

Dianne: Good morning to our panel today, we are happy to have our guests, Kim Cusimano the executive director for PIN, the people and information network in Guelph along with colleague Emily Vincent, also from the PIN, people and information network, formerly the volunteer center in Guelph. How are you both this morning?

Kim: Great. Thank you.

Emily: Doing well. Thanks.

Dianne: Thanks for joining us. And I'm so glad that people will get to meet you both. Volunteer centers are very unique organizations, and we are kindred spirits in the sector. I know being here in the Kitchener Waterloo area, we've worked together a lot with the Guelph center. And so, these are colleagues of ours that we are, appreciate the time you've put into pulling together the modules. So, module number five was or is about administration, which is very dry as a topic, however important. And I think the students that have seen the modules will have found a lot of value to that. And maybe before we start, would you mind just giving a little background to yourselves for, for our guests? So, they know your life experience that's brought you to this point. Emily, do you want to start?

Emily: Sure. So, I guess I initially came to, at the time, the volunteer center of Guelph Wellington in 2009 as a coordinator for the very new program they were launching in partnership with the city of Guelph, which is the snow angels program. And have continued to run that throughout my involvement. And, about 2013, we had a new program that came to the organization called best practices in volunteer screening, which has since been rebranded to be called best match and really looking at supporting organizations around screening practices and ensuring that they're offering a really robust screening program within their organization. And so, a certain time-

Dianne: You're an expert.

Emily: Well, a little bit. And I guess throughout that time really the organization has grown in terms of the programs and the services that we offer. But still a very small mighty workforce.

Dianne: Thanks, Emily. That's it, it's true. The projects are what build us over the years, and you've been there 11 years, I think you said. And so, you've seen some changes and adaptations and the pandemic has certainly put the icing on your experiential cake, I think- all of ours. Kim, did you want to give us a little background about your journey to here?

Kim: Sure. And I'm, I'm really thrilled that Emily shared her length of service with the organization. And I think not only just the projects and initiatives that volunteer centers take on, but it's really the core of it is the team that you have that are leading those initiatives. So, thank you, Emily, for all of your gifts and skills and experience that you bring to the organization. 2021 actually brought us to our 20th anniversary as an organization. 15 of those years, or 16 of those years, known as the volunteer center of Guelph-Wellington. I joined the

organization in the fall of 2016. So, five years I have been with what is now named PIN, the people and information network. And just as I had started was an initiative around rebranding of the organization to better tell the story of the full scope of work that we do in non-profit leadership, in community information, and then within our volunteer network. So, it was a privilege to be able to, to join the organization. I had long felt that the leadership of the volunteer center of Guelph Wellington, now PIN, really supported the community, supported volunteerism, inspired action and active citizenship. And I thought it was a real gift to be able to apply and join the team. So, prior to 2016, the bulk of my background actually has been in volunteer engagement specifically around supporting elders in our communities in the, in retirement and in long-term care and in community support organizations. So, volunteer engagement in those roles and also a background- a certificate through Conestoga College, great program and highly recommend individuals explore that further to, to engage in that learning, that foundational learning.

Dianne: Thank you so much. It does take practice and good practices are something we are very willing to share within our sector. So, it's great to have this opportunity to talk further about the real-life experience- post-school and application during your time at the volunteer center. We've learned a lot over the years together, I know. So, people don't really realize how much is involved in managing volunteers, do they? And I find that to be, you know, something that keeps us fresh every day is those calls, how do I get started? And so there takes a lot of intake processes and that's what administration is all about, I guess, is that a whole looking at managing volunteers and having them connect to their value. So, everything from informal to formal, you've talked about in your slides. And capturing that impact, I think is really what the administrative part is all about, isn't it? Because telling that story is part of what we as volunteer centers can help do. So how should organizations, how, how do you suggest that organization can, can show the value of importance of their volunteer programs? If you can talk about that through the work that you've done in the slides- structure, best practices, that kind of thing. Do, does someone want to start?

Kim: Sure. I can start if that's okay, Emily. So, really where I think it needs to boil down to, and we reference this in our module content, is about the organization valuing the support of human resources that, you know, reflects volunteerism.

Dianne: Right.

Kim: So, you know, recognition of that, strategic priorities of that, investment into an individual who would lead volunteers is really critical. And that's how you're going to show value. I don't think if you have that within your vision, mission, values, you do not have that within your strategic priorities, then I really don't, I really caution, you know, whether or not organizations truly value what volunteers are bringing to their organization.

Dianne: Emily, did you want to add to that?

Emily: I definitely would agree. And I think the importance of having a volunteer manager coordinator to be able to carry that forward and embed that in all the work that you do with, in volunteer management in your organization is really, really key to ensure that it is so-

Dianne: A guided tour, shall we say?

Emily: Certainly, that's a part of it, for sure. Yes. Yeah.

Dianne: To let, to let people succeed is really what volunteer managers and the whole structure of admin helps with the success of intake. And so that's, that's where we learn the best way because every volunteer role is different, isn't it? So, there is that.

Kim: Yeah. And I do believe that leaders of volunteers, those roles, whether you call that a manager, a mobilizer, a coordinator, those are really leadership roles and should be forward facing, public facing. They should not be something that's hidden. It should be something that an organization invests in the development, the, you know, paid roles of, of those, and recognizing that budgets are tight, but we know also that volunteers are your biggest ambassadors. They're the ones that are going to tell the world about their great experience. They have already invested themselves into the organization and very likely to be donors as well. So, that really is important I think for organizations to consider that.

Dianne: I think that that was a key point and administration is leadership, good leadership, good administration. It depicts your intentions. So, so much so having good records and recognition and all these things that are in the volunteer cycle that's being spoken about throughout the, the whole course, and also your slides as well is about how we capture that. And that's really time-consuming work, but it's intentional. Formal versus informal- you know what, what's the story on that? I know you've got the quiz question. What is formal versus informal? Is there any, either of you that would like to speak to that one in particular? The difference between and how can we have administration in both of those? Or do we require administration in both of those?

Emily: I guess I can just start with that. And I think the, our experience with a pandemic has really shown how critical it is to also be involved in the informal volunteering. And studies, national studies or local studies, have really shown that importance of in the activity within, in volunteer, sorry, informal volunteering. And the importance of being flexible and creating opportunities to be able to better capture that force of energy and a commitment to an organization or community. Certainly, within formal volunteering, it's really what happens outside of the community. People responding to a need, whether it's just very local with their neighbors and, and family and friends, or whether, whether it's somebody who's willing to take an important key issue forward and mobilize people informally in the community to engage and unit behind that particular issue. Certainly, formal volunteering is very different. Generally, involved in an organization and the structures that they have to invite volunteers in to help them achieve their mission and values within the organization. As I mentioned earlier, it's really becoming more apparent how important is to, for organizations to be able to connect with that

informal group of volunteers within the community. And I guess challenges us to think of ways that we can actually work differently so that we can also be in partnership with that energy and force that really helps to build a stronger community.

Kim: I love how you said partnership, Emily. I think that's fantastic. I mean, we know in the beginning part of the pandemic, first couple of months, you know, 52% of respondents in a national survey had indicated they hadn't even heard back from their intent to volunteer. That speaks volumes, you know, Stats Can 41% of the population volunteering formally and 74% volunteering informally. So how are organizations, you know, leading through this information and how are you in including it and adapting it within your own strategy? I think there, there's, there's the core of foundations, including the admin pieces that are important for supporting a meaningful experience, reducing risk and all of those sorts of things, but I also think you can't put yourself in such a structured box. I do believe that those boxes need to be broken open, and we need to be able to be more flexible around that. And we need to screen people in and not out.

Dianne: Touché. It's the slippery slope of complicated universe that we live in. And we're in an industry that requires us to be creative in how we do things and how we involve everyone. The inclusion piece, right? On top of- volunteer management is like human resources without resources, but we have more to do. So, there's a, there's a real challenge for us in the sector to keep that balance. And, and what, what do you think of the survival skills ladies? What is it that keeps this boat afloat?

Kim: Oh my goodness. How much time do we have?

Dianne: Maybe we'll save that for the next one.

Kim: Maybe.

Dianne: Talk about adapting to our audience, but this has been great. I mean, a little nugget of conversation. Just to give an idea. We have a lot on our plates, and we appreciate including people to help us. So, those challenges though do exist in terms of how to make the match and the fit. So, I think that we've really aligned with employment services a lot more recently, so that the world understands that volunteering has that formal aspect, but there's also informal ways to engage and we're all our own leaders of our universe. So, you know, get involved however you can to start and, and, and join the impact that you can make on the world, right?

Kim: Absolutely.

Emily: Definitely.

Dianne: Thanks so much for talking. We'll talk again on module 11. See you then ladies.

Kim: Thank you, Dianne.

Emily: Thanks.