

# Welcoming Celebration!

Congratulations to 'all of us' on the successful completion of the first year of our 'Welcoming' initiative!

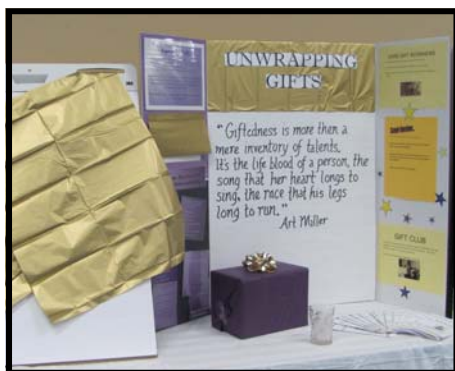


## A Party at the EndZone



About 45 of us gathered at the EndZone at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on November 15th to celebrate our learnings and our accomplishments over the last year. We heard about the successes, the challenges, and the hopes for the coming year. Many thanks to the people who consistently participate in a very full way!

## Our 'Signature Gift' Revealed...



**"We have a long history of being successful, innovative and committed to our community"...** does this sound like our Association? A number of groups and individuals say that it does. Thanks to Jennifer and Stephanie, many people invested in the Association have responded to a set of questions to help us define our organization's Signature Gift. It has been a wonderful exercise to create meaningful conversations at many different tables.

Our Welcoming initiative is tied very closely with the Core Gift work we've been doing for a few years now.

## Why invest in learning? Why invest in creating more welcoming cultures?

### Domain Area or Learning Group?

Domain 'a field of action, thought or influence'

Learning Group 'a form of active learning where students work together to perform specific tasks in a small group'



#### # 1 problem identified in evaluations

**"Domain members in our group do not show up at our meetings!"**

We could refer to our principles where it clearly states that "We believe in an organizational culture that encourages learning, risk-taking, evolving and innovating." It is important that our organization has this written down...it's good back up for the *real* reason that our Association invests in learning.

People supported, families, volunteers, staff and other community members are valued and are recognized as contributors to the vision and mission of our Association. By investing in learning, we are given an opportunity to find meaningful ways to actively participate and contribute to our own growth and development and to influence the development and priorities of our organization and the communities we live in.

The vision of our Association is "a community where everyone belongs" and our mission is "to nurture the ability and willingness in our community to welcome and support all people as valued contributing citizens." Given our vision

and mission statements, it is clear why our organization must invest in creating more welcoming cultures. It's also clear why we must continue to invest in our community.

So my questions are many. Why, with all this good community work, are so many people supported and often their families leading lonely and isolated lives? Why are there some days when only people who work for the person see and spend time with them? Why are we not giving our gifts and helping people supported to give their gifts? Why is it such a struggle for people to find ways to contribute to community life? Why don't we challenge each other in positive and respectful ways in order to learn from each other and build our individual and collective capacity?

Community Living St.Marys and Area is very fortunate to have a long history with lots of people it's connected to including many longtime employees. They have been part of many initiatives that have brought change. They have

debated, planned, and advocated for all kinds of things. The organization's structure has changed, job descriptions and roles have been flipped and everyone's adaptability has been tested. This learning, risk-taking, evolving and innovating has been met with excitement by many and trepidation by some.

My challenge to you is to participate in this initiative fully; to embrace the opportunity to learn and to contribute; to work with your learning group members; to look for possibility in our welcoming work; and to continually move toward a community development model versus the personal support model we are comfortable in but is not enough to help us reach our vision and mission.

Looking forward to our second year!

Marg McLean

## Our Many Accomplishments...

- Waddie Welcome readings
- Signs at JPC and many more improvements that welcome everyone
- Hilarious hypnotist show with more than 120 guests
- Core Gift Wall at JPC
- Planning for a Challenge Day...not this year but perhaps next
- Newsletters—Getting to know you and Birthdays
- Beautiful flower beds at JPC
- Short video created on Welcoming in St.Marys
- Monthly draws at JPC
- Attempts to host a World Café on welcoming in our community
- Deep discussions on mentoring
- Spring General Staff Meeting
- Revised orientation for new employees and more seasoned ones too
- Exploration of employment for people in our communities
- Social nights in Stratford and St.Marys





## The Four Domains: Transforming to a Welcoming Culture

Domain One: Helping people using services initiate and sustain community activities

Domain Two: Developing the welcoming capacity of community places

Domain Three: Welcoming people into our workplace and services

Domain Four: Creating a welcoming workplace for employees

[www.communitylivingstmarys.ca](http://www.communitylivingstmarys.ca)



### Domain 4: Creating a Welcoming Workplace for Employees

There is a crucial need for "us" to feel "welcomed", "cherished" & "cared for" in order for "us" to pass this on to our communities, our friends, our family & the people we support.

From our healthy sense of belonging & being welcomed, we can then be in a healthy place to welcome others.

Our association is based exactly on that and we are proud of our part in creating a community that welcomes all of its citizens. A community where everyone belongs.

From this beginning, our group tried to evaluate how our association is doing in their on-going job of creating a welcoming workplace for our employees.

Everyone of us employed by St. Mary's Community Living likely has a slightly different opinion of this. One thing we agreed upon, " the more effort that is put forth by an employee, the more positive a relationship occurs". Stumbling blocks that our group thought stood in our way were.

1) Individual working locations: Unlike other organizations, employees here work independantly to some extent &

out of the main bldg.

2) Our hours are not 9-5pm. We are working 24/7 which means that some of us may never cross paths with other employees even on the same team.

3) Our teams may not even be located in the same community

4) Our organization has many privacy obligations to the individuals that we work with & for.

These 4 conditions definitely created some difficulties when we analyzed how to improve upon creating a welcoming workplace for employees. they continued to be stumbling blocks time after time as we gathered each month to work on our plan.

Our group endeavored to create welcoming during paid time, not social activities and so we focused much of our attention on general staff meetings within the organization.

Our first idea concentrated on organizing a staff meeting that was both informative & entertaining. General staff mtgs are one of the opportunities at hand where all employees are welcomed to come together in

one place & are compensated for their time. Our spring meeting involved "chocolate" which certainly helped to welcome & a guest speaker who did an extremely informative & entertaining talk on the topic of chocolate making.

We do hope that our group can continue to encourage & support teams to actively plan these mtgs. as much is to be gained by both the organizing & by the audience participation. We also got together in small groups with the task of creating spring bonnets& that seemed a great way to meet or connect with others in the association.

Our central focus during the year was the idea of "Mentoring"and how to share the gifts we have within our organization. Our resources are unlimited as a group. The years of experience we have are so valuable & we believe that there are many, many ways for us to teach each other & to enrich our environment. Just in conversation last week, ideas have been exploding and we look forward to the second year of analyzing & discovery!!