

Jane: Hello everybody. I'm Jane Hennig with Volunteer Waterloo Region. I'm here today with Diane Wiles, from Leadership Waterloo Region and Kathy Irwin from the Alzheimer's Society of Waterloo-Wellington. And we're talking about where and how people engage. And you know, we've, in previous module, we've talked about the importance of engagement, and now we're talking about the different ways in which people engage. So, I'm going to start by letting both introduce themselves to you and tell us a little bit about your organization. So, Diane, why don't you tell us a little bit about leadership and what you do?

Diane: Fantastic. Thank you, Jane. As Jane said, I'm Diane Wiles. I'm the CEO of Leadership Waterloo Region. And I actually come to the organization in a unique way because I'm also an alumna of the program. So, I went through the program in 2002. So, I guess that's dating myself. But I've had skin in the game I always say since the beginning. I've served on all other committees with the exception of the board over the years, and just really enjoy to see people's leadership journeys. So, Leadership Waterloo Region, why is it different? We offer an experiential learning program. So, it's not about an age, it's about a stage in your life. So, if you're willing to look at the, at your own leadership styles, learn about systems in our community. And firsthand, see, have an experiential learning journey through seeing behind the scenes- then that is what our program offers. So, we cover leadership all the way from core values, emotional intelligence, unconscious bias, diversity, governance, coaching, mentorship. And the list goes on and on. When we talk about the systems, one thing we will never take for granted is we have the systems leads involved. So, if you're looking at education or healthcare or how does emergency services work? We have people who work in those fields come in and speak to us. And behind the scenes are experiential. So, you'll have opportunities to visit many agencies in the org, within our community and learn how they fit into those systems. We also do a project. So, one third of our overall core program is spent on an affordable housing project. What community isn't having an issue with affordable housing? So, we, along with Wellbeing Waterloo Region and the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience at the University of Waterloo have taken on this project. So, each year we're in our third year of the affordable housing project, we look at systemic issues. We look at how do you prototype that? And what are some of the solutions? So, through this process, we're able to bring in over 80 organizations, if you can imagine. Non-profits, government, industry, all working together to find solutions for affordable housing. We run 10 months a year. We follow the school year calendar to keep it simple. And it really is a learning experience that's life changing. You join a network of almost 500 leaders in our community. They're all committed to doing, to doing good.

Jane: Thank you. I have worked with Leadership Waterloo Region also since its inception and it's such a great program. And there are so many ways that graduates of that program are engaged in community and giving back. So, as we move into that conversation, it'll be interesting to hear some of the experiences you've had there. Kathy, would you like to tell us a little bit about Alzheimer's Society and your role there and how you work with volunteers in your organization?

Kathy: Sure. Thank you. My name is Kathy Irwin. I am our Development Administrator and Volunteer Coordinator with Alzheimer's Society Waterloo-Wellington. I've been in my role about eight months now. I do have job experience working with volunteers, but never at this level. We have currently about 85 volunteers supporting 16 different programs and it truly makes a difference to the work our staff can do. Prior to bringing on all the volunteers, we had to have two staff in each program. So, this is quite literally doubled what our capacity is for helping clients, which is pretty amazing. The part I love most about my job is the pieces that I'm able to put into place with volunteers and giving them that meaningful experience- ends up helping us with our mission and our values, and really enhances the lives of our clients. I like that, that, I'm sorry. I liked that, that piece- I am able to help support, I do my part so people can help more clients. They can help the care partners. And our agency is very much focused on helping clients with Alzheimer's and any related dementia live their best day. And that's what's important.

Jane: Yeah. It's pretty fulfilling to see that happen. What's really interesting, you know, Diane, in your PowerPoint presentation, you talked about the very broad and different ways that organizations support community. Some are social enterprises, some are charities, some are, you know, there's, there's that whole range of ways that organizations help and then volunteers within them. And this is what I like about this panel because Kathy, you have 16 different programs so that people who volunteer at Alzheimer's are not just doing one thing. They might be involved in a variety of different ways. So maybe, we could start by, Diane, maybe, with your organization, you have, like you say, over 500 alumni out in the community. I'm sure you hear of a variety of different ways that they get involved. What, have any of them surprised you or have you heard about roles that you didn't even actually know existed before? And I know you've been in the sector for a while, so I'm, I'm always interested in the different ways people get involved.

Diane: Well, Jane, our last survey and I know it's a little bit outdated, but 2017. So, we would have had approximately 430 grads at that time. And our survey, came back saying, you know what, we're on more than 400 boards and committees in our community. Like, can you imagine? These are people who are getting things done. I always say graduates of Leadership Waterloo Region are the ones that point of the elephant in the room. So, you know, when you truly understand your own leadership styles and you're comfortable in your own skin, it's easy to put your hand up. That doesn't sound right. We have lots of community traditions that have been started by Leadership Waterloo Region grads. So, it's not- when you think of volunteerism, yes, it's immediate need, human social services. It's also the arts, it's healthcare, it's karate. It's all sorts of things. So, you know, the buskers festival was founded by Randy Warren, who is a graduate of Leadership Waterloo Region. And that I just found so much excitement that he gives this ongoing tradition and pride to be part of Waterloo Region. And you could be a part of this wonderful event each year. Sharon Gilroy-Dreher started Toasty Toes. So, an initiative to honor her mom who, you know, by giving socks to people, to the homeless is now an institution. How many corporations? So, some of the most surprising things I've seen. We can get into this discussion later, but volunteerism is so rich because where else are you going to pull a group of people together on a regular basis where you have that cross

pollination of entrepreneurs, corporations, government, non-profits, healthcare, systems lead? That just doesn't happen. You hear about it happening for a special task force or a certain initiative. But imagine in the non-profit world, or if you're starting at grassroots or social enterprise, this kind of cross pollination and intersectionality happens on a monthly, bi-weekly basis. So, when I look at the work that's being done, when people not only bring their strengths, what they're good at, their professional experience, which often is so different, and are willing to share that in a way to make a difference- that is what I find not surprising, but rewarding. And that is what keeps non-profits innovative, responsive to need, listening to the people in the community. Because all the volunteers are made up of a cross section of our community. Diverse, lived experience, senior people, young people starting out. It is truly a place where everyone can come together and say, this is what I'm good at. This is what I'm passionate about. And I need to learn the above, but you can have my skills, you can have them, and I will do what I need to, to fulfill your mission. And I don't know of another place you can get that. I truly don't.

Jane: I love that, you know, that is so, so appropriate. I, I feel that. I came to the non-profit world later in my work life. And I agree with you. It is an innovative space because of the diversity of skills, of culture, of age that, that volunteers bring to the table and in so many different ways. And Kathy, I'm sure you see it in your volunteers. You're not working with just fundraisers because you know, people, it's people who care about the cause, but they're bringing different skills.

Kathy: Exactly. And I'm really glad Diane you mentioned lived experience because I do find about 75% of our volunteers do have some type of lived experience. And probably almost the remaining 25% are looking to get into the field in some way, when they finish school. We do have quite a few university students that volunteer for us. And I really liked that unique spin that they can bring to things. The lived experience from the different generations, I think is really, really important. And I think the more diversity we have within our groups, it just brings that puzzle piece together so much more nicely. We can see the different, you know, the positives and also the things we can maybe change and make it work better for everyone involved. And I love that about it.

Diane: And if I can add one of the most rewarding things as well. If you look at both sides of the spectrum, so I've worked with CEOs of massive corporations and they say, you know, when I come here, you call me by my first name. When I go into my work, people don't want to involve me in some conversations because of my position. But when I come here, I'm offered a coffee. We sit down, we laugh. We- so it's leveling the playing field. And then you have a younger, when you were saying about a university student comes in, it's not you're the junior person you do this. It truly is, you know, you're part of our team and you may be managing that CEO on your committee. So, really pull on your strengths. There isn't a better training ground for either for humbleness or for leadership skill development. There just, isn't a better training ground.

Kathy: I would agree with that. And I also really like that we do have a group of volunteers that are younger because I think engaging people with volunteering early on builds lifelong

volunteers. And I think it can bring a lot of value to someone's life. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Diane: I agree. And you volunteer for many reasons, right? You know, sometimes, like you said, Kathy, you have lived experience. So, you know, my first board position I held was at hope spring and I had just lost my dad of cancer and I was his primary caregiver. So, I had that. While that information was still fresh in my mind that community resources and what was available, I wanted to give back. But it's your passion. A lot of times people volunteer because you know, I'm really good at marketing or really good at whatever, but I'm not getting to do that in my current position, but you know what? I can keep my skills sharp and really feel accomplished because I'm using my strengths by joining a marketing committee at an organization. So, it's a real good use of your time professionally. And I love working with new Canadians like that different perspective on our community because a lot of times you go, well, you know, king street runs in four directions that's just how it is. Well, maybe that doesn't make sense. And when you have that outside set eyes come in and say this doesn't make sense to me. Then you get to look at a different lens and say, okay, let's do a deeper dive. So, if- there's so many reasons people come. Building your network is huge. Your network is invaluable. You know, if, if you need something personally, professionally for the organization you're volunteering for to be able to reach out. I'd rather learn from other people's mistakes. And I know, I don't know it all. I know what I know and I'm continually learning, but to be able to reach out to your network and say, I know you experienced this, how was that? What did you do? You know, what should I look for? What dangers? So, it's, it's, it's deepening of every aspect of your life.

Jane: Looking at it from the side of the organization. So, you know, we all run organizations or, or work in organizations that serve community. What better resource than people with diverse perspectives and diverse skills, bringing that to your table? We all know that we don't have enough human resources to do the work that we do. And taking, and I, I hate to say it, taking advantage in the positive sense, not in the negative sense, but taking advantage of all of that skill, all the skills, the time, the energy, the positive motivation for the work that we're doing is- it just makes our organizations that much stronger and more resilient.

Diane: And I always find that non-profits were at the leading edge of things like diversity because you do have that cross section. Like I can go, if I write a strategic plan or a proposal, I can go to many people in the community and say, can I have your set of eyes of this? I have CEOs of corporations that I turn to. I have individuals with lived experience. I have others in my center of influence that are willing to share their skills with me. And items like diversity and when you look at inclusivity and up-to-date policy, I look to non-profits because we have individuals at the table, right. I'm not going to speak on behalf of anybody. And I learned a long time ago it's very easy to offend people if you think, you know things. So, it's better to say, can you, can you look at this and make sure that I'm using language that's respectful because it's going out in print or on the internet or whatever that looks like. So, I, I find that those, that second and third set of eyes are just covering a broader cross section of the community.

Jane: Well, I think we've given a lot of food for thought to the people participating in this module. So, I'd like to give you any opportunity for last thoughts and we'll wrap up. So, any thoughts that you still have that you'd like to share on the breadth and depth of how volunteers and where they get involved?

Diane: Well, I just want to say it. Oh, sorry, Kathy, go ahead.

Kathy: Thank you. I just wanted to say that I know for my organization and one's I've worked for in the past, volunteers are absolutely invaluable. We couldn't survive without them. We, hopefully, enhance their lives as much as they help us with our work and supporting our clients. And it's really important for us to remember at ASWW to keep our volunteers engaged and let them know how much they're appreciated. To create those meaningful roles not just to keep busy role. And it seems like it's being successful and we're really happy to have the volunteers we have with us.

Jane: Great. Thank you.

Diane: Thank you. And I just like to add that, I've been volunteering my entire life. I came from a tradition of volunteering with my father and my mom was always putting her hand up for things. But it really is- fit it into your lifestyle. You know, whether you're running a coat check for one event because they need somebody or you're really wanting to sit on a committee or serve on a board of directors, it could be so rewarding. So, look at the stage of your life you're in. And what's so beautiful is you're never too young or never too old, right? There is no, there is no parameters. What you want to learn is what you're going to learn. And, you know, I would come home from school. My dad would say, how was school? I'd say, oh, it was terrible. And he'd say, well, I guess you didn't participate then. You didn't do anything. You know, if the more you put in, the more you'll get out. And having those, it's all about people, volunteers, right? It's relationships we're people working with people. People have different motivations, but at the end. You know, at Leadership Waterloo Region, when we're doing our full event schedule and different things, pre-COVID, we're utilizing 125 volunteers a year, if you can imagine. And those are individuals who come to us for so many different reasons, but what the end goal, they have their eye on the prize. They want us to succeed in building leaders for our community organizations.

Jane: And that's the joy of having volunteers involved. So, thank you both for your time. And I look forward to speaking with you more.