

Focus: Covid-19 Recovery

Highlighting: “Reaching Out” to the New Year

January 2021 Highlights:

[GTA Volunteer Centre’s Consortium continues throughout the winter months](#)

[Volunteer Markham Launches Year Round Recognition Program: Volunteer Champions](#)

[Recent Volunteer Postings](#)

[Change the World Markham Youth Update](#)

[Coming Soon...](#)

[Stay Tuned...Volunteer Markham is excited to share that we will be hosting our first ever ONLINE AUCTION!](#)

[Partner Spotlight: Routes Connecting Communities speaks about Volunteer Drivers](#)

....and the work continues! GTA Volunteer Centres continue their efforts throughout the winter months.

With emergency funding support from the **United Way Greater Toronto**, Volunteer Centres came together virtually to support our community recover from the Covid-19 pandemic for the past 6 months. Bringing our teams together, we set out a course of action in how to respond to the uncontrollable change the pandemic brought and we ended up.....learning! As we continue to grow, we have also shared a loud unified voice for volunteerism, increased collaboration



and networking, provided direct community support and benefited from a tremendous amount of innovation and learning! The rippling effect of all this work will continue on throughout the winter and set our foundation as a family into the future.

Over the past 6 months Volunteer Centres acted quickly and were on the ground with you to recover together.

In what felt like a lightning moment the world changed in response to Covid-19. For the first time, there were more individuals wanting to help and fewer opportunities available as non-profit organizations struggled to adapt in a safe way. The COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan by the World Health Organization (WHO) identified community volunteers as "key stakeholders for risk communication and community engagement". Our own community quickly responded with offers to help and were faced with challenges in how to do so while organizations were stalled and working to provide the most basic of services. Community groups formed quickly in response to helping the most vulnerable and the landscape of volunteerism changed. Volunteer Centres joined forces for the first time to share resources and to build supports in new and innovative ways.

Highlights include:

- Creating a [GTA centralized landing page](#) to offer *free learning and shared resources*
- Implementing a *quick and easy way to sign up* as a GTA Covid Response Volunteer (over 18k individuals signed up for Covid Response, 5k were from York Region) or as an organization needing volunteers (400 new volunteer positions were created)
- Launching a *'matching' service* for [volunteer drivers](#) to address the most needed opportunity in our community and get volunteers into their roles quickly (over 100 screened potential volunteers have been referred to organizations that signed up for this pilot). Read our **"Partner Spotlight"** feature at the end of this newsletter featuring Routes Connecting Communities who highlights Volunteer Drivers.
- Held *forums*, hosted live conversations and sent surveys over the past 6 months to stay abreast of what was happening in the volunteer sector and actively met with Volunteer Centres across Canada to share best practices and have a unified voice across the Nation.
- Bringing Volunteer Managers and Volunteers together for *live discussions* (with Q&A sessions) to raise awareness of where volunteers are needed the most and how to volunteer during a pandemic. These forums were held to highlight volunteering as a driver and in food insecurity. (Watch these sessions found on our [Resources](#) tab).

-Addressing **youth engagement** by hosting an information session with organizations that have active youth volunteers to learn how to best engage youth during a pandemic (a new [Youth Playbook](#) was launched to assist organizations looking at youth engagement in volunteerism). This forum was sold out and can be watched [here](#).

-Creating quick, **one page volunteer learning resources** ([in various languages](#)) to ensure information was being received and could be shared into all our communities

Together, we are now moving forward to bring even more support to organizations, individuals and grassroots groups with our mission to increase capacity through volunteerism.

Volunteer Champions Recognition Program

Your opportunity to say thank you!

Volunteer Markham is inspired by the many heroes that don't wear capes. You cannot move through our society without being impacted by the kindness and helpfulness of another. We have all witnessed the many individuals and groups that have come together to sew masks, collect donations, deliver meals, check in on seniors, support the homeless and so much more. Now you have the opportunity to tell their story! Click [here](#) to quickly and easily thank a volunteer for their efforts whether they are connected to an organization or are making personal efforts to help. Volunteer Markham will join you in recognizing their impact.

In December, Volunteer Markham kicked off International Volunteer Day (IVD) and launched a year round recognition program to highlight and recognize those who have reached out in their community in extraordinary ways! We were pleased to have launched our [Volunteer Champions Recognition Program](#) and had it [promoted in the Economist](#) as a testament to the importance of this program.

Recent Volunteer Postings

Volunteer Markham is looking for fundraising support to their first ever **Online Auction**. ([See posting](#))

Study Pages Inc. needs **Online Tutors** to support learners from age 7 to adults in various categories ([See posting](#))

St Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre Senior Persons Living Connected Is looking for a **Virtual Office Assistant**. This role is virtual with a flexible schedule. ([See posting](#))

Mackenzie Health Centre, Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital is recruiting **700 Volunteers** for their new site ([See posting](#))

Routes Connecting Communities needs a **Friendly Call Volunteer** ([See posting](#))

Food Bank of York Region needs **General Help** ([See posting](#))

SPRINT Senior Care is in need of **DRIVERS** ([See posting](#))

Change the World Markham Youth Update

Our youth-led team here at Volunteer Markham (CTWMarkham) have been leading efforts to address youth volunteerism and how to provide highschool students with socially distanced and safe volunteering opportunities. Working from home and virtually has not stopped the impact in our community!



Seen here in our community are Volunteer Markham's youth heroes (CTW Markham) collecting food and items for the Food Bank and City Street Mission and our members at the 3rd Aurora Guides (who created teen stockings to donate to 360 Kids).



CTW Markham also responded to the impact of isolation on our seniors during this pandemic and participated in organizing a letter writing campaign within their community. These letters were a great way for our youth to connect with our seniors! The students shared things about their lives in hopes to

engage in a meaningful and sentimental way. These letters are being distributed to CHATS, Amica, Unionville Home Society, Markham Veterans Association as well as Neighbourhood Network (who are in turn sending them throughout their community). Feel free to read and share these examples.



I hope you are having an amazing day so far!

My name is Lakysba.
I thought I would write to you to see how everything is! I know life feels boring during this pandemic, but hopefully this letter brings a smile to your face! During the break I have been trying to start cooking and baking more, but that also leads to a huge mess that I hate cleaning up. I think quarantine has really got to my dog, because she is sleeping more than ever! It's honestly kind of sad to see the squirrels not out, because my dog really enjoys chasing them. Well, how was your day?

Have a great day!



[Sara's letter](#)

Ending the year, our Youth Team created this video to share some information and send greetings for Canada's largest holiday. [Christmas Story Video](#). We could not be more excited to continue to support this team and all the work they are doing. Stay tuned on their social media ([Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) to see how they continue to make meaningful contributions each day! If you are a youth looking for volunteer hours or your organization is interested in working with CTW Markham, please connect with us at hello@volunteermarkham.ca

Coming Soon...

Volunteer Markham has been with you during this pandemic. We have reached out to organizations and community members, expanded our boundaries, explored and delivered supports and are continuously building our network and, in turn, our community! This has not been without trials, setbacks, great ambitions and commitment from all our team members and partners. We are committed to recovering from Covid-19 and fostering an environment of "always learning and adapting". We have learned that even with thoughtful, well laid out plans and anticipated results, things do not always go as they should and we need to pivot and redirect on a regular basis. Only together can we move ahead.

As we move through the next few months we are working on:

- new on-line volunteer learning resources
- continued efforts to fight the feeling of isolation through volunteer driven virtual programs
- marketing campaigns that support essential services (including the concept of "Snow Angels", volunteer snow shovellers)
- continued work on raising awareness of Homelessness/Food and Financial Insecurity

-supporting Youth Engagement (exploring the successes and challenges that youth are facing as they address Covid-19)

.....*and most importantly*.....

Stay Tuned...Volunteer Markham is excited to share that we will be hosting our first ever ONLINE AUCTION!

Join us to volunteer on our fundraising committee and build our first ever fundraising event. Help organize the event, donate and/or contribute to the Auction. Help us help our community! Email: mirja.raita@volunteermarkham to learn how you can support.

Partner Spotlight: Routes Connecting Communities speaks about Volunteer Drivers

By: Nivedita (Niv) Balachandran, B.Sc, MPH, Executive Director

What does it really mean to be a volunteer driver? Sure, getting someone from point A to B is a major part of the role, but there is so much more. Let's dive in...

Meet Johnathan G. (John). John is 82 years old, a military veteran and was living with his wife, Claire, for the past 52 years. Ten years ago, Claire was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and John has been taking care of her as her symptoms get worse. Sometimes she hits and screams, sometimes she doesn't remember who she is, or where she is, but for the most part- she always remembers John. The smile on her face, is one of knowing recognition, of love. John, having lost his license and living in a remote part of York Region, found it increasingly difficult to manage daily tasks like getting groceries, visiting the doctor, or picking up medications. John also could not leave Claire alone, adding to his troubles. Despite being a veteran, John and Claire are living on a low income, with very few dollars available for taxis, and public transit is not available, nor a good option, given Claire's deteriorating condition. After paying rent for their house, there is not a lot of money left for food, transportation, etc. John has been feeling alone, and that he is not doing a good job taking care of Claire. He is struggling to make ends meet, and to get himself and Claire to their much needed medical appointments.

That's where volunteer drivers come in. At Routes, our volunteer drivers not only help people get to appointments, but they also build relationships with people just like John.

For some clients, living with mental health issues/addictions, isolated/vulnerable seniors, single parent families who have experienced violence/abuse, homeless/underhoused populations- their journeys are harrowing. Some are dealing with cancer alone; some are trying to overcome addictions issues; some are battling lifelong dialysis requirements, along with living in poverty, living alone, etc.

A caring and compassionate ride is required- they need someone they trust, they have formed a relationship with (through multiple journeys, conversations, relationship building).

Our volunteer drivers pick them up at the door, wait at the appointment, and bring them home. It is door-to-door, removes the need to call an anonymous phone operator and book rides, navigate the system of pickup/drop off points, etc. And most importantly, it builds relationships between community members that goes beyond a ride from A-to-B. Our volunteer drivers and clients form bonds, they become sources of information, community building, referrals to other programs/services, they offer support/care and most importantly, make the client feel like they are not alone on their journey.

For the driver, volunteering from the comfort of your car can be a real benefit. It's an easier, less physically demanding way to contribute to your community, but you also build strong relationships and feel like you are really making a difference in someone's life. There is nothing better. Believe us, we've been doing this for over 30 years throughout the York Region!

For more information:

[Become a Routes Volunteer Driver](#) (click here to learn more)

Or contact: niv@routescc.org



Routes - Compassionate transportation for people with transportation barriers.

Affordable, reliable and supportive transportation for York Region residents.

www.routescc.org