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Volunteer Grandparent Gains A Second Family

Dayle is a senior living in Metro Vancouver who volunteers – as a grandma.

Her own son and daughter-in-law are unable to have children of their own so she decided to become the Gilchrist family's volunteer grandparent.

"Anybody who will listen knows I've adopted four grandchildren – it changed my life," said Dayle. "It makes you feel younger when you're out with kids and doing the things kids do."

Mary Gilchrist is a single mother raising four children on her own. A native of B.C., she moved to France when her children were young to be with their father. But the relationship between Gilchrist and the children's father didn't last. When they split up, she moved back to Metro Vancouver with her children. She had no family close by.

Five years ago, while reading the local paper, she found an article that insisted it took a village to raise a child.

"That really bugged me. What if you don't have the help of an entire village? What if you're doing it on your own?"

Shortly after reading the article, Gilchrist found an advertisement for Volunteer Grandparents, a non-profit organization in Burnaby, B.C., which pairs seniors with children who don't have a grandparent figure in their lives.

She felt the program could help her children develop a meaningful, lasting relationship with another adult.

"There are 12.5 million volunteers in Canada contributing more than two billion hours every year," said Ruth MacKenzie, President & CEO of Volunteer Canada. "The work of volunteers like Dayle is essential to our communities as well as to our social fabric and telling them how their contributions are making a positive impact is one of the best ways to thank them."

Gaining a grandma

When the Gilchrist family was paired with Dayle they began to spend lots of time together: going to movies, the park, attending festivals, and celebrating family birthdays. Over time, their relationship grew stronger, until Dayle was no longer a volunteer – to the Gilchrists, she became grandma.

“There are endless ways to volunteer in your community; we need only be aware of our surroundings and really observe what goes on around us,” said Dave Baspaly, Executive Director of Volunteer Burnaby.

“Volunteerism is literally everywhere. Volunteering is a positive chain that goes around making the world a happier and healthier place for everyone.”

The Gilchrists don’t have an entire village behind them. But with Dayle’s involvement, this family has grown and become stronger.

The Gilchrist children have someone else they can trust, and Mary has someone she can count on and confide in.

“The kids absolutely love (Dayle). She has a really good heart, and she’s genuine, and she just loves the kids. For me, she’s like the mom I never had. She’s part of our family.”

For more information about Volunteer Grandparents, please visit www.volunteergrandparents.ca.

About National Volunteer Week

National Volunteer Week (www.volunter.ca/nvw) pays tribute to the millions of Canadian volunteers who graciously donate their time and energy. This year’s 68th annual NVW takes place the week of April 10 to 16. It is Canada’s largest celebration of volunteers, volunteerism, and civic participation. The theme of this year’s National Volunteer Week is **Volunteers: Passion. Action. Impact.**

National Volunteer Week was first proclaimed in 1943 as an initiative to draw the public’s attention to the vital contribution of women to the war effort on the home front. In the late 1960s, the focus was revived and broadened to include all community volunteers.

Investors Group has sponsored National Volunteer week for 12 years as part of its commitment to corporate citizenship. The company is a founding member of Volunteer Canada’s Corporate Council on Volunteering.

Blood Disorder Survivor Volunteers to Protect the Health of Others

Edmonton native Abby has received more than 25 blood transfusions in her 20 years of life. When this University of Alberta student was young, the transfusions happened so frequently that she never even stopped to ponder where all that blood came from.

“When I was younger, I thought it just appeared out of nowhere.”

As she grew older, she realized the necessity of donations from the Canadian public. This realization inspired her to volunteer with Canadian Blood Services, and become a donor ambassador.

When Abby was three years old she was diagnosed with sickle cell anaemia, a blood disorder that causes red blood cells to assume an abnormal, rigid shape. The cells are left fragile, and this leads to a variety of complications.

Abby's life-saving medical treatments allow her to lead a full, healthy life.

Reaching out to donors

Abby decided to volunteer with Canadian Blood Services in 2009 after recognizing its importance in saving the lives of many Canadians. She began by speaking at events to raise awareness of the need for donors, and to give a human face to the organization's work.

"Volunteerism is the ultimate expression of personal responsibility," said Karen Lynch, Volunteer Canada board member and Executive Director of Volunteer Alberta. "Alberta's rural roots set the foundation for generations of volunteers when neighbours relied on each other for social and economic stability. While life has changed since those early days, Alberta's values about community are entrenched."

"One person can still make a difference, and more importantly, should make a difference. One in three Albertans choose to 'care' and choose to share their time, every day in every community across our province."

Today, Abby goes to clinics and speaks with first-time donors. She reassures them if they're nervous, and she speaks to them about the programs run by Canadian Blood Services. She also hopes that by reaching out personally to these people and thanking them for their contribution, she will encourage them to remain life-long donors.

"There are 12.5 million volunteers in Canada contributing more than two billion hours every year," said Ruth MacKenzie, President & CEO of Volunteer Canada. "The work of volunteers like Abby is essential to our communities as well as to our social fabric and telling them how their contributions are making a positive impact is one of the best ways to thank them."

It's important for Abby to give back to an organization that has done so much for her, and she is pleased to raise awareness so others who rely on blood transfusions can receive them.

"Volunteering is a way of educating people, but it's also a form of thank you," Abby said. "It's an acknowledgement of people who come in and give their time and it's a form of appreciation."

For more information about Canadian Blood Services, please visit www.bloodservices.ca