



Dear friend of Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region,

In January 2020, our Board of Directors approved [new mission and vision statements](#) for our organization. Through our new mission – **Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region champions an inclusive community for all by working with people with disabilities, their networks and the broader community** – we are working towards our new vision of **a community where everyone belongs and is valued for their contributions**. I remember being so excited about this mission and vision, and our team began dreaming of ways to share these with the people we support and the community.

And then March 2020 happened. Our focus shifted immediately to creating ways to champion inclusion in a community that was suddenly closed. While our work to make a difference every day in the lives of those we support never ceased, it is hard not to reflect, as I write this, on the profound loss that so many of us felt when the community we had always known became unavailable to us in ways we were familiar with.

Many of us have lost our favourite neighbourhood spaces, faces and even the physical presence of those closest to us. However, I am reminded that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, **less than half of people in Waterloo Region reported feeling a strong sense of belonging and connection**, according to the Waterloo Wellbeing Survey.

Often when we connect with you, we share a story of how EAFWR has made a significant impact in the life of a person or their family. This year, with the loss of community as we have recognized it before, we would like to share about our [Community Development](#) work. We've shared stories in the past of people who have fulfilled their dream of "a house, a job, a ride and a friend." However, these dreams cannot be fulfilled in isolation of the larger community. Regardless of how welcoming of a space the EAFWR office is, paid support relationships can enhance, but should not replace, reciprocal relationships; we don't have enough jobs for everyone who wants one; and we don't sell houses or cars.



This is where Community Development comes in. The work of Community Development is to develop (you might have guessed that by the name) a deep understanding of the needs of the people we serve and the needs of the larger community, providing intentional support by creating opportunities where people are valued for who they are and what they bring. Community Development listens deeply in many different places to understand who is welcoming the work that we are doing, and what skills and tools would allow that welcoming to be extended to anyone who has the strengths and talents that the community needs. When that welcoming relationship has been formed, Community Development moves on to the next opportunity.

We often liken Community Development to planting seeds. Sometimes, the seed yields a flower that blooms for one day and makes someone smile. Other times, the seed yields a giant field of plants.

The [Kitchener-Waterloo Library of Things](#), a Community Development field if we ever saw one, **began with a coffee bean**. Well, technically a cup of coffee, but that cup started as a bean.

One day, many years ago, one of our staff members wondered how EAFWR could be a "good neighbour" to the Mount Hope-Breithaupt neighbourhood. The Community Development Manager decided to have a cup of coffee with someone they knew in the neighbourhood to ask that question. When that cup of coffee was gone, he asked for the names of three more people who might be able



to help answer that question. After six cups of coffee, people served by EAFWR became hosts of community-led walking conversations that are part of the Jane’s Walk festival. The local neighbourhood group, having outgrown their available kitchen spaces, began hosting their monthly potlucks at EAFWR and welcomed those receiving support to join them. These gatherings led to the kind of relationships that happen when you start seeing the same faces in the same places, over and over again.



Mary’s excellent skills with children at the Community Share Agriculture pickup hosted in the EAFWR parking lot led to a position as a mother’s helper. A conversation about a WALES member’s passion for education led to the neighbourhood creating an informal bursary to make a college program more accessible. Stella shared her interest in advocacy with a neighbourhood professor, who invited her to speak to one of his university classes. That same professor learned about the concept of tool libraries in Europe and sought out EAFWR as a partner in creating the first library of its kind in Waterloo Region.

Over the past two and a half years, the KW Library of Things has not only loaned out **more than 4,363 individual items to 329 members** since opening, diverting a significant amount of waste from landfills and saving members money, but it has also supported people who face barriers to employment to develop the skills they need to find meaningful jobs within the community. **All this from a coffee bean.**

Community Development rarely moves in a straight line. However, your support of Community Development at EAFWR provides us with an opportunity to deeply listen to and engage with the Region outside of our agency doors. We never know what connection may result in the perfect opportunity for someone, but we know that so often, it happens and it’s amazing.



As we reflect on the year that it has been, I think we can all relate to that desire to make meaningful connections, and find that place where we are valued and belong. Thank you for your support of these connections and for investing in an inclusive community for all.

**With gratitude,**

*Allan*

**Allan Mills**  
Executive Director

On behalf of the team at Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region

### *How to give*

You can give [securely online at Canada Helps](#), by mailing in the response card supplied with this letter, or by emailing Becky Klokoff at [becky.klokoff@eafwr.on.ca](mailto:becky.klokoff@eafwr.on.ca). [On our website](#), you’ll find more stories about people achieving their goals and meaningful connections created through a community of inclusion and belonging. You can learn more about the incredible work that your donations make possible by checking [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) as well.