balance life," says Bennett. "We are like power plants. We bring our energy to the world and make an impact on the world. We can't do that if we are underpowered."

People often say they are too busy taking care of others to take care of themselves. But if you don't make yourself a priority, you won't have the stamina — physical, mental or emotional — to take care of those others.

Sure, life has its ups and downs, but when we are mindful of maintaining our well-being — our resources — we are better able to navigate the ebb and flow and better equipped to handle the larger unexpected events that inevitably cross our paths.

According to Bennett, we want to make sure we are regularly replenishing our resources so they're full when we need them most. "Ideally," she says, "self-care is a preventative approach of consciously taking care of our well-being."

Bennett reminds us that self-care starts with asking the right questions.

"We know what we need for self-care if we've done the homework first," explains Bennett. "Ask yourself: what do I need to let go of? What is draining my energy? What do I need to say yes to? What is giving me energy?"

Your answers to these questions will help you figure out what you need and what you want.

It's important that the things you choose are things you enjoy. Start a list of activities that make you feel good and add to it every time you have an aha moment — "Hey, I really enjoy this" or "This gives me energy."

Pay attention to yourself and your body. It will tell you what it needs.

Taking small regular steps towards maintaining your well-being can help you connect to yourself, build your confidence and make self-care second nature.



How to get started?

Bennett recommends taking quiet time to be by yourself. Lie on a couch, sit and look out a window, journal, do whatever activity feels most appealing. Tune in to what your heart, gut and body are telling you. Give yourself enough time to reflect.

If this type of mindfulness doesn't appeal to you, Bennett suggests you have a conscious conversation with someone who knows you well. "Ask them what things they notice about you," Bennett says. "Ask them how they would deal with a scenario or an emotion. They may help bring you to conclusions that you needed an extra nudge to get to. We want to pull these answers out of ourselves so we can deal with the issues and move on."

Here's our list of self-care ideas to get you started, but remember, it's all about you!



Self-care for the mind

- Read a book
- Avoid watching or reading the news
- Take a break from social media
- Listen to calming music
- Try an adult colouring book
- Start a gratitude journal



Self-care for the body

- Take a nap or sleep in
- Go for a walk
- Take a relaxing bath or hot shower
- Go outside and enjoy the sun
- Work out (choose the exercises you enjoy)
- Enjoy fragrance therapy (scented candles, essential oils)



Self-care for the soul

- Spend time with a loved one, dear friend or furry friend
- Unplug from technology
- Ask for help or help someone else
- Listen to your favourite song on repeat or watch your favourite movie
- Try meditation or simple breathing exercises
- Treat yourself to something (a fancy latte, a meal, flowers)

Self-care spotlight

We spoke to three members about their self-care practices: Patti Cole (District 16 City of Toronto), Penny Bowman (District 4 Sudbury, Manitoulin) and Mel Isherwood (District 46 Muskoka). Here's what they had to share.

Why is self-care important to you?

Patti: I do it because I like to feel good. Little things can make a big difference. Sometimes five minutes is enough — give yourself five minutes!

Penny: I am a cancer survivor and see life quite a bit differently since that happened. I want to enjoy my life and believe self-care is a part of what saved me.

Mel: Self-care is a natural part of life. We need to do that to be healthy and present and as vibrant as we can be. So much gets lost in the demands of life and in our culture that is so focused on achieving and acquiring.

What helps you keep on top of your self-care efforts?

Patti: I've kept a gratitude journal for the past four-and-a-half years. I also journal every day. I write down what I want to do, and if I don't have time to do it, I move it to the next day.

Penny: Self-care has become part of my daily routine. By the end of each day I will have done something for mental health, something for physical health and something for emotional health.

Mel: I go by how I feel. Every day I do something for my self-care. I try to make it as natural a part of life as breathing.

What suggestions would you give to someone who wants to be more mindful of their self-care?

Patti: You have to start with your soul. Start by being kind to yourself and showing self-respect. Sometimes we forget that we are our own best friend. Listen to your intuition.

Penny: You have to find your own motivation for self-care and be open-minded. At one point in my life I never thought I would be a person who meditates. I now meditate five times a week. The key to self-care is knowing yourself and having that self-awareness on a daily basis.

Mel: Go within as much as possible and ask yourself, "What could I do to enhance myself?" If you need motivation, chat with people you trust or admire and ask what they do for their self-care. Just keep trying. If you try one thing that doesn't work, don't give up. Just try something else. ■

Food for thought

Taking care of yourself from the inside out.

by **Anya Rampersad**
Certified Nutritional Practitioner



Regardless of how often you include vibrantly coloured vegetables in your diet (and how many times you say no to that second Timbit!), how much you benefit from all that healthy eating depends on proper digestion.

So if you're eating a healthy diet but aren't seeing benefits to your skin, existing health conditions or energy levels, the issue might be poor digestion.

The older we get, the more challenging digestion becomes because many of its key processes become compromised.

The production of stomach acid (hydrochloric acid or HCl), a main component of the digestive process, becomes significantly reduced as we age, which makes it difficult to digest protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals. In fact, symptoms associated with low stomach acid, such as constipation, burping, upset stomach, bloating and heartburn are mistaken for symptoms of high stomach acid. And things get more complicated when prescription medications are used to reduce the levels of acidity, when the root cause of the digestive distress lies in acid levels being too low.

Antibiotics can cause problems. They wipe out not only the harmful bacteria but also the beneficial bacterial colonies that help with digestion as well as the absorption — and in some cases the creation — of minerals and vitamins.

A dietician, nutritionist or naturopath (all covered through the RTO/ERO Extended Health Care Plan) can help you create a strategy for optimal digestive health. ■

And here are some simple things you can do at home:



- Start your day with a glass of freshly squeezed lemon juice and water or a diluted shot of apple cider vinegar. This extra acidity kick-starts the digestive process as you enjoy your breakfast.



- Cut out processed foods where you can. They disrupt the digestive process and affect the absorptive lining of your intestines.



- Keep your consumption of alcohol, caffeine and gluten in check. They're known gastric irritants and can affect the way your body absorbs nutrients.



- Include both naturally probiotic and prebiotic foods. Foods like kimchi, sauerkraut, pickles, cultured yogurts and kefir act to "inoculate" your gut with beneficial bacteria, which help your digestive processes and absorption of vitamins and minerals. To help make your gut a hospitable place for them, include the prebiotic foods that probiotics like to munch on, such as asparagus, onion, garlic and bananas.



- Ramp up your intake of whole foods and fibre. Both add bulk to your stool and keep things moving.



- Consider taking a digestive enzyme with your meals. Digestive enzymes supplement your body's digestive processes as you eat. If you have low stomach acid, or are experiencing digestive issues, giving your body a helping hand may be all you need to do. Visit a local health foods store to see what options are right for you.

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Lending a hand is good for your health

How volunteering can help others and yourself.

by **Pauline Anderson**

Volunteering reduces loneliness

Volunteering two hours a week may be all it takes to ease feelings of loneliness for recently widowed older adults.

At least that was the conclusion of a study, led by Dawn C. Carr, Department of Sociology and the Pepper Center on Aging and Public Health, Florida State University, Tallahassee and published in the *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*.

The researchers used a sample of 5,882 married adults aged 51 years and older, drawn from 2006–2014 surveys of the Health and Retirement Study. They looked at the relationship between loneliness and becoming widowed relative to staying married, and whether volunteering moderates the loneliness of losing a spouse.

Not surprising: the study found that loneliness is significantly more common among those who became widowed than among those who stayed married.

However, volunteering lessened the loneliness. Widowed subjects who began volunteering an average of two or more hours a week had levels of loneliness similar to those of married individuals volunteering at the same intensity.

Importantly, volunteering for less time was not associated with reduced loneliness among the widowed.

So the key to getting the benefit is contributing at least two hours a week to unpaid work. It may not be enough just to help out at a soup kitchen a few times a year.

The study authors surmise that socializing with others could help explain the reduced loneliness. Also,

engaging in work that has a social purpose bolsters self-esteem and sense of purpose in life, which helps people deal with their grief and loss.

The authors acknowledged that the moderation effect of starting to volunteer may have been due to widows choosing to volunteer to off-set feelings of loneliness rather than the act of volunteering contributing to decreased loneliness.

And while the study focused on starting a new volunteer role, it's possible that some subjects who engaged in volunteering earlier on stopped because of caregiving responsibilities and then returned to it after being widowed.

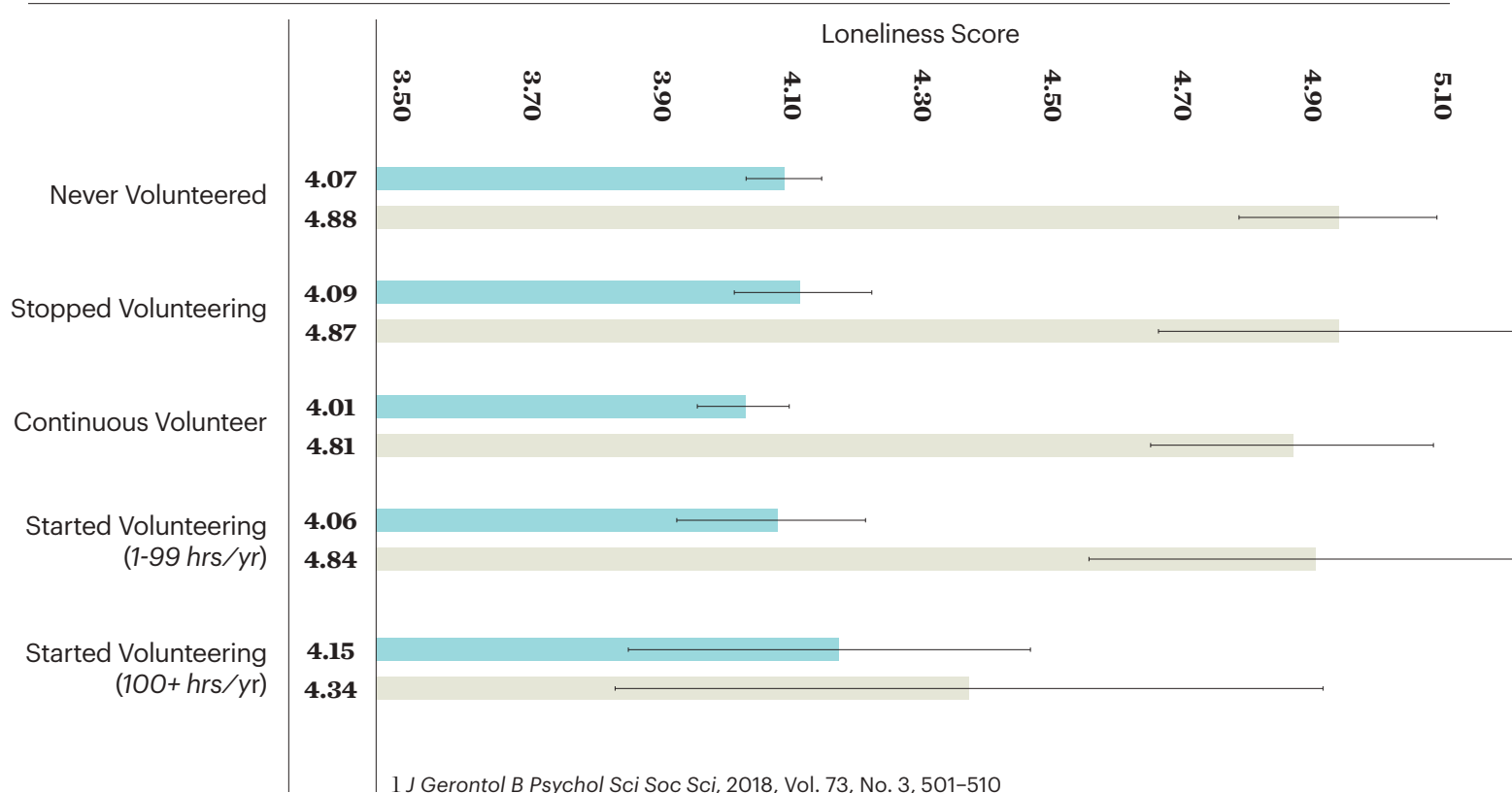
The bottom line, though, is that the research provides encouraging support for the potential of volunteering to alleviate loneliness among those who have lost a life partner.



PHOTO: HEDGEHOG94

PREDICTED LONELINESS SCORE BY VOLUNTEER GROUP AND MARITAL STATUS¹

● Continuously Married ● Became Widowed



Giving to others keeps your brain healthy

Mounting evidence suggests that volunteering in later life can reduce the risk of dementia.

One of the newest studies, led by Yannick Griep, Department of Psychology, University of Calgary, was published in the journal *PLOS One*.

Griep and his colleagues used data from the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health. Their study included 1,001 older adults who completed questionnaires.

Investigators divided participants into those who did no volunteer work, those who volunteered throughout the study period (2010–2014), and those who volunteered but not continuously during that time.

Investigators collected information on self-reported cognitive complaints (difficulty making decisions, remembering and thinking clearly). From data on dispensed anti-dementia medications (including acetylcholinesterase inhibitors and memantine), they determined the likelihood that study subjects were prescribed these medications.

The study found that retired seniors who volunteered continuously reported significantly fewer cognitive complaints compared to those who did not volunteer or volunteered sporadically.

As well, compared to seniors who didn't volunteer continuously, those who did were more than two times less likely to be prescribed an anti-dementia treatment.

It's important to note that the study may not represent all seniors. The sample was relatively young (mean age of 67 years at study onset). As well, most respondents did not report severe cognitive complaints, relatively few were prescribed an anti-dementia treatment and those who were prescribed such a drug had mild or moderate dementia.

Other research suggests that volunteer work might protect against cognitive decline by incorporating not only mental activity but also social and physical contact.

Meeting new people and engaging in activities can boost the “feel-good” brain chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine. This can reduce stress, anxiety and depression and improve well-being. ■

The Relationship Between Catching the Flu and Losing Your Independence



It's all too easy to put off getting the flu shot and to think that you won't get the flu, or that if you do, it won't be that bad. But every year, an average of 12,000 Canadians are hospitalized because of influenza complications, and about 3,500 die as a result. These hospitalizations and deaths occur disproportionately in older adults and others at high risk, like those with medical conditions like heart diseases, diabetes and lung conditions. Because older adults are also more likely to have one or more medical conditions, they are at increased risk of influenza complications. Looking at data spanning the 2010-15 flu seasons in Ontario, in those adults 65 years and older who were hospitalized for the flu, over 65% had an underlying condition.

A single hospitalization can have a devastating impact on an older adult's ability to fully recover. Functional declines such as loss of muscle strength and loss of independence can occur very quickly

during a hospital stay. Prolonged hospital stays can lead to a "cascade of dependency" where immobility leads to poor outcomes, including significant loss of ability to carry out activities of daily living. In some cases, this requires older adults to move to a long-term care home.

But surviving the flu doesn't mean patients will go home unscathed. Studies have found that as many as one-third of older adults leave hospitals with a reduced ability to

carry out their activities of daily living such as eating and dressing. Why choose to go through this traumatic event when you can better protect yourself with the flu shot? Maintain your independence and maximize your quality of life. Getting the flu shot is the best option for preventing the flu.

Vaccination does not protect 100% of individuals and does not reduce the risk of complications such as hospitalization once a person gets influenza.

Every year, an average of 12,000 Canadians are hospitalized because of influenza complications, and about 3,500 die as a result.

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8

ways to make a difference

Helping out can be a game-changing experience.

by **Alison LaMantia**

You've heard it before — giving is good for us. And there are some obvious ways to give back. Sometimes though, we just fall into opportunities. We might respond to an urgent need, stumble upon a chance to help that's right in front of us, or evolve into giving through a hobby or group we join. And sometimes our giving doesn't feel like giving — it's just fun.

Whether we go searching for opportunities to make a difference or one lands in our lap, helping out can have life-altering impacts for the people we help and for us too.

1



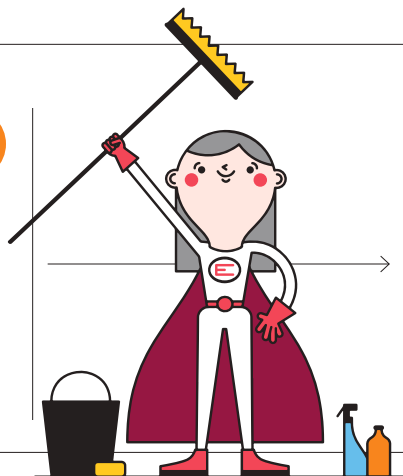
answer an urgent call to action

Natural disasters, civil unrest or festering issues can cause immediate needs. We have the opportunity to answer these calls to action and do what we can to help. As the Syrian refugee crisis unfolded, many Canadians stepped up to assist. One group of RTO/ERO members from District 21 Renfrew responded by teaming up to teach English to the Syrian newcomers who settled in their community.

↓
Ottawa, May 12, 2019: 2,196 dwellings were flooded or at risk of flooding. And at the same time in Gatineau, 3,800 homes and cottages were affected.



2



help save the planet

If you're concerned about the environment, why not channel that unease into green volunteering? Our world could use another eco-warrior to join the fight to halt and reverse the climate crisis.



look for opportunities at your doorstep



You don't need to find a formal volunteer position to make a difference in your community. Look for opportunities to help in your building or neighbourhood. You could visit with neighbours who live alone or help out when you learn someone has a project they want to complete. That's how **Catherine Marray (District 37 Oxford)** ended up painting her neighbour's porch. The two are friends, and Marray recognized the chance to show kindness and have fun at the same time.

brush strokes and jokes

— projects are better with friends



Starting a home improvement project such as porch painting can feel overwhelming. That is, unless you have a little help from a friend.

Catherine Marray (District 37 Oxford) knew her next-door neighbour and friend was interested in redoing her front porch, so she volunteered to help. They drove around the neighbourhood looking at different ideas. The team decided on a cream and red combination, selected the paints and got to work.

"We had quite the chuckle priming the porch because we decided to tint the base primer and it came out bright pink," says Marray. "This led to more chuckling as we worked to cover the pink with the finishing coats. We had such fun. We felt a sense of community working together."

Marray says neighbours came by to chat during the project, which contributed to the feeling of community. And her friend said more than once how happy she was to be doing the project together. Marray agreed — she says giving back to others is very good for the soul.

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU

Here are three factors to consider as you decide whether a volunteer opportunity is right for you:

CAUSE

Be sure to look for a cause that interests you. This will help you stay committed to the activity.

CONVENIENCE

Make sure the schedule and location of the volunteer opportunity will work for you. If getting to a specific place is a challenge, consider looking for volunteer roles you can take on at home.

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

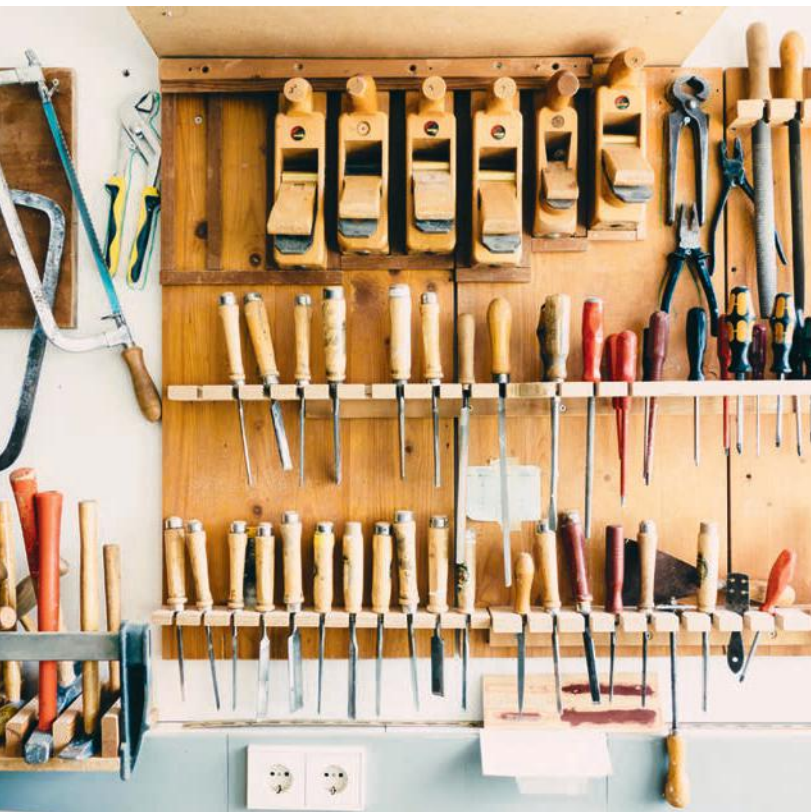
Think about the skills you have that might benefit an organization and the types of activities you enjoy doing. Do you like attending committee meetings, or would you prefer to help at a busy event or work directly with the people who are receiving support?

FIND OR SHARE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

RTO/ERO shares job and volunteer opportunities on its website. Browse or post opportunities here:

rto-ero.org/programs-services/job-and-volunteer-opportunities

Stuck on what to do? Volunteer Canada has an online quiz to help you figure out what type of volunteering you may enjoy. Find it at **volunteer.ca/english/index.html**.



use your hobby to help out

You might have a skill that could provide value to others. For example, many people knit hats for newborns in hospital. Some photographers offer free headshots for people re-entering the workforce. Or, if you enjoy woodworking, like **Karen Fleming (District 7 Windsor-Essex)**, you could use your gifts to help people build a better future for themselves.



KAREN FLEMING
District 7 Windsor-Essex

from woodworking hobbyist to builder of hope

We've all heard the advice that we need to retire do something. That's the wisdom that led **Karen Fleming (District 7 Windsor-Essex)** to take woodworking courses at St. Clair College as she neared retirement.

The focus felt right. Fleming liked working with her hands, had helped her father with construction projects growing up and fixed things around her home. Woodworking could become an enjoyable

hobby, she thought, after a busy career as a high school principal and coach. Fleming had no idea it would evolve into a calling — and trigger what she calls a new segment of life.

After taking the courses, Fleming was quick to put her new skills to use. She purchased property in northern Ontario with friends. They cleared some land and began building structures.

Then, her cousin, who is a nun in the United States, invited her to join a crew of nuns who were gathering in New Orleans to help homeowners repair their homes after Hurricane Katrina.

"My cousin knew that I liked to do that kind of work, so she talked me into going with her," says Fleming. She admits she needed the push to go but was hooked once she did.

"I enjoyed it so much that I went back four more times," she says. "It's such a heartwarming experience to be able to help people to get back in their homes."

She was happy to assist with whatever needed to get done. "I said, 'I'm here to help. Whatever you want me to do — that's what I'm doing.'"

That's the same attitude Fleming packed when she travelled to Malawi in 2012 to help construct a school. She enjoyed it so much that she returned a year later to help build 60 desks for students. And she decided to sponsor two children who lived in the village she had visited. She was back again this summer — at the age of 70 — to help build another school.

Fleming pays her way for her trips and even helps fundraise to cover the cost of building materials for the projects.

"Going and doing things like this makes you realize how much we have and how much other people don't have," she says. "There's a large majority of people out there who need our help. So, giving in whatever way, whether it's your time or donation, to me is more important now."

Fleming's advice to others is to step outside your comfort zone and try something new. You never know where it will lead. "It humbles you to no end," says Fleming. "Everybody has something inside them. They need to do something to bring it out."



find needs within a niche



There are conventions, communities and associations for just about every cause, interest or activity. If you're passionate about a topic, link up with others who are care about the same issue and use your passion to support the community. That's what **Joan Caesar (District 11 Waterloo)** has done with her love of magic. She founded the Canadian Association of Magicians. And she supports the international magic community by judging and volunteering at events.



ILLUSTRATION, TWILIGHTMOON; PHOTO, RYAN JOYCE



JOAN CAESAR
District 11 Waterloo

finding meaning in magic is no illusion

In 2021, about 3,000 magicians from all over the world will converge on Quebec City, and **Joan Caesar (District 11 Waterloo)** will be among them.

They'll be attending the World Championships of Magic, an international competition that's coming to Canada for the first time in its history. For Caesar and other Canadian magicians, it's a big deal. Caesar is already on board as the stage manager for the close-up contest, a volunteer position.

Caesar is well known on the Canadian and international magic scenes, and it's not only for her tricks. She's responsible for the creation of the Canadian Association of Magicians, an organization she founded in 1997 so Canadian magicians could compete under the Canadian flag at international competitions.

"I wanted Canada to be recognized on the world stage for magicians, and for magicians to look east and west at each other, rather than south to the United States," Caesar explains. It's safe to say she accomplished the goal. The organization is now 300 members strong.

Caesar's contribution to the magic community increased after she retired in 2008. She served as president of The International Brotherhood of Magicians. And she continues to travel all over the world as a judge for magic competitions and to help at conventions.

Her love for magic started when her son Ben was four. He showed an interest, and his principal, Dave Chalmers, suggested he join the magic club at their local YMCA.

Caesar attended too and began learning tricks. It wasn't long before she was helping the instructor as an assistant for a large magic show.

Both she and Ben continued learning tricks and eventually started performing. "I might be the only mother in the world who wanted her son to become a magician," says Caesar.

And while she still performs, it's Caesar's volunteer work assisting, organizing and leading where her real magic happens. She's passionate about empowering people, supporting the community and building connections. You'll find her at most of the big magic conventions.

"It's not the magic, because I've seen it all; it's seeing friends — that's the best part."

Caesar says she likes magic for the sense of wonder and awe and the escape from reality. In a way, it's helping people, just as she did during her career as both a social worker and an educational assistant. But Caesar doesn't see it like that. For her, it's just fun.

6

make volunteering part of your travel plans



It's hard to deny the power of travel to help open our minds and hearts to cultures and living situations that are different from our own. Why not pair your next trip with giving back? Projects Abroad (projects-abroad.ca) offers volunteer trips, including options geared to people who are over 50.

↓
Check out page 34 for stories about how members paired their travels with making a difference.

English lessons lead to friendships and blessings

Like many communities across Canada, the town of Renfrew, Ont., welcomed refugees from Syria. The sponsorship group had almost everything in place for their arrival but faced a critical challenge. There wasn't an adult ESL (English as a second language) program in the community.

The requirement for a funded program is eight students. They only had four. The group had two choices: get the adults to classes in another community or teach them English themselves.

Nine retired teachers were part of the sponsor group, so they got to work. The task was significant. "I don't think we realized what we were getting ourselves into, but because it was so rewarding, people just moved forward and were quite happy to do it," says **Caroline Sulpher (District 21 Renfrew)**, one of the teachers who answered the call to action.

Over 18 months, the teachers offered classes five days a week. They based their teaching on the English language benchmarks provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. They met with the coordinator from their Local Immigration Partnership who provided resource suggestions but they were responsible for preparing their students for successful integration into Canadian life.

"We designed units reflecting what was happening in the community," explains Sulpher. "If the Renfrew Fair was coming up, we did a unit about that. The families wanted to plant a vegetable garden, so we did a unit on planting a garden. The important thing was to use the language they needed in their daily lives."

The teachers broke into two groups and alternated months, which allowed them to have breaks. They did research and drew on their experience teaching primary grades and special education to develop learning plans and a team-teaching approach.

While the group only had to provide support for one year, they decided that they didn't want to end their course. "Our students were very motivated," says Sulpher, "and we just wanted to help them achieve their dreams."

All the students enrolled in the adult high school program in town. One student went on to study hairdressing in Ottawa and two studied to get their Canadian citizenships.

And while the formal classes have ended, the relationships haven't. They're friends and visit, talk and text regularly.

"The lessons made us appreciate what we have in Canada and how much we take for granted," says Sulpher. "It resulted in blessings for everyone involved."



Front Row: students Ammar Hriz and Walaa Aldakheel
Back Row, left to right: teacher Nancy Bailey, student Ghosoun Alstah, Teachers Caroline Sulpher, Gail Denault, Liz Cox and student Wiaam Aldakhil.



support one cause from different angles

If you're passionate about an issue, consider maximizing your impact by supporting the cause in different ways. For example, if healthy aging is a priority for you, you could volunteer to help with programming at a long-term care home, look for neighbours who may welcome social connection, add your voice to advocacy efforts, and support groups such as the RTO/ERO Foundation that are raising funds for aging research.



BE A GOODWILL VOLUNTEER

The RTO/ERO Goodwill Volunteer is a compassionate and caring person who wants to improve the lives of RTO/ERO members and seniors. By reaching out to members, volunteers not only express condolences, comfort to those in need, or send messages of celebration and recognition, a Goodwill Volunteer makes a difference. To find out more, email Pauline Duquette-Newman at pduquette-newman@rto-ero.org.



become a mentor

Many people who have worked in the education sector remain driven to help younger generations find their way. We know that even one caring adult can have a profound impact on a young person's life, so if you have that drive to help, don't ignore it! There are many ways to connect with youth who need support. Mentoring through Big Brothers Big Sisters is one option. You can also link up with a local school to volunteer, or look for a literacy program for youth at risk. ■



turning passion into action

by **Stuart Foxman**

L

iana Brittain (District 29

Lanark) says she didn't wake up one morning and think, "I'll become a social activist."

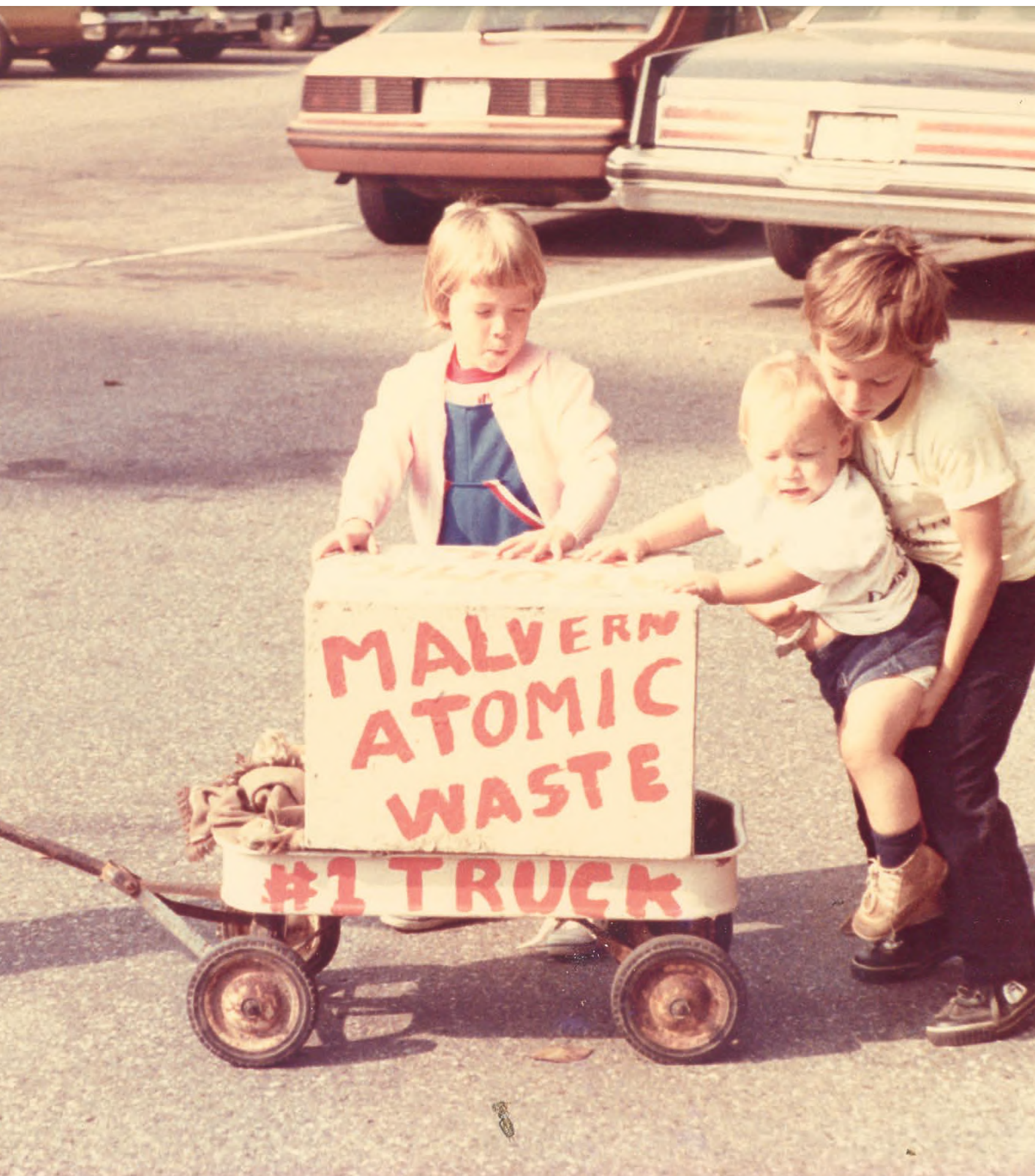
But she'd been making a difference since her early teens, when she volunteered with children who had developmental delays. After high school, Brittain became a governess for refugees and orphans in Switzerland, and during her working years, she volunteered at Almonte General Hospital, in Lanark County, as vice president and later president of the Hospital Auxiliary Board.

"I've always had a passion to make a difference and help others," she says.

Now she's doing it as an advocate for medical assistance in dying (MAiD). How have RTO/ERO members turned their passions into roll-up-your-sleeves activism? And what defines a social activist? Brittain and three others share their journeys and lessons learned.



PHOTO: GEORGE HEIGHINGTON





Fighting the Crown

In 1974, **George Heighington (District 24 Scarborough and East York)** bought a semi-detached home for his family on McClure Crescent, in Scarborough's Malvern neighbourhood, and what should have been an exciting adventure became instead a nightmare. Neither Heighington nor his neighbours realized what lurked underneath their homes.

In the 1940s, a company on the site conducted experiments using radium. When the plant shuttered, they left soil contaminated with radioactive materials. Decades later, the Ontario government bought the land for a housing project.

In 1980, when Heighington learned of the contaminated soil, he rightly worried about his family's health and his property's value.

"It's hard to sell a radioactive home," says Heighington.

So he led the charge for compensation. He researched the history of the site, rallied neighbours and sued the Crown in *Heighington v. Ont.*

"I made life miserable for them," he remembers.

In 1986, the province bought back his house and others, paying fair market value plus moving expenses.

Heighington still lives in Scarborough, a few kilometres from his former home. He self-published a book, available on Amazon, called *A Radioactive Waste Dump in Malvern: A Citizen's Account*. It memorializes the saga and serves as a lesson for activists.

"If you stick together," he says, "you can fight and win."

"If you stick together, you can fight and win."

George Heighington

"Keep an open mind and have a plan B."

Linda Milhausen



Have a plan B

Social activism can take you in unexpected directions, explains **Linda Milhausen (District 17 Simcoe County)**.

Pretty much daily for 30 years, her husband, Ford, walked the shores of Georgian Bay in Collingwood. Ford dreamed of getting a wheelchair ramp built at Sunset Point down to the water to make it fully accessible. He raised money, and the Rotary Club backed him. When Ford died in 2015, more funds came in through donations in his memory.

Milhausen sought approval from local council. The proposal was rejected, partly because a master plan for the area wasn't completed. Though Milhausen was disappointed, she had a pot of money to spend and was looking for a worthy cause.

She ended up arranging a \$22,800 donation, from the Ford Milhausen Legacy Fund and the Rotary Club of Collingwood, to the YMCA towards purchasing 10 sports wheelchairs.

Milhausen, who taught special education, was thrilled that the money went towards accessibility.

When you're advocating, circumstances can change. Her advice: "Keep an open mind and have a plan B."



More school days for girls

For Gayle Manley (District 3 Algoma), activism and service occupy much of her retirement. Her driving force: “Make our society a better place,” she says.

Manley does presentations for Elder Abuse Ontario and, in the past, has run workshops on domestic violence through the Centre for Research and

Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

Another priority is removing barriers to opportunities. As Manley notes, students are disadvantaged if they miss several days of school a month. In some countries, many girls miss even more because they don’t have access to, or can’t afford, menstrual products.

Through the Sault Ste. Marie chapter of the group Days for Girls, Manley assembles menstrual kits: flannel liners, cotton shields, washcloths, soap, underwear and Ziplocs. The chapter has produced 3,500 kits for girls in Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, Ghana, Malawi, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Haiti, Cuba, Tibet, Thailand and Syria.

If you want to get started, think of activism as a motivating group exercise, advises Manley. “The teamwork is important. It fuels you.”



MAiD together

Liana Brittain (District 29 Lanark) met Paul Couvrette in 2003; she was 53 and he was 59. She says at their ages they didn’t want to waste time — they got engaged seven months after their first date.

In April 2015, they moved from Ontario to P.E.I. to enjoy their dream of life by the sea. Eight months later, a chest X-ray revealed a tumour on Couvrette’s lung. He had surgery, and in September 2016, his doctor told him he was cancer-free.

But that November, the cancer was back and stage 4. By February 2017, it had spread to his brain.

Couvrette entered a palliative care program. A hospice volunteer, who was a neighbour, helped too. Couvrette wrote

his end-of-life wishes and arranged a “do not resuscitate” order.

“The sand was slipping through the hourglass,” Brittain remembers.

Couvrette elected to seek a Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) procedure, before he’d become incapable of giving the necessary consent. He and Brittain picked the date: May 10, 2017, the anniversary of the day they met and their wedding anniversary. The date of Couvrette’s passing would be associated with happy days. He died on his terms, at age 72.

At the end, Couvrette asked Brittain to educate others about MAiD. She agreed and threw herself into her promise. She began volunteering with Dying With Dignity Canada and now speaks and writes widely on the topic. She also blogs at maidtogether.com and authored a book called *MAiD Musings: A Widow’s Reflections*.

A friend at Dying With Dignity told her she had evolved from widow to advocate to activist. “I didn’t even know it was happening,” Brittain says. “Is that me? But opportunities present themselves. I saw a need.”

Her husband would be proud of her path, she thinks. ■

How to become an activist

Last year Backlash, a unit of ad agency TBWA, commissioned a study on activism, coining the word “pan-activism” to cover everything from charitable donations and protests to supporting or boycotting companies based on their beliefs.

By those loose measures, just about anyone can call themselves a social activist. Gayle Manley sees it as something more.

True activism requires what she calls total engagement. “The physical action of being involved is what lights me up,” she says.

A social activist fights for change, often addressing the causes of a social, political, economic or environmental issue. Cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

So join that group.

And if Mead’s notion feels daunting, you needn’t change the world to make an impact. You can change just a little piece. Change a mind. Or change yourself.

If activism is more than writing a cheque, it can also be less than an organized campaign. Everyday interactions can count. Liana Brittain says that when you see a chance to make the world a better place, grab it. It’s as basic as showing a kindness to someone in need.

Through formal collective efforts or informal one-on-one encounters, activism is in all of us. It doesn’t surprise Brittain that so many current and former teachers are also social activists. There’s a link between the profession and activism.

“I don’t think you chose to work in education,” Brittain says, “unless you’re a giving person and you care.”

travel to make a difference





PHOTO, BAKEPHOTOGRAPHY

Volunteer travel at home and abroad is a life-changing experience.

by Jennifer Lewington

I

In 1998, Nancy Loveless (District 17 Simcoe County) was teaching grade 2 in Collingwood, Ont. When she heard about Sleeping Children Around the World, a Canadian charity that delivers bedding

and basic supplies to vulnerable children overseas, she felt “something ignite.”

Here was an opportunity to teach about empathy, she thought. She organized students at her school to run penny drives every Friday to purchase \$25 (now \$35) bed kits that included mattresses, mosquito nets, clothing, backpacks, pencils and books, which would be luxuries for youngsters in developing countries.

When Loveless learned that Sleeping Children needed volunteers to assist non-governmental partners overseas, she jumped at the chance to help.

“It was something I was meant to do,” she says, “and it became a passion.”

Three times before retiring in 2010 — and four times since — Loveless travelled to Africa and southeast Asia, helping distribute more than 40,000 locally-sourced bed kits.



Nancy Loveless with schoolchildren in India.

Like Loveless, a growing number of retirees choose to combine travel and volunteer activities, discovering an enriching experience that yields unexpected insights.

“People do want meaning in their lives and, as we age, we are more aware of those esoteric questions like ‘What are we on Earth for?’” observes Paula Speevak, president and CEO of Volunteer Canada, a national advocacy organization. “What will be the evidence that we did anything to make this planet better?”

She urges volunteers to establish “reciprocal relationships and authentic engagement” to ensure their values match the charity’s and to confirm that the people being helped want what’s being offered.

Happily, says Speevak, retirees make ideal volunteer travellers because many have time, disposable income, good health and, importantly, skills and expertise.

“Our research shows that while some people want to get involved directly using their [professional] skills, others don’t want to do what they did all day at work,” she says. “They want to see their skills and expertise transferred to a different situation.”

Loveless serves on a team of volunteers who work with Sleeping Children’s local non-governmental partners, travelling by van to remote or rural distribution sites.

To record donors’ dollars at work, the volunteers confirm the children put forward by local officials, hand out kits and take pictures.

**Sleeping Children
Around the World**
There are 2,000
volunteers worldwide

“We are the eyes on the ground to make sure these children are the needy ones,” says Loveless, who estimates about 500 children and their families greet the volunteers at every stop.

After a long day, she says she feels “a funny kind of tired. It’s a well-I-made-a-difference kind of tired.”

The overseas trips, including to Tanzania, the Philippines, India and Bangladesh, have changed how she views herself.

“I have learned that I am stronger than I thought I was, that I am able to do more than I ever imagined I could,” she says. “I have learned that I can make a difference.”

Travelling also heightened her appreciation for diverse cultures.

“Sometimes in Western culture the things we fear are not to be feared,” says Loveless. “I am the wife of a Christian minister, and there is humanity in every culture that you will touch on every level and that you need not fear it. They [people in recipient countries] are very respectful of you as well.”

For **Peter Wheatley (District 12 Norfolk)**, a one-time trip to northern Ontario last winter opened a window on challenges here at home.

Last February, he and fellow Norfolk Rotary Club members Marjorie and Jim Dawson drove three days from southern Ontario to deliver a 14-foot trailer full of donated skates, winter boots, books, basketballs, musical instruments and locally grown apples to **Pikangikum First Nation**, with whom the Dawsons have worked for seven years.

The northwestern Ontario community, 228 kilometres north of Kenora, is accessible in winter only by ice road, lacks running water in most homes and suffers from a high youth suicide rate.

Wheatley was recruited for the trip to teach basketball to students at the school before returning south a few days later with his friends. The experience, he says, deepened his understanding of an Indigenous community struggling to reconnect with traditions disrupted by past residential-school abuse.

"We took a trailer full of things, but we really took a trailer full of care," he says, but cautions on the need for humility. "How do we empower other people without taking the credit ourselves?"

That urge to help others prompted **Wendy Addison (District 2 Thunder Bay)** to answer a Canadian Red Cross call for help in 2001 when a large forest fire forced the evacuation of a local community in northwestern Ontario.

"It's about being able to help someone when they are really in need," she says. "There was an immediate need, and so I had to respond."

Over the past three years, she has travelled for days or weeks at a time when the Red Cross assists in emergencies, including wildfires in Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba.

In 2016, she went to **Fort McMurray**, where fires led to the largest evacuation in Alberta's history, and helped schedule first responders.

"We were trying to make sure we had enough people on site, that when they came they knew what was going on and what was expected of them," says Addison.

The assignment tapped into her organizational and communication skills as a teacher.

"Time and personnel management are extremely important," she says.

Pikangikum Reserve
75% of residents are under 25

Estimated damage cost of Fort McMurray fire: \$9.9 billion

2017 was British Columbia's worst wildfire season



Peter Wheatley and the team play a game similar to musical chairs but no one is eliminated. The players all come together as one chair.

"I have learned that I am stronger than I thought I was, that I am able to do more than I ever imagined I could, I have learned that I can make a difference."

Nancy Loveless

Paid volunteers like her work shifts from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., in pressure-filled settings that also require monitoring the well-being of emergency responders and themselves.

While in **Burnaby, B.C.**, in 2017 to assist people dislocated by wildfires, Addison recalls the generosity of a Red Cross staff member who invited her on a day off to visit picturesque Bowen Island, an hour's drive away.

And after shifts, Addison says she, other volunteers and staff would meet for evening walks.

Deployed by the Canadian Red Cross earlier this year to Timmins, Ont., Wendy Addison works with fellow volunteer Dan Bryce.



As a Red Cross volunteer for the past 18 years — including recently providing remote support from Thunder Bay when the Red Cross responded to a tornado in Ottawa — Addison says she has made some self-discoveries.

“I have learned that I can give more than I thought I could give,” she says. “And that what I am doing has more impact than I might think.”

In 2009, **Cathy and Eric Sayle (District 17 Simcoe County)** heard about Project Umbrella Burma, a charity founded by a couple from nearby Washago, Ont., and travelled to the Thailand-Myanmar border for a first-hand look. The charity, founded in 2002, provides education and health care assistance to Myanmar’s ethnic minority Karen people, many forced to flee as refugees to next-door Thailand.

The Sayles saw their \$400 donation spent directly on school and medical supplies. “We went back to the open-air classroom, met the students and everything was distributed to them,” says Cathy Sayle.

Retired since 2006, the couple decided to give their time and expertise to the charity, making 15 trips lasting four to six weeks over the past decade.

“Was it karma?” laughs Eric Sayle, of the decision to volunteer overseas. “The trifecta came together — the encouragement of family, the opportunity to go to Thailand and the fact that we were willing and able to do it.”

While they were there, their day began with a 40-minute walk along a two-lane highway in the jungle to reach the school by 8 a.m. They taught English classes, worked with other volunteers, adapted a curriculum for the Karen students and assisted school staff on site.

As active volunteers in Project Umbrella Burma, Cathy Sayle says she and Eric witnessed the impact of educating young refugees to help their people.

“Our lives have been totally expanded because of this,” says Cathy Sayle.

In Thailand, the Sayles chose to live much as the locals did, an experience that changed Eric’s outlook on life. Now when faced with a difficulty in Canada, he says he asks: “if you had nothing, how would you solve this problem?”

Nancy Loveless says she, too, has been transformed by her experience.

“I would not replace this in my life for any cruise,” she says. “The things I have learned about other countries, the people and the children — you can’t put a price tag on it.” ■

September 2018
6 tornadoes hit Ottawa-Gatineau region

84% of refugees in 9 camps in Thailand are members of the Karen ethnic-minority population

Home safe home

It’s time to pack up and head out. But before you go, the experts at Johnson Insurance suggest these simple precautions to keep everything back home safe and secure.



Planning to be away for one to two weeks

1

INSTALL A HOME SECURITY SYSTEM

Even if you’re only gone for a few weeks, it’s still a good idea to install a home security system. These systems are connected to a control panel that activates when doors or windows are opened. Some systems also include fire and carbon monoxide alarms, broken glass detectors and motion sensors. Sophisticated systems also control home lighting and temperature. Post signs that indicate your home is protected by a security company. And be sure to notify your security company of your travel plans.

2 INVEST IN GOOD LOCKS

We know you'll remember to lock all your doors and windows before you go. But not all locks are created equal — deadbolt locks are best for all exterior doors and windows, and slide locks are effective on sliding glass doors.

3 ASK A NEIGHBOUR TO CHECK IN

Give a neighbour your information and contact numbers in case of an emergency. Take that house key you keep under the mat (an easy find for burglars) and give it to that trusted neighbour instead. Not only is it good to have someone come by to check on things, they'll also help create the impression that someone is at home.

- Ask them to collect your mail and newspapers daily.
- On a short trip, they probably won't need to mow the lawn or trim the hedges, but you may ask them to keep the snow shovelled in the winter.
- If your car isn't in the driveway, invite a neighbour to park there occasionally while you're gone.
- If they can't come by every day, invest in a timer for your interior lights, television and radio so they go on and off at varying times.

4 DO A QUICK UTILITIES CHECK

These small steps help to protect your house from fires and floods — and may save you money, too.

- Ensure smoke detectors are working before you go.
- Unplug all appliances (except those that are on timers).
- In the winter, turn the heat down to about 13 degrees Celsius. That will cut utility costs while preventing your pipes from freezing. You can also cut costs if you set the temperature to about 30 degrees Celsius in the summer.

Planning to be away for a few months

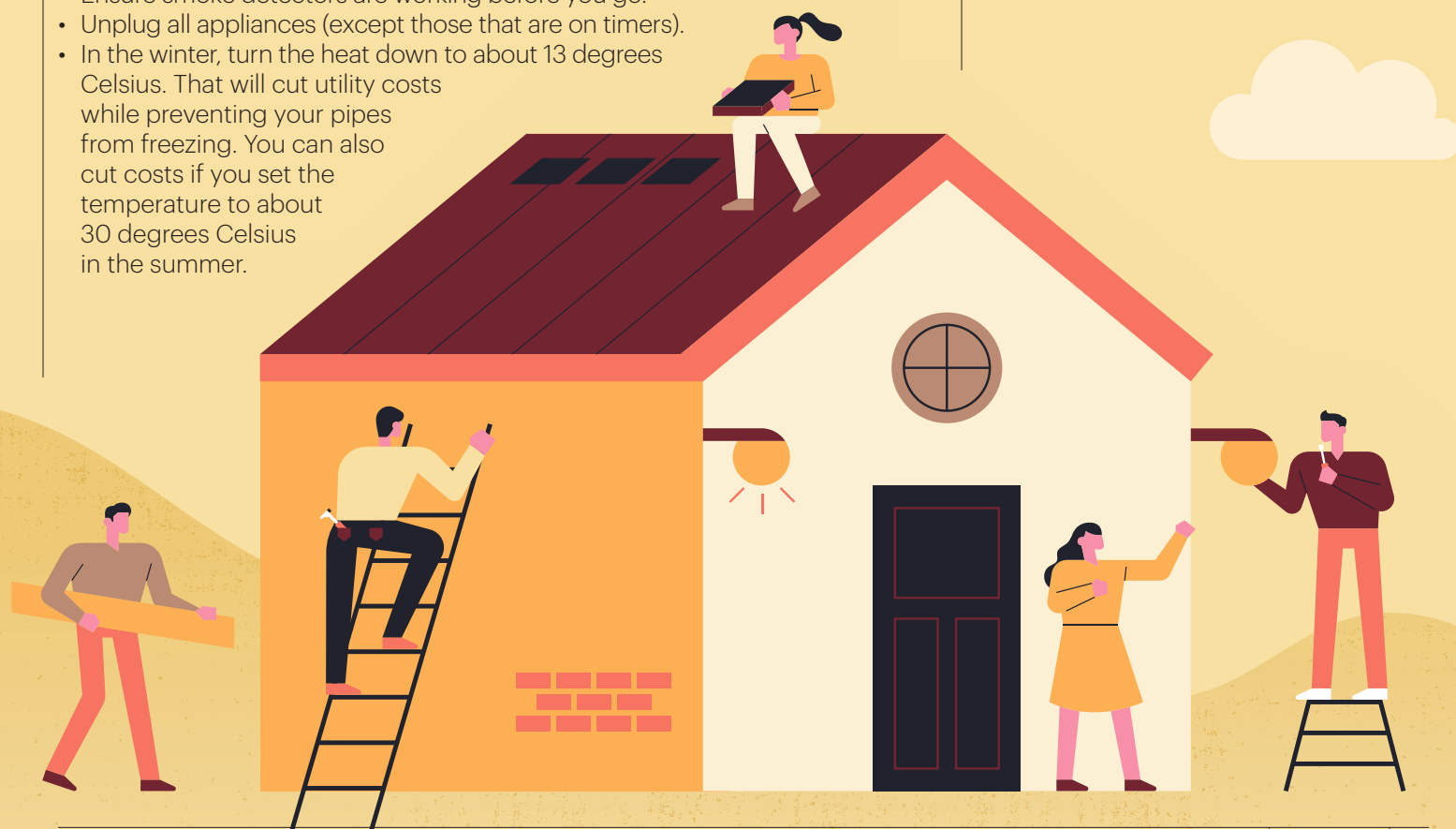
1 PUT SUBSCRIPTIONS ON HOLD

If you're going to be away for longer than a few weeks, you should put a stop on all mail and newspaper delivery.

2 CHECK YOUR PIPES

Ensure your pipes don't leak or burst while you're away.

- Turn off the water supply, with the exception of the fire sprinkler system.
- Drain water from your pipes and clear water from the tanks and bowls of your toilets. If you're going to be away in the winter, pour water-system antifreeze in the tanks and bowls.
- Ensure the pipes are well insulated during the winter.
- Have a neighbour stop by once in a while to turn on the faucets.



saving the planet one day at a time



Climate change is on everyone's mind, but we're bombarded with information — some of it frightening — and it's easy to get overwhelmed. What can one person do to make a difference? **Plenty.**

Take the case of the monarch butterfly. In 2013, research showed that the eastern monarch butterfly population had plummeted to 35 million, a drop of more than 95 per cent since the 1990s.

Researchers suspected milkweed was the problem. Monarch butterflies lay their eggs on milkweed, and it's the caterpillar's primary food source. But millions of milkweed plants had vanished throughout the migratory range.

Replacing the plants was one solution. Sounds simple, right? The David Suzuki Foundation thought so, explains Jode Roberts, a senior strategist with the organization. The foundation's Get Milkweed campaign encouraged residents, school groups, municipal park staff and others to plant milkweed. Trouble was, milkweed had a reputation as a noxious weed. Most garden centres didn't even carry milkweed plants.

But what happened next turned things around.

As Canadians began to understand the importance of milkweed to the monarch's survival, they went, one by one, to garden centres asking for support by stocking milkweed plants.

"In just five years," says Roberts, "we went from milkweed being a noxious weed no one wanted to plant to it being a popular plant in garden centres."

"And the monarch population is making a comeback."

Becoming a green volunteer in your home and in your community is easy, it turns out.

What can one person do? Plenty.

by **Ylva Van Buuren**



motivation is personal



2 Commit to reduce, recycle and reuse

“In our home, we compost, recycle and thrift deposit and reuse,” says **Mary Cecol (District 15 Halton)**. She likes to keep a clutter-free home and, when de-cluttering closets and drawers, gives clothing to a thrift store and rips up old towels to use as rags. When she and her husband, Peter, bought a new dining room set, Cecol donated the old one to Habitat for Humanity. Cecol shares magazines with friends or gives them to doctors’ offices. She uses cloth or fibre (not plastic) reusable bags when she shops. The couple have a green box compost container and a backyard composter to create garden compost. Christmas trees get cut up and used as mulch in the flowerbed.



1 Rethink garbage

Martin Aller-Stead (District 16 City of Toronto) is always on the lookout for reusable items and often stops to pick up “garbage.” For example, one day he picked up six lunch-counter stools from outside a restaurant and sent a note around to fellow teachers at the school where he teaches culinary arts. They were re-homed within 36 hours.

Aller-Stead composts and reuses everything he can in the classroom and at home. He volunteers for the Toronto Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, picking up used fake Christmas trees year-round — the centre uses them to help rehabilitate wildlife, such as baby birds who have been orphaned, have been injured flying into a pane of glass or have suffered other trauma. “They have to learn to fly again from a tree in a safe place before they are released back into the wild,” he explains.

On vacation, he picks up rocks, writes notes on them and gives them to dinner guests to use as weights or art.

“My wife and I are committed because an aware community is important to us. We are trying to limit the damage we create to the earth’s health.”

Martin Aller-Stead

“We have always been conscientious recyclers to ensure our environment, our home area and planet remain healthy for our own living and that of others, especially the children.”

Mary Cecol

3 Lead by example

On crisp fall mornings, people driving along Highway 41 near Eganville, Ont., may see **Rosemary Cammaert (District 21 Renfrew)** on her regular cleanup patrol. Sure, she's walking for exercise, but she carries a bag so she can pick up garbage she spots along the way. Her husband Gus mows the highway strip of grass along their property, so garbage is more visible. "When I'm picking up garbage, maybe people driving by will think twice about throwing anything out their window." ■

"It's just something I started to do a long time ago. Garbage is where it shouldn't be — I pick it up and put it where it should be. I do it because it's the right thing to do. It's my little contribution to making the world a better place."

—
Rosemary Cammaert

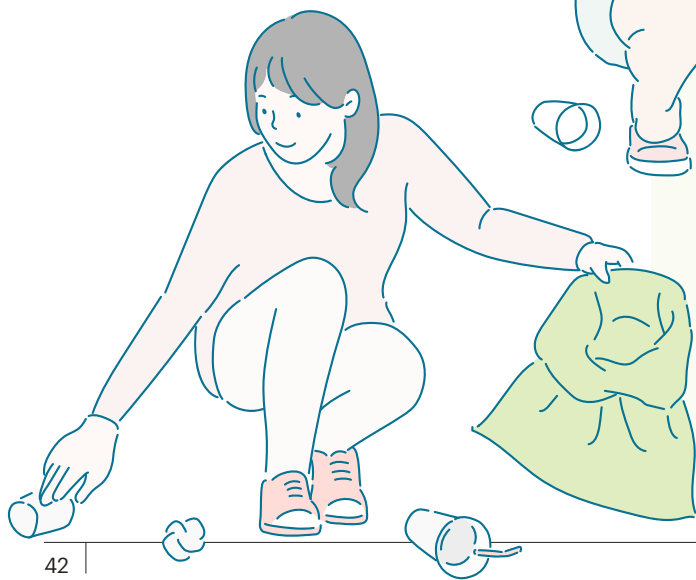


According to savvygardening.com, many bees, butterflies and ladybugs overwinter here and need protection from the snow and cold. Native bees, for example, may burrow under a piece of peeling tree bark or into the hollow stem of a bee balm plant. So this fall, leave some foliage and plant materials when you clean up your garden — you could even bundle leaves and put them into a back corner — to shelter the insects you want in your garden come spring.



These green-scene websites offer lots of ways to become an eco-warrior.

- consumerhandbook.ca/en/topics/environment/tips-for-green-living
- davidsuzuki.org/take-action/volunteer
- planetfriendly.net/volunteers
- goodwork.ca/volunteer



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Volunteer and fall in love

Sometimes, you volunteer and meet someone special along the way.

by Ylva Van Buuren

Finding a life partner isn't easy. You might meet someone at a club, a party or a community event. Maybe a friend sets you up. Or you might explore a dating website.

Sometimes though, you volunteer for a cause you care about — and meet someone special along the way.

That's what happened to **Andrea Kirshenblatt (District 34 York Region).**

In 1973, Andrea was volunteering at the Kadima Centre in Toronto, a social and recreational program for adults with developmental disabilities. Andrea had chosen the Kadima Centre specifically because her friends volunteered there, too. She very quickly grew fond of the participants, and the experience helped create an interest in Special Education, which eventually became her career focus.

One day, David Kirshenblatt showed up to volunteer, and when he walked into the room, she noticed him immediately.

"It wasn't love at first sight," she laughs, "but there was definitely an attraction!"

David and Andrea became friends, volunteering together for three years before they started dating.

"You really get to know somebody when you're friends first," Andrea explains, "without the pressure of going out on a date."

The romance started slowly — very slowly: the couple only dated once a year for a few years.

"Maybe subconsciously, I didn't want to ruin our friendship. David is several years older than me, so at first, we were at different life stages."

Over time, though, she realized that David was perfect for her. "We had a lot in common — interests and values."

Andrea remembers the incident that pushed their friendship into something more.

The couple had taken a Kadima group to Maple Leaf Gardens to see the Ice Capades and one of the participants dropped his ice cream into David's lap.

"I started to laugh and eventually, so did David."

As they looked into each other's eyes, they realized they had something special.

The couple married several years later. Andrea was teaching and David was studying to become a social worker. They were still volunteering at Kadima, too.

The Kirshenblatts, married for more than 40 years, still volunteer together: they sit on the music committee at their synagogue as well as on a committee that visits people who are bereaved or housebound. ■



Dating experts suggest that volunteering is a good way to find a partner.

"Donating your time for a cause can help you meet someone with similar values and interests," says dating expert Julie Spira. "Whether it's feeding the homeless, teen mentoring, serving as a board member for a non-profit organization, or helping developmentally disabled adults, you are creating shared experiences that bind."

You shouldn't volunteer simply for the sake of getting a date. But volunteering offers opportunities to make new friends and learn new skills, and while you're helping others, you may meet your future partner.

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3500184

It pays to give back

Giving is good for your bottom line, too.

by Leslie-Anne Scorgie



Giving is great for your soul *and* your pocketbook and that's why it's part of a solid financial plan.

When you donate more than \$20 to \$25, depending on the policies of the registered charity, you receive a tax credit (not a deduction) that positively affects your income. Generally speaking, you can receive a charitable tax credit of up to 75 per cent of your net income while you're living and 100 per cent of your net income in the year of your death.

How it all works

What makes giving so powerful is that when you apply the charitable tax receipt to your taxable income, it is worth between 25 per cent (if you give less than \$200) and 45 per cent (if the value is over \$200), depending on the province you live in. The receipt should have the charity's name and registration number, your name, date, serial number of the receipt itself (similar to an invoice number), amount donated and the CRA website address. It should be

signed on behalf of the organization.

In Ontario, the higher your income, the greater the tax credit. If, for example, you gave \$1,000 to the RTO/ERO Foundation, and your household income is below approximately \$200,000, your tax credit hovers around \$360. If your income is more than that, the credit bumps to nearly \$400.

Using the CRA's online charitable donation tax credit calculator is a handy way to calculate your total tax credit based on the province you reside. You'll find the calculator and other useful links at cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng.

There are a few strings attached to getting the charitable receipt in the first place. You can't have received something in return, like dinner at a fundraising gala or tickets to a ball game, and if you do, you have to deduct that value from your gift before the credit can be applied. And, if you're still thinking the First-Time Donor's Super Credit is around, sadly it expired in 2017.

Combining your donations

If you have a spouse or file your taxes jointly with a common law partner, you can combine your donations and claim them against the person with the higher income so that you maximize your charitable tax credit. Or, if your taxable income is low, perhaps because you're taking advantage of other credits or deductions in a certain tax year, you can, and should, carry the credit forward for up to five years.

Donations in kind

If your car is on its last tires, and you're thinking of selling it for a couple of thousand dollars on Kijiji, you may want to consider donating it to an organization like Kars4Kids. They'll issue you a tax receipt for the "fair market value" of the vehicle. This also applies to other major gifts of significant value such as appliances and furniture, gently used, of course.

Gifts of clothing and small household items are generally not receiptable, but local charities really value these donations. So if you're decluttering your closet or your home, support people who need what you no longer do.

Donating securities

New rules encourage the donation of securities — stocks, bonds, funds, etc.

If you own a security that has appreciated in value, there is now no capital gains tax on such gifts. This could be a substantial benefit, as you get the tax credit on the higher amount, but do not have to pay any tax on your gain. But not all charities accept this kind of donation, so check with the organization first.

Budgeting for your donations

Donating monthly works giving right into your regular household budget. The charity can debit your bank account directly or can charge your credit card. If you aren't carrying a balance on your credit card, and you collect points, paying for your donation on your points credit card is a triple win: you get a tax

receipt, you collect points and you're helping your cause in a sustained way.

Donations at work or through your pension plan are also dead simple because they're deducted right off your paycheque before you can spend the money. These credits are typically recorded on your T4 or T4A slips.

Endowments

Large-scale endowments to community foundations such as the Toronto Foundation are popular for families hoping to leave a legacy. However, donor-advised funds (DAFs) — set up through the TELUS Friendly Future Foundation, for example — are becoming

popular because they allow the donor the same privileges as a private foundation with greater flexibility and fewer costs. In either case, families pool their money, because of tax advantages, and direct funds to the charities they care about. If this is something you and your family are interested in, it's essential that you work with a professional advisor, often a senior fundraising professional or a lawyer, to coordinate your efforts.

Expand your giving mindset

Ethical investing — also called socially responsible investing — is an investment strategy in which you screen out companies involved in harmful businesses

or practices — environmental degradation, human rights violations, child labour, discrimination, weapons manufacture, for example — and invest in companies whose mission, vision and values reflect your own.

You can check out companies on your own or ask your investment advisor how they would approach ethical investing on your behalf.

Statistics Canada has plenty of research on the impact of giving in the community. But most findings align to a basic financial planning principle: plan ahead. If you plan ahead, chances are you will give more, and in a sustained way, and that has a greater impact on your community and the causes you care about. ■

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Volunteering for life

Getting back as
much as you give.

by **Pauline Duquette-Newman**



Achille
Drouin
(District 45
EstaRiO)

Achille Drouin (District 45 EstaRiO), who retired in 1997, thinks that Canadians — young and old — are more capable than they often give themselves credit for. And the potential for retirees to contribute in meaningful ways is especially untapped.

“Everyone should be able to volunteer based on his or her capabilities and talent,” he believes. And he has been doing exactly that for more than 20 years.

Drouin grew up in the country, and his passion for environmental protection began when he first noticed the decline in the bird population and was nurtured during his time as a Boy Scout.

Drouin’s passion led to his contribution to a number of environmental groups, including as Director of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest and as a founding

member of the Association française des propriétaires de boisés privés de l’Est de l’Ontario Inc.

“My goal,” he says, “is to influence people’s attitudes, recognize the life-giving power of forests and the importance of conserving and protecting them.”

The challenge, he explains, is reconciling the needs of forests with the needs of landowners.

An amateur beekeeper, Drouin owns about 30 hives and has built a small shelter for wild bees during the winter.

The decrease in bee populations, he explains, is the result of a complex combination of factors, including globalization (diseases and parasites are travelling), agricultural practices (the use of pesticides) and climate change (the long, icy winter of 2019 was particularly harmful for many apiaries).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACHILLE DROUIN

Drouin believes that sustainable management is the only way to ensure the survival of all life forms — humans included — and that belief led him on his first volunteer trip to the Dominican Republic more than a decade ago.

Since then, Drouin and his wife, Marie-Andrée, have visited regularly with a group of friends on humanitarian missions organized by **Diane Longtin (District 45 EstaRiO)**.

Here, Drouin and the team work alongside local villagers on projects identified by the villagers themselves, including building an aqueduct, planting trees, putting soil conservation measures in place and building and repairing houses.

Drouin also supports local apiary initiatives. The sale of local honey combined with the sale of his Canadian honey finance a variety of other projects.

This year, Drouin worked with a small village of 40 to 50 families in the mountainous region of Ocoa.

He knows that he is helping to lift the villagers out of poverty but, he says,

volunteering also has invited him to discover a world and a culture beyond his personal experience, and his own life is enriched.

“Reforestation brings back sources of water, and water is life,” he says. “With irrigation and soil conservation, the families can produce twice as much as they used to. That improves their standard of living.

“We know that we are making a lasting difference, and that is gratifying. It is important to be open to what is done elsewhere, to listen, to give your time and attention.”

At the same time, his work with the Dominicans has helped him recognize that human experience must be lived to be understood. He knows the tremendous need for volunteers in Canadian communities, but working in developing countries has allowed him experiences that have shaped the way he lives in the world.

In 2011, Drouin received the Ontario Senior Achievement Award, which



is presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to their communities through volunteer activities after the age of 65. He was honoured for his forest protection work and especially for his humanitarian aid in the Dominican Republic. And he is grateful. ■
—Translated from French by Susan Collins

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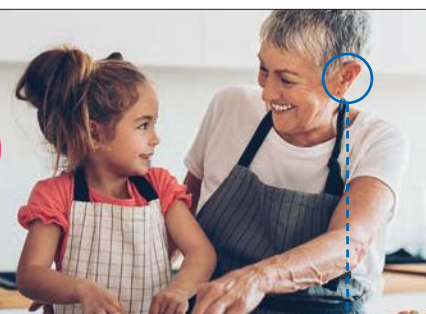
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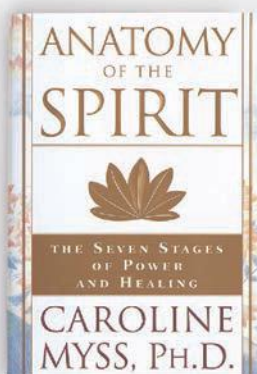
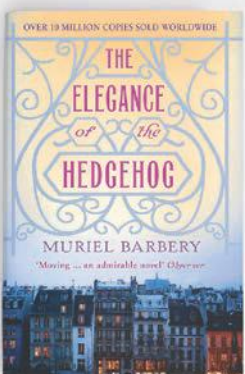
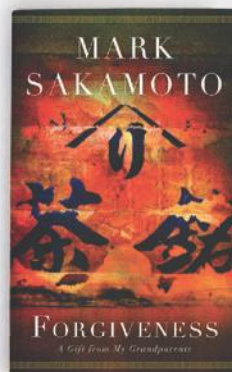
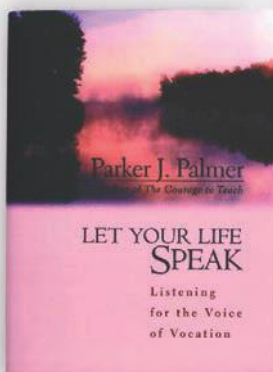
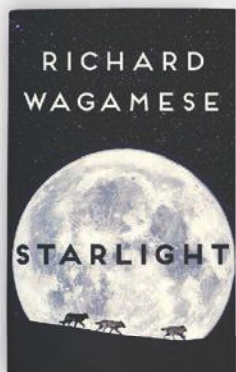
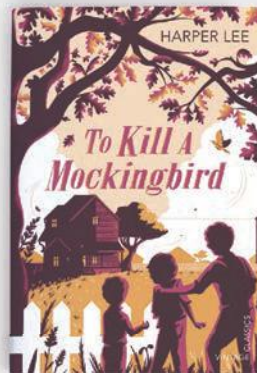
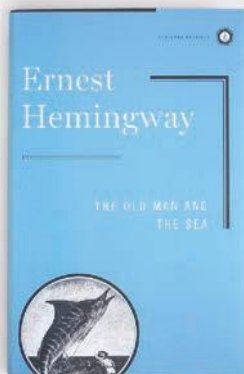


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Inspiring reads

What book has most inspired you?



Books have the power to change how we think and how we live. Sometimes, the inspiring book is a work of fiction. Other times, it's a memoir or a classic self-help book. When we asked you on Facebook to tell us the book that most inspired you, here is what some of you had to say.

Becoming

by Michelle Obama

—Marlene Thornton (District 9 Huron-Perth): Everyone struggles.

The Old Man and the Sea

by Ernest Hemingway

—Brian Moore (District 9 Huron-Perth): I almost named my fishing boat OMATS as a tribute.

To Kill a Mockingbird

by Harper Lee

—Sandy Stewart (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)

Starlight

by Richard Wagamese

—Doug Janack (District 14 Niagara)

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation

by Parker Palmer

—Bill Rivers (District 14 Niagara)

Forgiveness

by Mark Sakamoto

—Marie-France Leclerc (District 18 Haliburton, Kawartha Lakes)

Elegance of the Hedgehog

by Muriel Barbery

—Wendy Sobol (District 29 Lanark)

Anatomy of the Spirit: The Seven Stages of Power and Healing

by Caroline Myss

—Marylou DeNoble Kinsella (District 48 Leeds and Grenville)



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