

Dianne: Hi, my name is Dianne Boston-Nyp and I'm community engagement director at the volunteer action center Waterloo region. I'm here with Jane Hennig who is the executive director of our center and has been so for a couple of decades. So we're very happy to be able to share some of our insights over the last couple of decades that we've been working together and in the sector for even longer as both employees and volunteers, perhaps you can start by telling us a bit about how your role and your experiences have influenced your thoughts on volunteerism in Canada.

Jane: Sure. I'm so happy to be here. It's exciting to be part of this project, just to say that I have been a volunteer for as long as I can remember. So, my parents took me to nursing homes and to hospitals and, and we had all kinds of lived experience people as part of our lives as children. So, it has influenced who I am and since being an adult, I have served on over 12 boards of directors and multiple advisories and working groups in the community. So, I was a volunteer long before I was the executive director of a volunteer center. So that absolutely shaped why I'm in my role currently. And as an executive director, it has really been the impetus for me, understanding the contribution of volunteers in Canada. We have over 200 volunteer centers across the country and volunteer centers are basically community hubs for volunteerism. So we work at broadening community understanding of volunteerism. We advocate for volunteers and volunteerism in the community and at the provincial and federal levels. And we really support, not for profit organizations in how they engage with volunteers. So public really sees us as a recruitment center, but a community organizations have us as a resource in a variety of areas. All related to volunteering.

Dianne: It's great. But you have also been involved with volunteer Canada these past two years, pretty pinnacle years in our, our life experiences with COVID needless to say, we've all been through a lot. But perhaps you can comment on some of the things that we've learned through this last couple of years, what do you think most prevalent changes will be? Because as a result?

Jane: Okay. Well I think even before the pandemic, we started exploring informal volunteerism and I spoke to that in the PowerPoint presentation. The last sector survey that was done in 2018 was the first time that we did some research on informal volunteering and saw that the impact that was making on community and on the nation at large and saw it as a way to learn and explore new ways of aligning, supporting formal volunteering through understanding informal volunteering. I think that's risen to the surface during. You know, Dianne, that we fostered many calls early on in the pandemic. When so many organizations were trying to figure out what they were going to be doing with a new virtual reality. And we were encouraging people to do the informal, take care of your family first, take care of your neighborhood. And then when you know that you're ready and have the time, then we can talk about formal volunteering. So there's a real parallel that we're really, and continuum I think, that we're really trying to understand, and I think will really affect volunteering moving forward.

Dianne: I think ah, yes, we've learned a lot. And we're, we're learning to tell the stories right now and explain some of the, the learning that we've acquired through these difficult times and

virtual reality. I like that phrase, I don't think I've heard that yet. And, but yet it is what we're living through is these huge changes. And, and I think the awareness has been risen to our sector. Finally, there's more attention on it when things were falling apart, people were running towards us and we saw that in droves. So, we're here to stay. We want to be better together. We've heard that a lot this year, but what do you think can be done to broaden the awareness and recognition of volunteer contributions to the community and the economy?

Jane: Oh yeah. Anytime we can get in front of people. Right. And so, this forum, this course, even though we're getting in front of many people who were already in the sector, they might be late. Program managers, executive directors, volunteers, themselves even from that perspective, many people don't understand the breadth of the contribution of volunteers. And so the more we can get in front of audiences and talk about both the economic contribution, but the role contribution of volunteers, what I've seen coming out of charities, non-profits, and am some volunteers from the community and the last probably year to year and a half was an understanding that people just don't get the contribution of volunteers. And so there's a rising interest in advocacy for volunteerism. Groups of volunteers are coming to us and saying, what can we do? To raise awareness. So, it's just more spreading the word being ambassadors for volunteerism.

Dianne: And tooting our own horns is kind of part of that. So we keep telling people, share your experiences with, with us, with, with the world. And we are trying to facilitate that here at the volunteer action center, as many people are through those extenuating ways to communicate with each other, we have to up our game. So how can volunteer managers and leaders of non-profits and others, what role can they play? I think you've mentioned it a little bit in your previous question and or response to that question, but it's, it is the stories because people in the sector are isolated in this work. I watched you work and get stretched across many platforms and sectors through the pandemic. And it's reached pinnacle where we have to start to select how we go forward. So, what do you think would be a role that non-profit leaders can play?

Jane: Well, I think for volunteer managers, it's making sure and, you know, whenever possible sharing with their management teams. Peers within their organization, how you know, what the role is, how the role is changing, how together program managers, the executive directors can influence and, and be influenced by the volunteers as a resource for their organization. For leaders, it's really listening and trying to understand and being willing to adapt and change with the changing interests of the volunteers. Volunteers are bringing really high levels of experience, of knowledge. They're bringing skill sets that we wouldn't otherwise have access to. So trying to take advantage of that and then demonstrating back to the volunteer, how that's made a difference. Volunteers are really motivated by what makes a difference. And, and so showing them that they're making a difference is one of the best forms of recognition that they can receive

Dianne: And reflecting on it is also a form of recognition having this time together to actually talk about many champions, we're going to be doing that in the next modules, for sure. Going

on every aspect of, of the storytelling that we can. So thank you so much for, for today. And I think that we have lots more ahead to talk about too.

Jane: Yes. Looking forward to it.

Dianne: Thanks, Jane.