

REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM



Program Evaluation – Year 2

Funded by



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...a very worthwhile initiative...so much potential for this to be a very positive experience for all participants...sincerely hope it will continue...

Executive Summary

This evaluation focuses on Year 2 of the **Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism** program, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) and sponsored by Community Living Ajax-Pickering and Whitby (CLAPW).

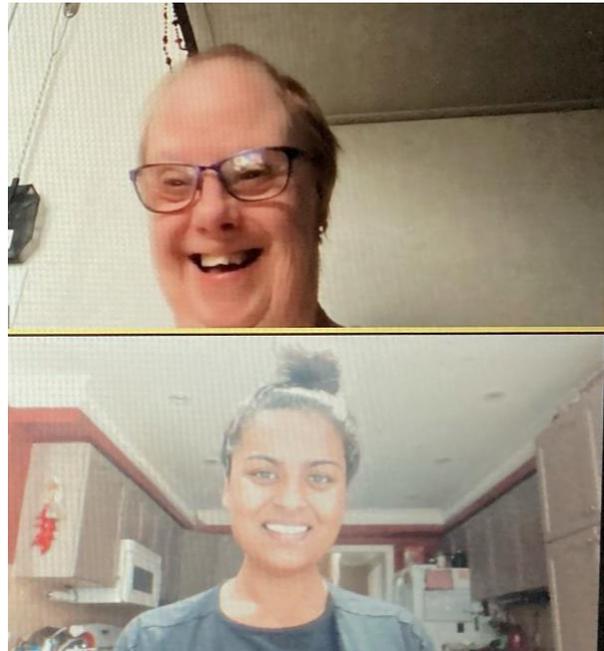
Designed to enhance the engagement of individuals supported by CLAPW in their communities, the program involved twenty-five more individuals in 2021-22, building on the twenty who participated in Year 1. The twenty-five 2021-22 participants were connected to volunteers, and together they participated in activities of the individual's choosing. Due to the continuing presence of COVID, many of those activities were online.

This evaluation is based on two sources of input. The first was a survey developed by OTF and the second a survey from CMCS Consulting Services, the company that also completed the first year's evaluation.

Twenty-five participants from Year 2 contributed to the OTF survey. Fifteen volunteers completed the CMCS survey, along with eight families of participants.

As in Year 1 of the program, the participants chose to engage in a range of activities:

- On-line games;
- Activities of daily living, reading, gardening and arts and crafts;
- Watching videos on travel, history, nature and geography;
- Quiz-based activities;
- Watching sports shows;



- Listening to music;
- Chatting;
- Taking walks around the neighbourhood; and
- Painting bird houses.

Volunteer and family respondents also identified that:

- Participants were able to be involved in activities as often as they wanted.
- There were other benefits for the participants.
- CLAPW prepared the volunteers well for their role.
- CLAPW continued to support both the volunteers and participants well throughout.
- Volunteers and family members also benefited.

More than half the participants reported to OTF that they reached their most important goal, whether that goal was:

- Feeling less alone;
- Feeling more connected to their community;
- Having people they could ask for help;
- Making more friends; or
- Talking to more people.

Some volunteers and family members put forward ideas for change to the program:

- In-person activities including outdoors where both the person supported and volunteer could do things together.
- Group sessions with other volunteers once a month would be nice.
- Get everyone to fill out a questionnaire about likes/dislikes (almost like a dating profile) to ensure good matches.

As in 2020-21, there were many positive comments from the volunteers about the work of CLAPW staff:

- *Sharon Burgess was an amazing help in getting me up and running. She showed me the ropes and helped guide me along the road I've been going down for the last 2 years.*
- *CLAPW helped me by letting me know ahead of time what the client enjoyed. They also provided me with examples of what we can do during our sessions.*
- *My match had a great support system and her care team were able to assist when needed.*

Families were also complementary of CLAPW's preparation of the volunteers:

- *Everything was set up and prepared. Extra effort for a good match was made.*
- *Our volunteer had a lot of information and didn't hesitate to ask me further questions.*

Most important, all the stakeholders felt there were many benefits to the program and that it should continue:

- *Something to look forward to and a sense of autonomy.*
- *One-on-one conversations that were comfortable and enjoyable.*
- *Contact and conversation over and above scheduled times.*
- *Learning how to engage online.*
- *A great way to be engaged.*
- *Connecting with someone the individual's own age.*
- *We would dance and sing via Zoom – our own dance party.*
- *Increased sociability including introducing the volunteer to new music.*
- *Growth and inclusivity.*

About the Program

The ***Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism*** program was developed to increase the community involvement of individuals supported by Community Living Ajax-Pickering and Whitby (CLAPW), thereby reducing their physical and social isolation. Funding was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF).

The idea was that CLAPW would link individuals it supported with volunteers who together would participate in activities of each individual's choosing.

The second year of the program, that started in July of 2021, built on its first year, in which twenty individuals were matched with volunteers. Over the second year, twenty-five more individuals were introduced to the program. Due to the continuing COVID pandemic, the second year involved mostly on-line activities, although eight individuals and volunteers met in person.

This evaluation was completed by CMCS Consulting Services of Oshawa, the same company that evaluated the program in 2021. As after the first year, the CMCS-created surveys were circulated to those who volunteered in the ***Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism*** program and to families of CLAPW participants.

Also as after the first year, these surveys augmented a survey created by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, that was completed by



the individuals supported by CLAPW who participated.

The OTF survey focused on whether the people from CLAPW who participated in the program met their most important goal:

- Felt less alone;
- Felt more connected to their community;
- Had people they could ask for help;
- Made more friends; or
- Talked to more people

Twenty-seven responses were recorded for the Trillium survey¹.

The CMCS survey posed the following questions:

- Were the individuals supported by CLAPW able to engage in meaningful activities of their choosing?

¹ This number includes two responses from individuals who participated in both the first and second year of

the program, in addition to responses from twenty-five participants who started in the second year.

- Did the activities happen as often as the individuals supported by CLAPW wanted?
- Did CLAPW prepare the volunteers well for helping the individual they supported?
- Were the volunteers well matched with the person supported in terms of their interests?
- Did the volunteers receive the support they needed from CLAPW over the course of the Project?

- Is ***Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism*** a valuable program that provides people supported by CLAPW with a range of activities and helps them lead a life of their choosing?

The CMCS survey also asked for ideas on enhancing the program and invited comments related to each of the questions above. Fifteen volunteers responded to the CMCS survey, along with eight families.

Findings

The findings in this report are drawn from the surveys conducted by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for individuals involved in the program and by CMCS Consulting Services for volunteers and families.

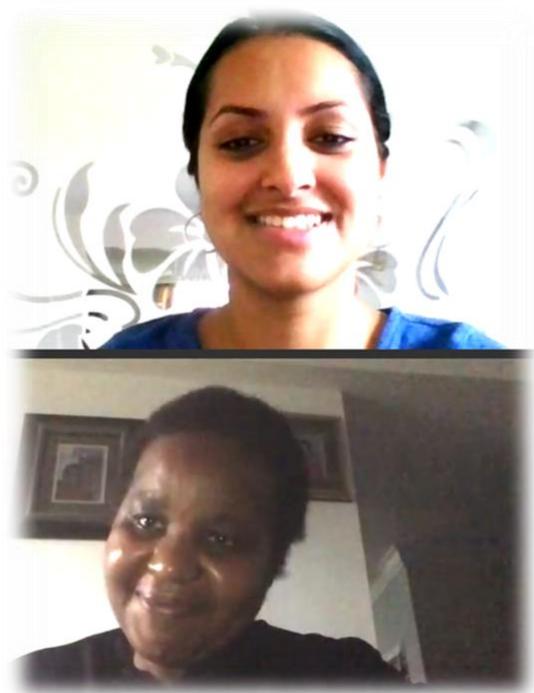
OTF Survey Results

The OTF survey results focused on the most important goal identified by each participant and whether that goal was achieved.

The results were as follows:

- One said they felt less alone, of the two who said this was their most important goal.
- Three felt more connected to their community, of the seven who said this was their most important goal.
- Four said they talked to more people, of the eight who said this was their most important goal.
- One said they have people they could ask for help, of the two who said this was their most important goal.
- Six indicated they had made more friends, of the eight who said this was their most important goal.

In total, fifteen of the twenty-seven respondents (56%) reported to OTF that they met their most important goal.



CMCS Survey Results

As noted, the CMCS surveys were completed by fifteen volunteers and eight families of the participants involved in 2021-22, the second year of the project.

Activities of Their Choosing

The first question posed in the CMCS survey asked whether participants were able to engage in meaningful activities of their choosing.

Eleven of the fifteen volunteers (73%) strongly agreed and four agreed (27%) that participants were able to engage in meaningful activities of their choosing. Three of the eight families that responded strongly agreed (38%) and five agreed (62%).

So, for both volunteers and families, the answer was definitely “yes”.

The activities the volunteers said they facilitated included the following:

- On-line games such as Jeopardy and Hangman;
- Activities of daily living, reading, gardening, arts and crafts, conversation, singing;
- Watching history videos and educational games;
- Watching videos on animals and geography;
- Quiz-based activities;
- Making slide shows;
- Listening to music; and

- Watching sports including wrestling and baseball.

Families noted the following activities:

- Chatting;
- Playing games;
- Listening to music;
- Walks around the neighbourhood;
- Painting bird houses; and
- Playing board games.

Additional comments from the volunteers about the activities included:

- *Many of these activities are virtual but through these activities we have gotten to know each other and learn a lot from each other.*
- *I always start our meetings with a greeting and asking what he would like to do today for activities.*
- *This was somewhat limited to being on Zoom, however I always choose/talk about the interest of who I was matched with.*
- *Sometimes my client just wanted to talk about the other activities she was involved in... she would decide when she wanted to switch on to doing something different.*
- *All our meetings are based on person-led activities.*

Additional comments from families about the activities included:

- *I am not sure if the volunteer asked my family member directly if there is any other activity she would prefer...while this might take some coaxing and encouragement, I think it would be good for my family member to make these decisions/choices.*

Frequency of Activities

The second question from the CMCS survey asked whether the individual was able to participate in activities as often as they wanted.

Among the volunteers, 11 of 15 (73%) strongly agreed and 4 (27%) agreed. One of the eight families (13%) strongly agreed and 7 of 8 (87%) agreed.

As with the first question, the answer from volunteers and families was “yes”.

The comments of the volunteers about frequency included:

- *We often meet for extra encounters last minute if there is something that has happened that we would like to share or just looking to connect.*

Other Benefits

Asked whether the person they supported benefited in other ways beyond having something enjoyable to do, ten of the fifteen volunteers (67%) strongly agreed and five agreed (23%).

From the family perspective, three families strongly agreed (38%) and five agreed (62%) that there were other benefits.

Again, the answer is “yes”, there were other benefits.

The volunteers identified what they felt were the additional benefits:

- *(The Individual I was involved with) suggested different places in the world they wanted to see and we would go there on Zoom through YouTube walking tours.*
- *Something for the individual to look forward to and a sense of autonomy.*
- *One-on-one conversations that were comfortable and enjoyable.*
- *Opportunity to relax and have fun.*
- *Satisfaction when providing correct answers to quizzes.*
- *Contact and conversation over and above scheduled times.*
- *We would dance and sing via Zoom – our own dance party.*
- *Increased sociability including introducing the volunteer to new music.*
- *Growth and inclusivity.*

Regarding other benefits, families added:

- *Learning how to engage online.*
- *Family member doesn't like to leave home so this was a great way to be engaged socially via Zoom.*
- *Connecting with someone closer to the individual's own age.*
- *Learning new jewelry techniques.*

Preparation of Volunteers by CLAPW

Asked whether CLAPW prepared them well for helping the person they supported to participate in activities of their choosing,

Ten of the fifteen volunteers (67%) strongly agreed, four agreed (27%) and one disagreed (6%). As for families, three strongly agreed (38%) and five agreed (62%) that CLAPW prepared the volunteers well.

The response of both volunteers and families confirmed the merits of work done by CLAPW in preparing the volunteers.

Volunteers' observations about preparation included:

- *Sharon was able to prepare me to help the person I supported... she sat down with me before I began my placement.*
- *Any questions or support I required was at arm's reach.*
- *Sharon Burgess was an amazing help in getting me up and running. She showed me the ropes and helped guide me along the road I've been going down for the last 2 years.*
- *CLAPW helped me by letting me know ahead of time what the client enjoyed. They also provided me with examples of what we can do during our sessions.*
- *I was well-trained and informed of the best ways to engage with the individual I supported.*
- *Before meeting with each participant, CLAPW staff provided me with a quick overview of each individual and demonstrated how the meetings should be done.*
- *I was given a brief background about the client and their interests but*

mostly I learned gradually from my one-on-one interactions with the client.

- *My match had a great support system and her care team were able to assist when needed.*

Families' perspective on CLAPW's preparation of the volunteers included:

- *Everything was set up and prepared. Extra effort for a good match was made.*
- *CLAPW prepared the volunteer to meet with my family member but the volunteer was not always available at the times which had been arranged so there were occasions when the meetings did not materialize.*
- *Our volunteer had a lot of information and didn't hesitate to ask me further questions so he could understand our family member better.*
- *They were supported to establish a rapport as well as help with any technical difficulties on Zoom.*
- *Our volunteer seems to have a good understanding of how to use the online applications used in their conversations.*

Fit of Matches of Volunteer and Individual

Asked whether the volunteer was well matched to the individual they were involved with, eight of the fifteen volunteers (53%) strongly agreed while seven agreed (47%). As for families, three strongly agreed (38%), four agreed (50%) and one didn't know or couldn't say (12%).

By their responses, the volunteers and families said "yes" to whether the volunteer and participant were well-matched.

Volunteer comments about fit included:

- *We both enjoy playing sports, watching similar movies, and going to concerts. We get along very well, and I'm so glad to have met them through this program.*
- *I was well-matched since I am trained in how to build trust in therapeutic relationships and these 2 individuals trusted me and share their feelings, likes, and dislikes with me.*
- *I'm sort of in the middle, while I do think we connect well as we like things like skateboarding, he is a very sporty guy while I'm more of a gamer/music man so I'm on the fence with this one.*
- *Even though we don't have too many similar interests it was nice learning about each other and the different things we both enjoy.*
- *We both had a broad range of interests and we often had many similar interests such as Harry Potter, escape rooms, animals and other movie interests.*

- *I was not put into a process of finding an individual with the same interests, but I did not personally mind.*
- *I think CLAPW has matched me well with all the clients that I have interacted with on a 1:1 basis. They also provide you with a choice of pairing you with a client that you think you could relate to as well.*
- *We both loved music and were able to bond together throughout meetings weekly.*
- *Both of us got along very well and we get more comfortable with each other after each meeting.*

Families added to the issue of fit:

- *The volunteer took an interest in activities which my family member enjoyed and always tried to make their meetings enjoyable.*
- *Very pleased with this pairing!*

Ongoing Support from CLAPW

Asked whether throughout their time in the program, the volunteers received the support they needed from CLAPW, twelve of the fifteen (80%) strongly agreed and three agreed (20%). Regarding ongoing support to their family member participating in the match program, four strongly agreed (50%) and four agreed (50%) they got the support they needed.

This indicates that CLAPW not only prepared volunteers and families well but supported them well throughout.

Volunteer comments about ongoing support included:

- *Yes, Sharon is always available to help and will respond to emails regarding support in a very timely manner and is always willing to help or offer suggestions.*
- *The Volunteer Services and all staff at CLAPW are always there to help. Whenever I needed extra resources to engage with the person I support or if I needed personal questions addressed, they have always been happy to help.*
- *I have received the most support someone could ever need. Everyone at CLAPW is so accommodating towards new people that it feels like I'm a family member right from the start.*
- *I always had staff supporting me and giving me ideas.*
- *I did receive the support I needed. It was not made difficult for me to cancel a session if I needed to and the staff was very understanding.*

- *Whether it was a quick question or just an update, the staff were always quick to respond and supported me.*
- *My supervisor has been very helpful and supportive throughout my time at CLAPW.*
- *Sharon is always ready and willing if there are any issues that arise such as contact or platform problems that arise.*
- *All CLAPW staff were very supportive and appreciated their kindness.*
- *Sharon was always around to answer questions.*
- *CLAPW is always available to answer questions and provide necessary resources.*

Family comments about ongoing support included:

- *Initial background support until up and running independently.*
- *CLAPW was always available and helpful in setting up the meetings and ensuring they were a positive experience.*
- *Supported person was supported to get logged on to zoom and CLAPW staff supported the relationship by assisting with communication, other technical needs, as well as assistance to obtain or purchase supplies needed during their time together.*
- *Support has been provided to ease communication between the 1:1 parties.*

Benefits to Volunteer and Families

Asked if they, the volunteers, also benefitted from being involved in the match program, all fifteen strongly agreed (11/73%) or agreed (4/27%). All eight families (100%) also strongly agreed (2/25%) or agreed (6/75%) that there were benefits to the family that accrued from the involvement of their family member in the program.

This confirmed that the benefits of the match program extended beyond the individuals supported by CLAPW.

The comments of the volunteers to this question included:

- *Yes, I did benefit, I was able to see places in the world I have not seen before on Zoom in our time together.*
- *I have benefited immensely from being involved in this program. My meetings with the person I support is something that I enjoy greatly. My biggest passion is to give back to my community and volunteering in this program to help limit social isolation and be an engaging part of someone's day is more than I could ask for. Through this experience I have gained self- confidence, felt like I have made a difference in someone's life, have a bigger role in my community and have fun.*
- *I benefited a lot from this program, especially on the social aspect. I feel so much more comfortable with myself and others after being at CLAPW for almost 2 years. This program has changed me so much and I'm forever thankful for this opportunity.*
- *It was a great opportunity to work on 1:1 sessions, something I didn't have too much experience with. I now however feel very comfortable with it so it was good to have this experience.*
- *I think volunteering has given me more of a sense of purpose in life and It was a great opportunity to interact with my match and build a bond with her and have a day to have fun and relax which is great because often it's so common to feel isolated from others due to all our priorities.*
- *I benefited as I learned a lot of techniques and methods on how to work with individuals.*
- *I like knowing that I make some difference in the lives of these individuals. It has also added to my overall experience of working with people of different backgrounds and abilities.*
- *I have made a great connection with the person I am volunteering with and look forward to our time spent together. I love learning new things together, even random things that come up in our conversations that we would both love to learn more about. It's such a positive thing, and I am extremely happy with every aspect of volunteering with CLAP-W.*
- *I enjoyed being able to meet with my match and share time together.*
- *It's very sobering and fulfilling to be a part of a great initiative.*

Families referenced a number of benefits, including:

- *Gave much needed respite time to me the principal caregiver.*

- *The volunteer took my daughter out for a long walk which she enjoyed very much and which also gave me a break.*
- *The Zoom 1:1 was beneficial to the person being supported as they would normally be in person at day services but could not, due to Pandemic. It allowed for companionship, as well as mental and physical well-being. as this person lives independently in the SIL program.*
- *I'm not sure benefitted is the best way to describe impact to our family however it is comforting to know our family member has more interactions outside of the home (even though online),*
- *I was able to do some things that I normally wouldn't do until she was in bed for the night.*

Input from the volunteers about the value of the program included:

- *This program helps individuals to have a sense of autonomy and control over their lives in terms of what they want to do. It helps them to connect with their community and to engage in exciting activities they might not have had access to without this program.*
- *The 1:1 program is such a gem of a program as it allows for clients to become more comfortable with social aspects. The idea of just having a conversation with another person can really help build character and respect.*
- *Yes, I believe it's a very valuable program. Sometimes it's nice just to chat with one person and constantly meeting up with someone once a week you can build a good relationship which can be great for the clients.*
- *I believe this program allows them to engage in activities that they enjoy and they are able to express themselves and make new connections.*
- *I have witnessed how much the 1:1 support means to the supported clients. Clients always look forward to these meetings and truly appreciate the time we spend with them.*
- *I feel that all the individuals in the program are given the opportunity to share what they enjoy with the volunteers.*
- *It's a very good program and the 1:1 format makes the sessions more focused and productive. It ensures that both parties involved have equal opportunity to participate in the initiative.*

Value of the Program

Asked whether *Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism* is a valuable program that provides people supported with a range of activities and helps them lead a life of their choosing, all fifteen volunteer respondents strongly agreed (13/87%) or agreed (2/13%). All eight families (100%) concurred that *Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism* is a valuable program, with four strongly agreeing (50%) and four agreeing.

This provides OTF and CLAPW with overall confirmation of the merits and efficacy of the program.

Families reinforced the sentiment of the volunteers:

- *It is great to have another avenue of activity.*
- *Having a contact outside of her usual people has broadened her perspective.*
- *I feel it is a very important program. I think it is a win/win situation in that it gives volunteers a valuable addition to their resumes and benefits the recipient with meaningful 1:1 companionship and friendship.*
- *Absolutely!*
- *I like the fact that the interaction is 1:1 and is hopefully more realistic with an interaction our family member would have with anyone else in her community.*

Ideas for Improvement

Asked whether they had ideas for making the *Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism* program better, two volunteers (13%) strongly agreed, four agreed (27%), four disagreed (27%) and 5 (33%) indicated they didn't know or couldn't say. Of the eight family respondents, two agreed (33%), one disagreed (17%) and three (50%) said they didn't know or couldn't say.

While the suggestions for change were limited, they point CLAPW in directions that may help make the match program even better.

Volunteers' comments included:

- *I do have some Ideas to help make the program better. Although there are so many things we can do with the*

person supported on zoom maybe outdoor activities where both the person supported and volunteer could do together.

- *I believe the program is good and as we know there is always room for improvement.*
- *To be honest I think it's perfect the way it is and at the moment I can't think of anything to add.*
- *It is overall a great program!*
- *Definitely, doing an activity in person would be more beneficial.*
- *Group sessions with other volunteers once a month would be nice.*

Families suggested the following:

- *I hope this program will continue. Would it be possible for volunteers to assist members of CLAPW with various activities with which they may need assistance and other events such as bowling which may take place at other locations.*
- *I'm happy with the way the program has evolved for my family member. My family member and his volunteer match now have an established friendship.*
- *It will be great when people can meet physically but I think, if the match is mutually beneficial for both parties, it adds so much value and opens up other potential opportunities and experiences for people.*
- *It would be nice if at some point the 1:1 interactions online were in person and more involved in the community in which my family member lives.*
- *Maybe get everyone fill out a questionnaire about likes/dislikes (almost like a dating profile) to ensure good matches. Also, get driving*

cleared before because sometimes busing isn't an option and if I have to take time away to drive my family member and hang around to bring her home, I might as well bring her myself.

Final Comments

Final comments from the volunteers included:

- *I thank this organization for giving me the opportunity to work with these 2 amazing individuals.*
- *I've loved every minute of my placement at CLAPW and I hope if everything goes well with my schooling that I can come back and work with the company some more.*
- *Cannot wait to continue and gain experience for my future as a Social Service Worker!*
- *I enjoyed my time with CLAPW and the 1:1 sessions were beneficial to me and the client as well.*
- *The 1:1 volunteer experience is truly great.*
 - *Absolutely a positive experience. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.*
- *I LOVED meeting my match and the CLAPW staff. Warmed my heart. Great organization to be a part of!! :)*
- *I appreciate the opportunity to be involved in community building through volunteering.*

Families noted the following:

- *This is a program that is in need of continuing.*
- *Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity*

- *This is a very worthwhile initiative. There is so much potential for this to be a very positive experience for all participants and I sincerely hope it will continue.*
- *I'm very pleased with this program and hopes it continues!!*
- *Great program! Great to have the 1:1 to allow for one's personal goals and interests to be realized. Opens the door to new people and new experiences that may not be available to a person, otherwise.*
- *My family member seems to enjoy her interactions with her volunteer match and I hope her match is gaining as much from the interaction as my family member is.*
- *It was nice while things were more shut down.*

Conclusion

Twenty-five more individuals participated in **Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism** in 2021-22.

Its benefits extended beyond those individuals supported by CLAPW to include their families and the volunteers involved.

As in Year 1, the program:

- Provided meaningful activities for participants;
- The activities were of the participants' choosing;
- The activities fulfilled the most important goal of many participants;
- The activities were as frequent as the participants wanted; and
- The volunteers and participants were well-supported by CLAPW in the beginning and throughout the year.
- Everyone involved benefitted.

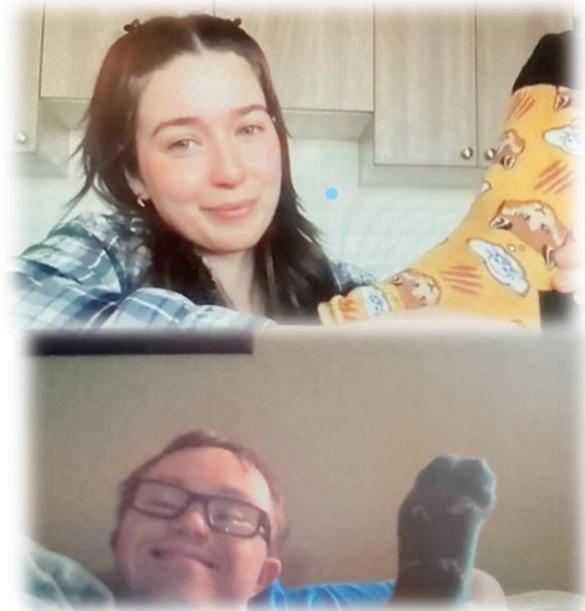
The majority of individual participants indicated that they met their most important goal.

Among the many positive comments from volunteers was this one:

- *Absolutely a positive experience. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.*

A family added:

- *This is a very worthwhile initiative. There is so much potential for this to be a very positive experience for all participants and I sincerely hope it will continue.*



Individuals, volunteers and families also offered up ideas for making the program even better.

Sharon Burgess and other CLAPW staff received a number of compliments for their work.

The success of **Reducing Social Isolation Through Volunteerism** reflects positively on the policies and funding of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and its commitment to community-building.

It also suggests that CLAPW is an innovative organization that can formulate and implement powerful ideas that enhance the lives of the individuals it supports.