

Bridges to Belonging launches Build-A-Bridge to create more Accessibility, Inclusion, Equity and Belonging

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Kitchener, Ont. - Kitchener charity Bridges to Belonging is excited to announce the launch of the Build-A-Bridge Monthly Partner Program.

Build-A-Bridge is an opportunity for community members across Waterloo Region to partner with Bridges to Belonging by making a monthly financial contribution, and social investment for positive change, in the trajectory of the lives of people with disabilities and diverse identities.

In 2019, 87,600 people (20.8%) identified as living with a disability in the Region. The primary source of income for most adults with a disability is the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The current ODSP maximum allowance for the basic needs of a single recipient is \$672/month with the rate adjusted to \$969/month if they have a spouse. In 2020 there were 52,140 people with an income between \$10,000 to \$19,999 in Waterloo Region (Statistics Canada).

The data clearly demonstrates the financial barrier that exists for people with disabilities to live with the freedom of choice, personal expression, and equitable access to resources while attending to their social determinants of health and wellbeing needs and enjoying the rights and privileges of their citizenship.

Bridges to Belonging is a non-government funded social enterprise. We uphold the absolute and inherent value and dignity of every person with a disability, their basic human need for social connection, and their rights to live free of barriers to inclusion with choice, personal expression, equitable access to resources and civic participation as valued members of our human family and community. As facilitators we offer an unconventional approach to traditional disability programs, placements and services by walking alongside the person in a one-to-one relationship to be empowered to envision and determine the life they want, set, accomplish and sustain their goals and aspirations and develop an unpaid network of supportive relationships.

Removing the financial barrier to valuable resources and personal facilitators creates possibilities and opportunities for people with disabilities to step into their personal power, build social connections, become employed, and engage in volunteerism, while increasing their independence, living a healthier lifestyle, reducing isolation and improving their quality of life.

100 per cent of all Build-A-Bridge contributions are used to remove any fee-for-service cost for youth, adults and seniors who self-identify with ANY disability (physical, developmental, cognitive, psychosocial, mental health, Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) or chronic pain), experiencing social isolation and barriers to inclusion with a facilitator who will walk with them as a trusted guide and resource to create personalized plans, discover pathways and access inclusive community opportunities to express their gifts and

strengths, pursue their passions, develop a network of support and achieve their personal goals for the life they want to live.

"I have been working with my Facilitator for a while. We have tried quite a few things and slowly I am starting to put some passion back into my life and move toward my goals." ~ Self Advocate

"So far, this has been the best, most useful program that Christina has participated in. Christina has experienced the largest strides toward independence, confidence and acceptance toward independent living ever. Independent Facilitation has been the most crucial program that Christina has been a part of and the most helpful to me, as the caregiver. Thank you for everything so far. I honestly don't know what our lives would be like without you in them anymore!" ~ Family Member

We invite you to join our Build-A-Bridge Monthly Partner Program and become a Bridge Builder, whose investment positively impacts the trajectory of the lives of people with disabilities and diverse identities across Waterloo Region.

To become a Bridge Builder please go to <http://www.bridgestobelonging.ca/donate/>

For more information please email Carmen Sutherland, Community Relations Liaison at communityrelations@bridgestobelonging.ca

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