



To the 100 Women Who Care,

Thank you so much for allowing Community of Hearts - Boxes of Hearts social enterprise programme, five minutes of your time! I would like to talk to you about the ways that this programme serves members of the Guelph community, and the impact these dollars would have on the work we do.

What is Community of Hearts?

Founded in 2012, Community of Hearts is a not-for-profit, charitable organization in Guelph that provides post-secondary learning and community involvement for adults with intellectual exceptionalities. Through curriculum-based quality programming, a person centred focus, and relevant and responsive opportunities we support our participants to build self-confidence and become more engaged members in the community.

Community of Hearts sees the significant gaps in the current social support system and builds responsive programs to bridge the gaps and remove barriers in collaboration with the people we support in our life skills programs. To join the workforce, you need experience to get experience but when nothing exists to help you access experience, there is no hope of ever attaining employment.

Boxes of Hearts: Employment Readiness Training

Boxes of Hearts is a social enterprise program that provides job-readiness training through community-based employment. Participants are admitted to Boxes of Hearts via successful completion of an application and interview. They gain the following skills: increased concentration and focus on job tasks; further development of receptive language; increased competence to follow instructions; learn to abide by Health and Safety regulations; and independence and confidence on the job. Participants currently make peanut butter/banana and pumpkin dog cookies, delicious chocolate-covered candy as well as beautiful photo greeting cards on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings. Participants receive financial compensation in the form of honorariums for their time (so as not to interfere or result in the cancellation of participants' fixed income from the government), a certificate of completion and can count on references for future employment opportunities. Remaining revenues are invested back into materials to ensure sustainability of the program moving forward.

Approximately two years after establishment, Boxes of Hearts has been embraced by local small businesses and large corporations alike. Ongoing partnerships with the Downtown Guelph Business Association (DGBA), Old Quebec Street Mall and The Co-operators are fruitful! During the warmer months, participants manage vendor tables and sales of social enterprise products at DGBA's Wednesday Market and Friday Noon Hour Concerts. In November and December, participants manage vendor tables and sales of social enterprise products at holiday markets. The Guelph Animal Hospital and Sweet Temptations Cupcakery provide retail space to sell products with all proceeds going back into the program. Three Boxes of Hearts participants keep record and stock inventory at The Guelph Animal Hospital and Sweet Temptations Cupcakery on a weekly basis.

Local businesses (Wayne Pitman Ford Lincoln Inc. and Home Group Realty) and non-profit organizations (YMCA-YWCA of Guelph, The Guelph Community Foundation and Big Brothers Big Sisters Guelph) regularly place orders for Volunteer Appreciation Week and staff Valentine's Day and Christmas gifts. In

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addition to these revenue sources, products are for sale online on Community of Hearts' website and orders are filled by participants on a weekly basis. Outcomes of the program include a sense of community, belonging, and a sense of pride in a job well done.

Pre-COVID, Boxes of Hearts ran programs 10 months a year and had a core team made up of 11 passionate volunteers supporting nine participants each semester. There is a growing waiting list of interested candidates, and Boxes of Hearts hopes to expand to additional days to meet this need. As we grow in capacity we hope to serve more individuals in our community who could benefit from this training experience. Without the financial support from individuals like you, Connie, and other community members would not have access to these skill-building opportunities.

Loss of daily tools/connections as a result of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown has meant that our kitchen could not meet standards set by Public Health for proper social distancing. Community of Hearts participants experience social isolation more intensely than other populations and are at risk of developing depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and other mental health and physical illnesses. Revitalization of the Boxes of Hearts Social Enterprise Program via renovations and expanding our public health approved kitchen will mean we can revitalize the program, and improve participants' lives by giving them skills to build community support systems and resiliency (emotionally/financially) in the face of a pandemic and economic crisis. With our eyes looking to the future and longevity of this program, we are seeking funding to renovate and expand the current Public Health Approved kitchen. This funding will support the upgrade to the electrical work, purchase and installation of a new stove and restructuring of the space to better accommodate participant needs and meet COVID-19 protocols.

Please visit our website to see the products and the Local Heroes interview by CTV with our participants and volunteers.