

For me, volunteering is both an opportunity and a responsibility. It's an opportunity to make a positive impact in the community, to grow as a person, have new experiences, and to develop new relationships. It's a responsibility to practice compassion, to share skills and abilities, to learn from experiences, and to ensure everyone is included. Volunteering is integral to a sense of belonging.

I grew up with close ties to my extended family. Family get-togethers often involved big work parties. Three or four times a year we would head to 'the homestead' (my grandparent's home) to help with the wood. The men chopped and hauled the trees. The kids collected branches and loaded wheelbarrows. Women prepared meals and helped stack the wood by the wood stove. Everyone participated as they were able. Sometimes this meant helping with the physical work, other times it meant keeping the seniors company, or taking care of the babies while their parents worked. Everyone contributed, not because it was something we HAD to do, it was something we just did. Being a part of a community meant having a valued role in, and contributing to, that community.

I have volunteered in many capacities. I have worked with children, seniors, community associations, on city committees, at my church, at fundraisers, festivals, and special events to name a few. One of my most influential volunteer experiences, though, was at a school for children who had developmental disabilities. As I came to know those amazing people, it inspired a career and a lifelong passion for inclusion.

I have worked in developmental services for over 20 years, most of that time providing direct support. A couple of years ago, during my annual review, my manager asked me if I had ever considered applying for a supervisory role. I said yes, but that I would miss working with the people we support and having a direct impact on their lives. He said, 'but just think about how much more impact you could have by fostering that passion in others to do the work you've been doing.' This really resonated with me, and when the opportunity came, I applied for my current role.

The values that lie in the heart of my work are citizenship and inclusion. I believe that everyone has a right and responsibility to contribute through volunteerism. As Volunteer Coordinator at KW Habilitation, I am able to provide volunteers with opportunities make a difference in the lives of others, to share their gifts and talents, to learn new things, and to build connections. I can share my skills, knowledge and passion for inclusion and inspire others to see how they can help to build a community where everyone belongs and participates.