



# Annual Report

## 2024-2025



**Volunteer**  
WATERLOO REGION



# A Brief Overview of the year

## Executive Director Jane Hennig

Volunteer Waterloo Region has had a good year, but it has not been without the same challenges facing so many charities and nonprofit organizations in the current environment. We have seen firsthand the struggles of many of our members that come when community needs are increasing exponentially and changing as they grow, and when donations and funding are precarious. Our sector has become adept at doing more with less, but it seems that we, the inclusive we, have finally hit the wall. Staff burnout, increased waitlists, programs and even organizations closing are all part of the reality in the sector.



This sounds like a very negative approach to this annual report. Agreed, but it is also a means to discuss the other reality of our sector, the side that is nimble and creative in facing challenges. This year we have had exciting conversations and explorations about how we can better meet the needs of our members. We have, in partnership with and with the support of many of our members implemented and tested some new approaches to engagement and continue to investigate new resources and supports to help Waterloo Region with volunteer engagement.

With struggle comes opportunity. This year we have been able to support our members in new ways. Our corporate engagement and our coaching program are highly sought after as resources to support new and challenged staff for our members. Our intergenerational program, bringing youth and seniors together for dialogue and social interaction has garnered attention and will be documented for replication in other communities. At our AGM we will launch phase one of the online information system upgrades that we have been working on to enhance volunteer experience and increase recruitment for our members.

A special thank you to some key donors, United Way Waterloo Region Communities, Waterloo Region Community Foundation, Janice and Robert Deutschmann Family Fund, Kenneth & Norah Rae Family Fund, Audrey and Gerald Moser Trust, the Cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. The funds from these contributions have facilitated change that will impact on the over 150 charities and nonprofits that rely on our services each year.

Thank you to the Board of Directors for their progressive approach to change and their unwavering belief in this community. Thank you to Daniela Montoya, Cameron Tai, Emily Vincent, and Mary McGuinness for your hard work and enthusiasm. And finally thank you to Catherine Jepson and Kim Cox, volunteers extraordinaire.



# Messages from the Board of Directors

## David Marsh – Board Chair

In 2024-2025 VWR continued to implement our strategic plan focusing on the four pillars of promoting, engaging, connecting and coaching. VWR has focused on multiplying impacts, removing barriers to volunteering, coaching, consulting and assisting NFPs on navigating the changing volunteer landscape and upgrading our systems that connect volunteers with volunteer opportunities.

The entire Board extends sincere thanks and appreciation to the volunteers and staff of VWR for the focus, energy and dedication they bring to the work at VWR, serving volunteers, not-for-profits and the community of Waterloo Region. This past year in particular presented a number of challenges all of which were met by our staff with poise and an unwavering commitment to volunteerism in Waterloo Region.

## Jenn Hill – Board Treasurer

While the year ended with a modest deficit, we are proud to report a strong year overall, highlighted by an 18% increase in revenue. This growth reflects the continued support of our stakeholders and the relevance of our mission. At the same time, we acknowledge that the volunteerism landscape has presented some unique challenges, impacting engagement. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Jane for her exceptional leadership and dedication throughout the year. Her commitment has been instrumental in navigating challenges and positioning the organization for continued impact in the year ahead.

As we move forward, we will continue to ensure that cash management remains top of mind so that we can continue to build a Waterloo Region that is invested in volunteerism. The audited financial statements will be available at the fiscal 2025 AGM and will be made available to members upon request. We look forward to the future and are excited to continue our cause within the Region





# Report on Communications

## Traditional Media

This year at Volunteer Waterloo Region, we have been steadily growing our presence and partnerships within the community. We continue to maintain a strong relationship with our community radio partner, CKWR, now MIX 98.5, working with them to signal boost our members, get the word out on important events for the community, and promote its importance and existence in Waterloo Region.

We have also garnered media attention through the Metroland media group, especially with the Cambridge times, who have interviewed staff for multiple articles on volunteerism in Cambridge, and Waterloo Region as a whole.

## Digital Presence

Our social media presence continues to grow. With the changes that occurred on X (formerly twitter), we have taken steps to distance the organization and the brand from the platform. We have, in the interim, started putting out our microblogging content on our new BlueSky page, allowing a different avenue for distributing short form and engaging content. We will be monitoring the platform's success and growth as we continue to experiment with this new channel. Our youth focussed Instagram page has increased its following steadily in the wake of the X (formerly twitter) change, and we continue to use this as a good form of connection to the community along with Facebook. Our LinkedIn page also continues to grow rather quickly, with the help of connections like the Ontario Nonprofit Network, and the growing call for leadership in the nonprofit community in general.

The weekly email Volunteer Newsletters continue to garner attention from many different audiences in the region and beyond. Our Youth Newsletter continues to be picked up by school staff and guidance counselors, allowing for additional support for youth in the community to be able to complete their community involvement mandates. Our General Newsletter has been important in drawing attention to time sensitive volunteering opportunities, and community events in the region.





# Community Events

## National Volunteer Week

Volunteer Waterloo Region continues to celebrate **National Volunteer Week (NVW)** with content produced on behalf of our members, and ads in local papers. This year, 14 volunteers were given the spotlight in the NVW video, representing 6 organizations. The advertisement for NVW this year was present in the Waterloo Region Record, and in the Elmira Observer, giving recognition to volunteers across the region and highlighting the efforts of 16 of our members in building stronger communities.



## Our Community Cares

Our Community Cares (OCC) has continued to be a desired appreciation event for our members, helping with tokens of appreciation for International Volunteer Day, December 5<sup>th</sup>. This year, thanks to some additional support through funding and donations, we were able to build small 'Thank-You' gifts to distribute to 32 organizations, recognizing 1 000 volunteers, along with letters of appreciation to all our members, reaching more volunteers within the region. It is estimated that, just with appreciation letters alone, we reached at least 2 500 volunteers. As this event continues to be in demand, we will evaluate the sustainability of OCC and how we can continue to offer this as a service to our members.

## Third Party Event

With the support from local community members, Volunteer Waterloo Region was a beneficiary of the "Two of a Kind Artisan Market" in downtown Kitchener in April 2025. This is a restructuring of an event that used to be hosted for the MS Society of Canada, who partnered with us on logistics to bring this event to life. As a first-time event, it went well, but would need better promotion and more lead-up time if it were to be planned again in the future. Both Volunteer Waterloo Region and the MS Society received a modest amount of funds raised from the market.





## A Milestone Celebration

In 2024, Volunteer Waterloo Region celebrated 40 years of serving the region as a nonprofit organization and a hub for volunteerism. We celebrated this milestone with a dinner event with long-term supporters and friends of VWR. The event included speeches from local dignitaries, a former executive director, and music from local artist Juneyt, with catering from Gilt, and desserts provided by SnickleFritz Kitchens.



## King Charles III Coronation Medals

Volunteer Waterloo Region was selected as a nominating organization for the King Charles III Coronation Medals, in honour of the crowning of the new monarch, King Charles III. We used this opportunity to highlight some amazing volunteers who contribute so much to time, talent and effort in their community, building a stronger Waterloo Region. The recipients were Ajirioghene Evi, Courtney Waterfall and Carol Taylor. We are always glad to be able to take part in appreciation of volunteers making major differences in their community, and giving them the respect and thanks that they are due.







# Community Engagement

## Networking

Waterloo Region Association of Volunteer Administrators (WRAVA) is a volunteer engagement community of practice who meet to learn, network, problem solve, mentor and advocate. WRAVA continues to offer monthly meetings for Volunteer Engagement leaders throughout the area, at no cost, to provide a collaborative space to gather, share their work, have conversations about relevant issues and challenges, offer mutual support and create space for peer connections. Topics of discussion and professional development vary and reflect the interests of members, current issues and trends. These discussion topics are led by staff, WRAVA members and community members.



## Coaching and Consultation

Volunteer Waterloo Region continues to connect with new and current members to provide support to Volunteer Engagement Leaders through coaching and consultation. We have provided Professional Development training focused on volunteer engagement, the Volunteer Management Foundations Workshop and Hybrid Conference for 26 leaders within Waterloo Region. Adaptable and accessible materials for both new and experienced Volunteer Engagement Leaders are being integrated into our newly designed and updated website and online information system. These materials include resources, toolkits, templates, tip sheets and guides focusing on volunteer management and related issues and trends. Thank you to the Resilient Communities Fund through the Ontario Trillium Foundation for supporting this effort.







# Youth Engagement

As of the fall of 2024, our Youth Engagement Coordinator, Daniela Montoya, has left Volunteer Waterloo Region to pursue her education at Laurier University as a Master of Social Work Student. While she remains connected to the centre, her schooling and program have demanded too much of her time to continue her role with us. We wish her success in her studies and expect her to do great things in the field of Social Work.



## Board Games and Mingle

This year, we ran Board Games and Mingle again, but we also worked on expanding the program into Cambridge as well. We were able to expand the program in 2024 thanks to some funding from the Weiland Family Fund from the Waterloo Region Community Foundation. We worked with Preston Heights Community Group as a place to host the program in Cambridge.

The attendance in Cambridge was relatively low, but our program in Kitchener continues to hold a steady attendance and is still well received by both youth and older adults alike. We plan on continuing this intergenerational program this year and working on a format that can be replicated and shared with other communities in the future.





## Invitation to Belonging

Invitation to Belonging continues to be our most in-depth youth led volunteering opportunity. It provides a place for newcomer youth to learn and practice their leadership skills, while providing important information and connections to other newcomers in the region.

With the support of the City of Cambridge, the program was held at the Allan Reuter Centre, providing an easily accessed place in the city for the youth and adult mentors to meet and engage in community. Overall, there were 13 youth participants, 6 youth leaders, and 7 adult mentors who attended the program and created important connections in the community. VWR hopes to be able to continue this program again in the fall, with more new youth leaders stepping up to lead.



## The Welcoming Table

Thanks to the funding received from the Youth Impact Project (YIP), our youth leaders were able to continue The Welcoming Table: Forest Heights, during the fall term at Forest Heights Collegiate Institute (FHCI). The youth leaders, Niya and Mohammad, both gave their time to help support their peers and provide a safe and welcoming space for newcomers at their school to ask questions, learn about volunteering, and get engaged with their community in their school.

These youth leaders have also continued the program during the winter/spring semester at FHCI with the support of one of the vice-principals and some faculty who were looking to support the students who benefitted from The Welcoming Table. As VWR does not currently have funding or dedicated staff to support this program, we are confident that this youth-led program will continue with the support of the youth leaders and faculty at the school who find the program important.





# Inter-sectoral Engagement

## Corporate Engagement and Caring Kits

Last year, we renewed our focus on engaging with small and medium size businesses across Waterloo Region in an effort to increase local employees' awareness and participation in our community. Over the last year, we've been making significant upgrades to our website and database to cater to users from a variety of sectors and especially the business community.

In Spring 2024, we launched a new program, Caring Kits, designed to be a low-touch volunteer opportunity benefiting our members and ultimately their clients. Through Caring Kits, we partner with businesses who fund the purchase of essential supplies and pack them for the clients of their matched local charity. On the kit packing event day, we invite a speaker from the recipient organization to share with the employee volunteers information about the program they're supporting and how their donation and packing effort directly uplifts individuals in our community.

To date, Caring Kits provided nearly \$17,000 in essential supplies to 14 organizations, through the partnership of 8 businesses and groups and their more than 400 volunteers.





# AI Tool – Gambit Changemakers Venture Studio

In the Fall of 2024, Volunteer Waterloo Region was selected for the first cohort as part of Gambit's Changemaker Venture Studio. The program spanned three months to develop production-ready AI for public use. For Volunteer Waterloo Region, we opted for an AI tool to act as a comprehensive volunteer and community navigation and education assistant. This solution is designed to make volunteer matching both efficient and informative, enabling VWR to help organizations fulfill their missions while guiding individuals toward meaningful roles that align with their skills, interests, and personal goals. Additionally, the tool aims to educate users on the value and structure of volunteering in Canada, providing insights into the benefits of community involvement and the unique ways volunteering supports personal and professional development. As we continue to improve and develop our services, we may look towards the integration of similar tools with our system.

## Key Features of the AI Tool:

1. *Personalized Volunteer Matching*
2. *Educational Insights into Volunteering in Canada*
3. *Centralized Knowledge Base*
4. *Volunteer Education and Support Resources*
5. *Community Awareness and Exploration*
6. *Seamless, Inclusive User Journey*
7. *24/7 Availability*







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Thank you to our funders who continue to support volunteers

