



# My VON Story

120 stories of life, love, loss, fun and pride

written by VON employees in celebration of  
VON Canada's 120th Anniversary

November 2017



# Foreword

This year, VON Canada celebrates its 120th anniversary. One hundred and twenty years of nursing care and support provided by tens of thousands of VON employees and volunteers to millions of Canadians.

As our country grew, so too did VON – joining other pioneers to settle communities and establish towns and villages across this country. Through national hardships including pandemics, epidemics and economic crises, VON employees have been ready and eager to bring health education, relief and aid to those in need. Their compassion and desire to help others built VON’s foundation of trust and excellence.

Every day throughout our history VON employees have lived through and witnessed extraordinary events. Some were happy, some sad, some rewarding and some humorous; in celebration of our 120th anniversary, we asked employees to share with us 120 of those events. When reading the stories they submitted, a clear theme quickly emerges – the most meaningful and memorable moments in life are those shared with consideration and gratitude.

I believe that if we had collected stories from employees over the course of the past 120 years, they would not have been very different from those in this book. They would illustrate that respect, participation, responsiveness and courage mixed with kindness, compassion and a sense of humour are key to having a fulfilling life and career at VON.

I would like to thank those who submitted their stories, and all employees, for their ongoing commitment to the clients and communities we serve and for embodying VON’s values.

I sincerely hope you enjoy these stories as much as I have.

Jo-Anne Poirier  
President and CEO  
VON Canada

November 2017



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## The Right Career

When I first enrolled in the PSW program, someone told me about VON. I started to learn more about the company, and I learned that I wanted to be a part of it myself. When it came time to start applying for a student placement, I contacted the Education Department in Peterborough in hopes of doing my hours at the Beaverton Hub. I did the long drive down for an interview. They had never brought in students before but they decided to give it a shot. When I started my placement I got to know many different clients and I loved going every day. My preceptor was pretty awesome too. Near the end of my placement, I was offered a position with VON! It's been over a year now since I started, and I can honestly say I still enjoy going to work every day. I not only picked the right career for myself, but I also picked an amazing company to work for.

Katelyn Handy, PSW  
Durham



# That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles

I have worked as a CCA for almost 20 years. I love my job and it does have its moments. Over the years there have been many but this one sticks in my mind and has been used by me while being a mentor.

I had a 100+ year old client when I first started years ago. A very smart gentleman. He made me nervous for some reason even though I went there on a daily basis. One day after supper he wanted a cookie. He had received a huge can of fancy shortbreads in papers all done up nice. When I went to put them away they slipped from my hand and landed on the floor upside down! What to do? pick them back up? throw them all away? I was so embarrassed! I did not know if he would be angry or not. He laughed and told me to keep the ones that were not broken and just throw the rest out.

It broke the ice between us and actually I started to enjoy our visits. He was not as stuffy as I had once thought. Every night, for a long time after, he would tease me about those cookies and the look that was on my face. He would always want a cookie to see if I could get him one without dropping it!

We shared a lot of stories about his younger years. Some were very funny, coming from that old of a person. He was 105 when he passed and I still think of him often.

Carole Field, CCA





## Home Sweet Home

I met a man who lives 84 kms from my home. He asked me if I knew where Great Village was. I laughed and said yes, "I do". He asked me about a house just past Bowers Corner. He described the house and told me he grew up in that house. I said, "sir... I grew up in that house".

Turns out, he lived there in 1976 and I moved into the same house in 2000; it's my mom's house now. It was such a coincidence. He asked me to describe his house and tell him about the changes that it had gone through; he was so happy.

Kristin Weir  
Colchester East Hants





# Elly

Elly was a spirited woman who spoke truthfully about the things that were important to her. She was a true advocate for the care and support she received from VON. Her home was adorned with unique items depicting the American Southwest. It had been one of her favourite places to visit in her younger years. The living room was decorated to suit Elly's style. It made a statement.

The day that I met her she was sitting in a recliner in her living room. Her daughter and granddaughter were in the kitchen. They would chat back and forth with Elly while they cleaned or organized the cupboards for her.

Elly no longer had an interest in cooking or eating but she was adamant that her family and friends continue to enjoy a good meal as often as possible. The family had purchased all the necessary ingredients (Elly's specific list) to prepare a large pan of lasagna. Elly stayed in the living room and directed them step-by-step on how to cook, mix and layer the ingredients in the pan. They visited with her until the lasagna was completely baked and ready to serve. Elly insisted that all of us sample a piece of the lasagna before her daughter and granddaughter went home for the evening. Her granddaughter tried to convince her that she wasn't hungry and Elly jokingly said " I'm still the boss" with a big smile. Needless to say the lasagna was delicious. Elly made sure that her granddaughter took some home to share with the family.

This day put a smile on my face. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment that I spent with Elly on the journey to her final days. I will always remember her generosity and her determined spirit.

Jodie Radossevich  
Middlesex-Elgin



I used to think that old people had nothing to add  
I thought they were done living; that made me sad

Their happy days were gone, none left ahead  
Getting older I knew that part I would dread

Not so much the wrinkles and sag  
That wouldn't be fun, bit of a drag

It's the aches and the pains that never seem to end  
They're walking so stiff, will they break if they bend?

The memories they fade, the losses are great  
They shrug up their shoulders leaving it to fate

## Senior Moment

By Rita Barbaro  
Simcoe

Now I'm closer to senior than to my youth  
I've learned a few things; I'll tell you the truth

If you're lucky you'll live long enough to call yourself old  
No longer caring what others think, it's your time to be bold

Some things you'll lose but many you'll have gains  
No longer tied to the rules that kept you with chains

To those that value youth and all of its glory  
The truth is it's for you that now I feel sorry

To the young people that don't see the value in age  
Appreciate your life now but know it's just a stage





They call them senior moments that's just fine  
They don't last that long, the memories are mine

I zone out cause nothing interesting is happening  
Talking to you? No thanks, I'd rather be napping

Don't get me wrong I don't mean any disrespect  
But I know a few things; I did last time I checked

So ask a few questions come on don't be shy  
Don't wait until it's too late, someday I'll die

Just think all that they know can be handed down  
We should cherish that knowledge, take it to town



They're here to teach us life is worth living for all of its days  
Happiness and joy isn't just for the young, it's not just a phase

I now know to not judge others on the year they were born  
They don't want our pity, their losses are for them to mourn

I look at all they've gained with each passing year  
Now that's something to cherish, give that a cheer

Next time you see someone having a senior moment  
Smile as they zone out on a memory they can't forget

Then when they come back ask what they were thinking  
They'll be happy to share with you with an eye a winking

They'll know that you're getting it and it's never too late  
Having a senior moment together, now that would be great!



# Smile

I loved to visit this lovely lady from the Netherlands. She could speak fluent English but chose to speak Dutch. I'd ask her a question "Would you like some tea?" She would reply in Dutch. I went home and Googled a translation app. I translated the usual questions.

I'd ask, "How are you today?" – "What would you like for lunch?" – "What would you like in your tea?" usually 5 teaspoons of sugar. Every time I asked a question she laughed even harder.

At 95, she finally spoke in English - "Are you asking me out on a date?"

I love what I do. I get to smile and bring a smile every day.

Mike Balsor  
Annapolis Valley





## My VON Nurse

When I was in my 2nd year of nursing, about 36 years ago, I met my first VON nurse as part of my program. I had never given home nursing much thought when doing my other clinical areas, medical, surgical, pediatric and geriatric and was immediately fascinated by the idea of caring for people in their home. My "teacher", Susan, began our day by telling me about the VON, its history and how they had cared for people in their homes exclusively for some time. She wore a white blouse and blue slacks and a blue sweater; I loved the "uniform". Everywhere we went Susan was met with such respect, she was always "My VON Nurse" to each of the people in her care. One of the most interesting parts was the travelling we did that day, I saw places I'd never seen before, we looked after people of all economic backgrounds, yet everywhere we went there was that respect for the VON! Susan exemplified what I believed to be the qualities of a VON nurse and today as I work for the VON it's my goal and desire to exemplify those same qualities with every person in my care.

Deborah Bechard, RN  
Hamilton



## Happiness Is...

I started with VON 4 years ago. I worked 5 years at a nursing home and was terrified to do the change but I did it and never looked back!

Being a CCA is one of the most rewarding jobs ever, especially with VON. We are allowing these people to stay in their homes with help from us. Every day I smile as I walk into clients' homes knowing that they can't wait to see me.

Sarah Dean, CCA  
Pictou



## Susan and Merle

My VON story began 16 years ago February 2001. My sister, who has spina bifida, had wonderful girls from the VON come into the house to help her begin each day. I was impressed with the care these girls provided and decided it was just what I wanted to do also.

I was one of the first to complete a VON sponsored CCA program; and I began my days with VON. It is wonderful to go, each day, to provide the care and support people need to remain safely and content in their own homes.

As VON employees we mentor the new students of the CCA programs. Five years ago I was assigned a student to mentor. My first reaction, when he stepped out of his car, was to wonder why a man his age would be starting a new career. His first thought of me was that I looked stern. Days went by as I mentored him to become a CCA. Upon graduation, he accepted employment with VON.

A few months after his joining the team, we began to date. What a fantastic idea! I looked less stern and he looked younger to me by now. We have now been happily married three years.

We both enjoy our work with VON, the clients, and stories from our day.

Susan Scotney-Hudson and Merle Hudson  
Annapolis Valley





## What a Team!

Ever since I was a child, I have heard people talk about VON and the great service they provide to individuals. Even now, most people I talk to refer to the staff who come to their loved one's home as "the VON worker" when meanwhile, the PSW that comes, is from another organization. So many people think VON equals home care. When I saw the job posting come up for a Coordinator, Meals on Wheels Program, I immediately sent in my resume. I was so excited and passionate about the work VON does and about the opportunity to serve with this team. I started to cry in the interview, and when I was offered the position. While my first seven months here have been hectic at times, I have been moved each and every day by the passion, commitment, team work and service that the staff and volunteers provide. Every time things get overwhelming, I always say, "we wouldn't have got through this if we didn't have such a great team". Whenever a need comes up, whether it's flooding, road closures, not seen not found visits or a difficult phone call, I always know that I just need to turn to anyone in the team and they are there to pitch in.

Debbie Burns, Coordinator, Meals on Wheels  
Peel

## More Than a Job

I've been doing this line of work for 18 years in nursing home environments but the last 5 with VON. I have to say, doing this work is so rewarding. Hearing so many wonderful memories and stories that helped shape people into what they are today. Getting to know their habits and why they have their care done in a particular way, is all a part of the job.

The lady I visited, at first, was very depressed and lonely not being able to do all she used to. Needing outside help made her feel terrible and she refused a lot in the beginning. Making meals was the start of her wonderful journey.



As we all began our daily visits we got to know more each time we went and everyone worked together to tidy up and organize a daily routine to suit her day as she was used to. It was like watching a flower bloom each week just a bit more. The caregivers became not just workers but friends providing companionship and a listening ear to her exciting life, lived in her large family home of generations.

Now, when I visit, she keeps a little measuring cup of sunflower seeds on the table and we do the most amazing thing together. After care is provided and breakfast is finished, she introduces me to her oasis which she loves - two little chipmunks she feeds from her lap every morning on her front step. This brings such a smile to both of our faces and such a memory I will cherish forever. Seeing this beautiful lady bloom and become so proud and happy being able to enjoy staying in her own home and making these kinds of memories means the world to her, and us.



# Grateful

I answered the phone and a quiet well-spoken lady spoke and said “Hello Amanda, my name is Melanie Therrien”. She invited me for an interview at the Beaverton office for the VON Assisted Living Service program, North Durham Hub with the then Coordinator Sasha Harrison. I can’t say exactly what they saw in me but my extensive PSW training showed my knowledge of the PSW scope, my RPN experience was in a location with great rapport with additional training and I was a cancer survivor with a unique life experience! Just over 1 year post chemotherapy treatment I wondered, did I have it together enough to manage the day to day operations for an Assisted Living Service program, FOR VON CANADA?!

It’s an amazing feeling to go from February 2013 not knowing if you will make it past treatment to October 2014 working your dream job. My great Aunt worked for VON in Ottawa for over 20 years, I know she would have been proud that I joined the VON organization too.

I joined the VON ALS team on a 1 year contract, by 8 months it was determined that our brother and sister hubs were growing! Some things were rearranged and as a result I was offered a permanent full time position as the Coordinator for the VON ALS program for North Durham region. I was proud as a peach.

As I grew as a Coordinator, I continued to work as hard as I could with the guidance of my esteemed mentor Melanie. She is one person that could change the world. The Coordinators from all of the hubs worked as a close-knit team despite being so far apart. We would call and discuss difficult situations or brainstorm together when trying to make positive changes in our own hubs. I wanted the PSW staff to see my intention as a new Coordinator and I would tell them during our staff meetings, "We focus on guidance and mentorship here not discipline and dismissal". I further said “I need your help though, I am not about to sink this ship!” Almost 3 years later, the staff continue to be respectful, professional and work hard every day. This team of PSWs has evolved to be what I refer to now as “The Faces of VON”.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of such a great organization.

Amanda Duncan RPN, Coordinator, Assisted Living Services for High Risk Seniors  
Durham



## Appreciated

It doesn't always happen, but often when I see a family member after a client passed or got discharged, they often say, "mom/dad really enjoyed your visits, they liked VON nurses".

Makes you feel appreciated.

Cyndi Garrison, LPN  
Greater Halifax





# Couldn't Be Happier

I first became a part of the VON family 11 years ago when I was hired as a PSW in Thunder Bay, ON. This was my first time ever working in community care and I was so excited to be part of such a well-known and respected agency. I loved working as a PSW in the community, seeing many different people all the time and knowing that I was personally helping my community by doing this work gave me great satisfaction. I continued to work as a PSW with VON for the next two years until I made the decision to move on and pursue interests in furthering my education.

I went on to college to get a certificate in pre-health, dental hygiene and registered practical nursing. I worked in a variety of health care settings including but not limited to long term care, assisted living and hospital care but once again found myself wanting to find my place within community care. I began the process of searching for a position I felt would give me the satisfaction of working with the community while also satisfying my need to take a step back from front line work.

I heard through a few friends that VON was hiring office positions and it really piqued my interest so I quickly applied and was successful at securing a position as a CSA at the Thunder Bay office. I have now been in my position for almost a year and love it just as much now as I did when I started.

I love speaking to clients and staff every day, and just as I did 11 years ago, I genuinely feel that I am doing my part to help my community by ensuring that our clients are being seen and met with the best quality of care from well trained and reliable nurses and PSWs.

I could not be happier to be a part of such a great company, team and community group.

Amanda Sawatzky, CSA  
Thunder Bay





# Why I Love My Job

I began working for VON as the Hospice and Bereavement Coordinator in Middlesex-Elgin in February 2009. I had always known of VON for its long history of Visiting Nursing Services, but wasn't aware of the Community Support Services we provide.

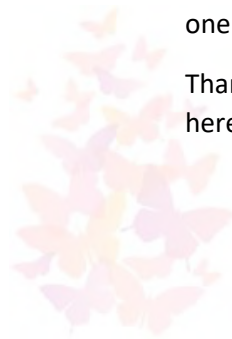
I truly feel that I have the best job in the world. Supporting individuals in their journey through illness and bereavement is so rewarding. I get to comfort people at one of the most difficult times we face as human beings. My clients and their caregivers inspire me to always be authentic and to use deep listening in my role. Listening to their stories, their experiences and those things left unsaid help me to be a positive support in their lives.

I love working with our committed group of hospice and bereavement volunteers every day, without them, our service would not be what it is today. Supporting our volunteers to provide excellent quality in care is a strong passion of mine.

My proudest VON moment, was when I was honoured with the Jackie Wells award for Passion and Innovation in 2014! What an awe-inspiring moment that was for me. It makes me want to work that much harder to serve our clients and volunteers in the years to come. I would be remiss not to mention that I have the opportunity to work with some of VON's best employees daily. We all have our functions that make our mission, vision and values come to life, but we absolutely can't do what we do without one another. .

Thanks for the opportunity to tell you why I love my job and why I am blessed to be here!

Becky Ahrens, Coordinator of Hospice and Bereavement Services  
Middlesex-Elgin





## Paul and Susan

Meet Paul, a young man of 50, ravaged by cancer. Meet his wife, Susan, wanting only for him to be able to have his wish to die at home, and overwhelmed with what that REALLY meant. They had no children, no siblings, no living parents. Susan was tirelessly brave, and learned how to care for Paul and all his accompanying “equipment”; catheter, CADD pump, oxygen, and worst of all, his chest tube. He was most definitely “bedridden” with all those lines!

As he became increasingly weakened and fatigued, they both wished he could see his famed flower garden in the backyard, and sit out on his deck. It seemed like an impossible wish, but Susan was one mighty force to be reckoned with, and one persistent advocate.

VON gave permission to extend one of Paul’s morning visits. In unprecedented compassion, two nurses were allowed to attend him that day. We both spent much time preparing all those lines, carefully positioning that cumbersome and frustrating chest tube, then transferring a very drowsy, mostly immobile guy to his long unused wheelchair. A lot of careful maneuvering was needed to find a path through his small home, without jarring him and causing him even more pain. But maneuver we did! It was such a joy to wheel him out onto his back patio and see his reaction to being in the great outdoors for one last time. Of course it was a fleeting moment, and after a mere five minutes, he nodded that he really wanted to go back to bed. Reversing the rigmarole, we put the exhausted fella back in his bed, with his attentive and elated Mrs. by his side. Paul died peacefully just two days after his “excursion”.

I’ve since retired from a 30 year VON career but I have seen Susan from time to time. We both marvel at the fact that a window of five minutes in Paul’s last days could have such an immense impact on a life well-lived. It gave HER such solace - comfortable that she did her best. It gave HIM such peace.

Carol Owens, VON Retiree  
North Bay



# Double the Rewards

“I don’t know what I would do without all of you” is a phrase I hear frequently from both our clients and caregivers as Coordinator of the VON Adult Day Program. Laughter, hugs, singing and cheering – it’s just another day at the office. From our beautiful location overlooking Sydney Harbour on Cape Breton Island, we host twenty five clients daily Monday through Friday. We see clients who come to us with depression who find value and self-worth by befriending a client with dementia. We witness clients suffering anxiety find comfort and security in our familiar daily routine. Supportive staff and volunteers focus on strengths to enable all to enjoy a day of cognitive stimulation, physical activity, fun and friendship.

Offering clients a fulfilling day is rewarding in itself, however, it is the respite service this program allows caregivers, that is most motivating to me. Our hours of 8- 5:30 allow some caregivers to maintain their employment both for financial stability, as well as the social connections their work provides.

I have witnessed deep, dark circles disappear from under the eyes of a spouse who could not sleep because her husband’s dementia had him wandering all night long. After two weeks in the program, he slept better and she did too. Caregivers are able to give attention to their own health while those in their care are with us, tending to their own treatments at our cancer centre, attending yoga class, swimming, skating, walking, etc. Some spend the day shopping and running errands. The Day Program allows them to do whatever it is that they need to do, all the while knowing that their loved one is safe and cared for.

In my 30th year employed in health care, I proudly lead our team of amazing Activity Assistants and volunteers to offer the care that we do. And I can honestly say my role with this VON Adult Day Program is the most rewarding of my career for the dual difference we make in the lives of our clients and their devoted caregivers.

Janet Kokocki, Program Co-ordinator, Adult Day  
Cape Breton



# Fondly Remembered

I have been touched by so many clients I really don't know where to begin. I love working for VON and plan to retire with VON. I started working with VON about 20 years ago. We didn't have mobile phones then. I had to stop at payphones to call my clients. So I had to make sure I had a lot of quarters every day. Lol

I have 34 years of service as an LPN and have seen a lot of positive changes. Sometimes challenging but I stuck in there and remained positive. What really kept me going daily were my clients; the smile on their faces as I come to their door, the laughter - I love making people happy, and the sad times I sat weeping with a client and family - ALS is an awful disease.

I have experienced a lot but I had a client who really touched my heart. She was only in her 50s. A brave woman. I would visit her daily to help her with tube feeds and medications. Her husband was so kind to me and greeted me daily. One day, I knew it was getting closer to her time of death. She could only stare at me but still had tears to tell me she was scared.

The day she passed I called to let her husband know I was coming. He said - please hurry, something is going on. I got to the apartment running up the hall knowing, this was it. The husband met me at the door and I looked across the room and saw that she was very pale. I told her husband to sit down by the bed and I took the rail down. He told her he loved her and "say hi to your mother" and I put my arms around her and stated, "it's going to be ok, you are going to a beautiful place". And she smiled and passed on.



Caroline McDonald, LPN  
Greater Halifax



## Antique Treasure

Over the last 20 plus years of nursing I have felt and witnessed some very heartfelt moments. Just recently I was sitting at the bedside of one of our palliative clients when I asked him if he could pass on any wisdom that had inspired him over his lifetime of trial and tribulations.

He started to tell me the story of going to church and listening to a South African Minister who shared with everyone how he was embraced by everyone when he came to Canada. He was welcomed into the church and people's homes with open arms. He also shared that people are like "antiques" and how some want to lock up antiques and forget about them.

At first I was confused and I said to our client, "Colin what do you mean?" He said, "the Minister was trying to tell us that our elderly are like antiques and we should take care of them at home and not put them away and forget about them because they are filled with wisdom and you will never find the true wisdom of someone until this one thing happens", which he stated his dad told him. This one thing was..."not until you have one foot in the grave will you be able to pass on wisdom". Colin slowly looked up at me and said, "thank you for taking good care of this antique".

I touched his hand and smiled and said, "thank you for sharing your wisdom", he said, "it was my pleasure Cheryl because now I have one foot in the grave and I am ok with that because I am going to soon be with my wife! We have had a good life!"

Cheryl Nickerson, LPN  
Greater Halifax



# Blessed

I started in 2007 with the Halifax branch as a caseload planner where I stayed for 2 years until my husband received his dream job back home in Cape Breton. I was sad to end my time with VON in Halifax because I enjoyed what I did and I enjoyed the people I worked with. Little did I know then that 9 months later a position would open up in Cape Breton at the local office for a Staffing Coordinator...7 years later and I am still here going strong!



Although my role has changed and I am now the Coordinator for Community Supports, my feelings remain the same...I am blessed! Never in my life have I worked in a job where a small group of women work so well together. We are more than just coworkers, we are friends and these ladies are my family! It doesn't matter what the day throws at us, we all connect first thing in the morning before the work day starts to share a few laughs or talk about the day's news. If someone's day is going on the rails we all chip in to lighten the load, I can't explain it...we just make it work. If someone falls, one of us is always there to pick that person up. Each of us brings a different characteristic to the table which makes us such a unique group of ladies.

Being the 'baby' of the group I have learned so much in the last 7 years that, I believe, would take a life time to learn if I were left to my own devices! I have been on the giving and the receiving ends of the 'shoulder to cry on', the 'hug that just makes it better' and the 'laugh until your sides hurt'. As I sit here thinking of all the amazing memories I have made during my time with VON, I smile...I wouldn't change a thing. Thank you VON for blessing me with such an amazing family.

Deanna Harvey-Green, Community Support Coordinator  
Cape Breton



## One of Many Special Memories

It was the last visit of my evening shift. My patient was a man in his forties and he was in his last precious hours of life. His wife and teenage son were at home with him. The pain of having to say the final farewell filled the room. His wife and son left the room while I was doing my assessment and other nursing tasks. While I was checking his pain pump and making sure he was comfortable, his respirations slowed. I called his wife and son back into the room and his respirations increased and he was agitated. The tension increased so I said maybe if they left the room we would see if he would settle which he did. I sat with him and once again his respirations slowed and he was almost gone so I called his family back in. Once again, he became agitated and the family was telling him that he could go. They said that they would miss him but they knew he needed to go. They suggested that they would leave the room and I would stay with him. Once the family left the room my patient settled again. His respirations slowed and I sat there with him. He slipped away peacefully. The family returned to the room and were relieved that their husband/Dad was no longer suffering and that he didn't die alone. I felt so honoured that this man chose me to be with him when he left this world. As a nurse, we have many special memories and this is a very dear one to me.

Debbie Sloss, Retired VON RN  
North Bay



## The Old Days

I've been working with VON since 1991 and have very much enjoyed my job as an RN. Things are very different from when I first started working with VON. My orientation at that time was only two days on the road with another nurse then I was flying on my own. I had an actual VON car (these were donated from various Legions in the Community). At that time, if you were working in any one area for the next week or so you were allowed to take the car home. You got gas at certain gas stations and the gas was billed to VON. My paystub was done on a calculator on a paper slip with handwritten notes to the side indicating deductions etc. All nurses went to the office first thing in the morning to get their client lists (you might have 7 people at the most for a day) and pick up client supplies. We had a total of 18 staff which included office staff, LPN and RNs. After all our clients were seen, we all headed back to the office to return the charts and write any notes that were required and also make phone calls that were necessary. These were the good old days! Then slowly changes came – with charts in the clients' home, no VON cars, fax machines in our homes, voice mail, cell phones, no more going to the office to pick up supplies – they now were delivered to the client.

With all this I have to say I loved my job! And still do. It's a little more stressful now but things changed for the better, I think VON finally got it right!

Donna Stewart, RN  
Cape Breton



# Straight From the Heart

I was sitting at my desk on May 26th, 2015 attending the weekly leadership call. I felt fine, the day before we had just started our redesign at the local site. It was around 9:30 when I suddenly started to feel warm and anxious. I got up from my desk and walked outside to get some air. I returned to my desk and continued my call. I continued to feel unwell and thought my “sugars” must be “off”. I called out to Sheila Burke, working in our supply room and asked her to go and get Marilyn MacKenna who was a VON Nurse Manager. We tried some sugar and something to eat but I was still not feeling any better.

Debbie Macleod, VON RN and Cardiac Nurse, arrived in the office around the same time. She came in and assessed my condition. Marilyn went back to her office and came back with two baby aspirin for me to chew, which I did. Debbie asked for an ambulance to be called and I told her I didn't feel there was time.

Debbie put me in her back seat and Joan Collings came with me as well. I had all my VON support around me. We drove to the hospital and went right into the Emergency Department. Debbie told the triage nurse that I couldn't wait and an EKG was done right away. The EKG showed that I had an anterior myocardial infarction. I was treated right away with a clot buster (when it was administered I felt that I was dying BUT I felt like I was in great hands) I felt 100% better after the clot was dislodged but I needed follow up and treatment in Halifax. I was given a stent and follow up.

I was off for 6 weeks and then returned to work on July 6th, 2015. Redesign occurred and all was well. As an employer, I couldn't have had better support. The staff, Managers, my co-workers and friends at VON all supported me during this very scary time for me. VON nurses and friends saved my life that morning. From my first symptoms to treatment it took under ½ hr to get to the ER.

I have proudly worked for VON for almost 20 years and I have 1 million stories to share but this one has allowed me to look forward to future stories and friendships. I love VON: from the bottom (and front) of my heart.

Elizabeth MacDonald, District Executive Director  
Cape Breton Metro/Antigonish



## A Lasting First Impression

When I started at VON in 2007 as Director of Practice Education one of the first things I did was go out with VON nurses to visit clients. I am a nurse but had only worked in acute care and was not familiar with home care. I was to meet a nurse from VON CEH at the local Wendy's. I was waiting outside and a car pulled up and said – “Are you Heidi? I am the VON nurse – let's go”. We appeared to be in a rush so I asked her why. She explained that the power had gone out in their town the night before and one of her clients who was a quadriplegic had a special air bed and when the power goes out it deflates and does not re-inflate when the power returns.

She had already called the client before meeting me and indeed she had lost power and was laying on a hard metal surface. The client was not due for a nursing visit till later that day but we went to the client's apartment, re-inflated the bed, checked the client for any evidence of skin breakdown, ensured she was comfortable and went on our way. A home support worker was due to come in later that morning.

I was so impressed with that nurse's concern for the client and how she went out of her way to ensure she was safe. She definitely provided client centred care that day and is a shining example of an exemplary home care nurse!

Heidi Carr RN BScN MAEd  
National Director, Professional Practice & Education – Halifax



## Change

I've been working for the VON for over 30 years. I've past retirement but still love my job. I love to help people and keep them in their homes. Most of them appreciate us so much. When I first started in 1986 my wage was less than 5 dollars an hour. I've seen many changes in the VON and got through all of them. When the mobile phones came I never thought I could do it but it ended up being easy, after a bit, lol.

Janet Hebb, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



# VON Has Changed My Life

I have worked here at VON Kingston Office for a little over two years now. I want to tell you how VON has changed my life!

I am a Medical Office Assistant with over 10 years' experience outside VON. I am a person who sees the best in things but in the course of my career have been subject to many jobs that have had a negative impact on my life. Because of this negativity, I struggled to find myself and ended up with severe depression. In the process of all of this, I ended up having a house fire and lost all my belongings with no insurance. I was at an all-time low in my life, struggling with even day to day things. As I continued on with life, I felt that maybe a change in my workplace might be just what I needed, so I applied here at VON. I accepted the job and started working with The Assisted Living Program as an Intake Support Clerk. I was welcomed with open arms by my boss Melissa Dion and all staff members. I was given the opportunity and trust to work on a project and come up with my own ideas on how to fix some of the problems they were having. For the first time in a long time, I felt valued as a part of a team. I started feeling excited and proud and soon began to fall out of my depression. I began to fall back into my depression because of some personal things that were happening at home. Melissa was not only supportive but helped me find ways to balance my work and my life at home in a positive way.

When most people would have left on medical leave, I stayed strong because of the support I had from my colleagues here at VON.

VON has had such a positive impact on my life and I appreciate what this company has done for my career and my self-esteem.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Jennifer Bishop, Intake Support Clerk  
Greater Kingston



# Forever Grateful



I've had the honour to work for VON for 19 years but I learned the true value of VON when Sean, my son, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. No parent should ever have to live through helping their child die. This was not an easy time - but through the whole process VON was there for me and my family.

Like many young people Sean had plans and dreams. He was full of hope and promise. I remember his first week of kindergarten. "Mom, get the milk and cookies, we need to have a serious talk" he said "Mom - you're sending me to the wrong school. You see, when I grow up I am going to fly planes and they are not teaching me anything about flying planes!"

Although I am a nurse, I am a mother first. After years of being part of the VON family and helping others, it was our family's turn, my turn, to depend on VON's professional nurses, palliative care program, and personal care providers. And they were amazing! Because of the care my son and family received from VON, I was able to continue to work. The nurses helped plan a death at home and with the help of Personal Support Workers, I was able to work as long as possible. My colleagues were also a great support and were there for me during this difficult time. I will be forever grateful for their compassion and care. With VON's help, my son was able to stay home with us and die at home, surrounded by his own things and the people he loved.

Sometimes there is nothing you can do to change what is going to happen. Sometimes the only thing you have is a hand to hold and a hope for a few more good moments. I treasure every moment of the 20 years that I shared with my thoughtful, caring son and am forever grateful for everything that VON did to help us. Nothing would change the end of Sean's story, but VON helped to make the most of the time we had together.

Joan Wekner RN, HBScN  
District Executive Director, Northwestern Ontario



# Every Day, We Make a Real Difference

I am a Client Service Associate Team Lead in Pictou. I have proudly been part of the VON family for almost 4 years now, but my love and admiration for this amazing organization and its talented and compassionate people began almost 10 years ago, in August of 2007 when my precious mother was diagnosed with terminal metastatic lung cancer. We began receiving VON services for my mom, as the disease robbed her totally of her mobility. During this devastating time in all of our lives, these amazing, compassionate teams of “Angels”, as we referred to them, came into our family home and provided the highest degree of care possible to my mother. Yes, this is part of their contractual duties, but the magic occurred immediately, as these remarkable individuals really cared for all of us. We developed a trust in these professionals with our loved ones care and well-being, knowing that the outcome was going to be her passing. They allowed us to feel safe and assured that caring for her at home and allowing her to pass in the comfort of her own surroundings was the best decision we could have made. They were instrumental in helping to navigate my entire heartbroken family through this foreign, terrifying and unwanted process. My mother’s comfort and well-being was the absolute focus of every visit and our family was able to carry out her final wish to be at home with all of us by her side as she took her last breath.

NONE of this would have been possible without the care and support of her incredible team of Nurses, Liz Archibald, Krista Bonvie, Kathryn Carruthers, Louise Gillis and Nancy MacKenzie. I am so proud to work alongside them every day!

These few words are not enough to fully impress upon anyone reading this, the impact this has had on all of us. This is the reason I am proud to come to work each and every day, even given the trials and great stress we face. I want to use my skills and talents to help create the very same experience for every client we serve, and my greatest wish is that every single employee of VON CANADA could realize the difference they make in the lives of their neighbours, EVERY SINGLE DAY!

Proud to be VON!



Jona Currie, Client Service Associate Team Lead



## Jim's About-Face

I met with Barb, Jim's wife and Deb, Jim's daughter to explain the day program to them and for them to see the day program in action. The plan was for Barb and Deb to bring Jim into the day program the following day. In the time it took them to drive to the VON office Jim changed his mind and wanted nothing to do with the day program or the people in it. There was this tiny little man sitting in the front seat of the car with a great big scowl/frown. I opened the car door and said "Hello Jim my name is Mary Ellen and I am very happy to meet you." Why would a handsome guy like you not want to come in and meet some new friends? This got a very faint smile from him. Jim took one look at Barb and Deb and said "how long do I have to stay in this hell hole?"

I looked very matter-of-factly at Jim and said the program is finished at 3:00 and you can go home then, trust me we won't want you here any longer than that if you are going to be like this all day. Jim looked at me and started to laugh.

Jim tried very hard to make it look like he wasn't having a good time but as the day went on it was harder and harder for him to carry on with his charade. From that moment forward we never looked back. Jim loved the time he spent with us so much that prior to his death he was attending 3 days a week and cried on holiday Mondays because he missed us so much.

Jim was the guy that made all of the new clients feel welcome. Jim loved coming to the day program so much and he talked about the fun he had here. This also made it nice for the other family members when they would visit with Barb and Jim at home.

The family all agreed that they wouldn't have been able to keep their mom and dad together in their home if not for the love and support of the day program staff. Even to this day when we look back at old pictures and see one with Jim in it we say "do you remember Jim's first day here" and we all smile and shake our heads and say "can you believe how he changed into a complete softy".

Mary Ellen Player, RN, Dorchester Adult Day Program Coordinator  
Middlesex-Elgin

# Mary Prang Jobe

Mary Prang worked for VON in York Township from 1947-48 and came to work for VON because she said, "I knew the nurses gave good nursing care". VON offered her a bursary for \$750 and her choices were to either work for 2 years in the location that VON chose or repay it. She chose to work for VON and found out she was going to Digby, NS (1950) when they sent her a letter with her new placement. She lived and worked there for two years with fellow nurse Beau Heine.

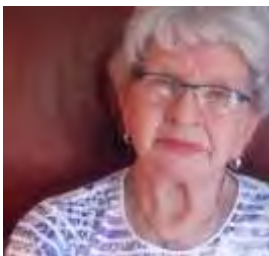
She stayed in a boarding house (VON always made accommodations available to nurses). The landlady died after a few weeks and VON helped with another boarding placement. The house was on the Bay of Fundy and was also the jail (they had never had boarders before). The husband was the fire chief, police chief and ran the jail and the wife was the cook for the jail. They had lots of laughs from all that transpired while living there!

It was a difficult decision to move to Owen Sound in 1952; she came because it was on the water (like Digby) and had family in Ontario. Ruth Bellamy, a staunch board member, met her at the train station, took her out for lunch and took her to her new boarding place.

In Owen Sound, Mary was the nurse in charge along with 2 other full time nurses – Mae Tarrant (married name McClatter - deceased) and Nora Lee (married name Kent – she passed away June 18, 2017). All 3 got married the same summer of 1955 - "VON thought they were running a matrimonial service". Mary married Ron Jobe and worked in Grey Bruce until 1957, when her son, the first of 4 boys, was born.

Loretta Dunn, Coordinator of Volunteers

Mary 2017



Nora, Mary and Mae - 1955 Sun Times (Owen Sound) article -"VON Here"





## **This Is What It's About**

I recently had a client's spouse tell me, "I always begin to feel relaxed when I see the VON coming in the front door."

Gary Guiney Yallop. CCA  
Annapolis Valley



## Loving It

From the time I became a CCA, to today, I can honestly say the role has changed my life drastically. I was shy, a bit of a pushover, would hide from issues because I was too proud to ask for help. Right from my first nursing home placement, I had a Director of Nursing place me with the toughest CCA there because I was shy. I cried. But today, 17 years later I am a CCA with VON Annapolis Valley and I feel privileged to be part of this huge organization but yet feel like I'm one in a million. At the end of the day, I am tired, sometimes sore but content knowing I did my job today so that means I have allowed many people to remain at home for one more day. The most important task in the run of my day, in my opinion, is to open every single door with a smile on my face so that they know they have my full attention for the duration of their visit. I feel like a better person working within VON because I know I am valued. That, hands down, is the greatest feeling in the world. I no longer have to question myself after a shift as to whether I have done my work to satisfy the next person because I know I have. My confidence has bloomed! VON is an organization above and beyond what I expected as a seasoned CCA. It is by far the best CCA job yet. I wouldn't give up one on one care for anything!

Written anonymously by a CCA  
Annapolis Valley





## A MacGyver in Our Midst

Sometimes the cost of supplies is beyond what some folks can pay. People find whatever way they can to manage. One of my favorites is the old dairy farmer who needed a supra pubic catheter. This is a catheter that gets inserted into the bladder through a hole in the abdomen. Usually this catheter is attached to a urinary drainage bag that patients would attach to their leg and empty whenever needed. This particular patient thought the cost of \$5.65/ per week was a bit more than he was willing, or able, to pay.

When I got to this gentleman's home he was lying in bed and I followed the tube down from his abdomen to a tube that was part of his milking line from the barn. This was attached to a tap, a regular household tap, then another length of milking line and this finally ended inside a whiskey jug. When I asked him why the tap, he said "well if I got to get up, I need to make sure this thing isn't leaking all over the place". When I asked him if the milking line had been disinfected, he said "Well no, this was scrap pieces I had left over" I gave him 5 points for creativity and -5 points for infection control procedures!

Mireille Mitchell R.N. BHScN  
Regional Manager, Quality and Risk, Central Region North Bay



# The Protective Patient

I was visiting a client who had a wound that required sterile dressing changes. I had visited many times before, but the client lived on one of those streets that has no parking from the 1st of the month to the 15th on the North side of the street and then no parking on the South side of the street from the 16th to the 31st. My visit on this particular day was on the 16th of the month and there were no cars parked on the street, which means I did not notice that I had parked on the wrong side.

I prepped for the wound care in the usual way, got all my supplies ready and then put on my sterile garb. A mask, a gown, sterile gloves and proceeded with the care. All of sudden, we heard quite a raucous outside. The parking authority had come down the street and the officer was in the process of writing me a ticket. The patient's husband...we'll call him Ron... had seen him and he was very upset.

"What is wrong with you people" he said, "don't you have real criminals to go and chase". This is my wife's nurse and she is here to help us out. How dare you write her a ticket". When the parking enforcement officer failed to stop writing, Ron escalated his anger to the point where I had to stop my treatment and see if I could calm things down. I ran out of the house, mask hanging off one ear, removing my second glove as I reached the car. I told Ron it was alright, it was my fault for not paying attention and I asked Ron to come on in. The officer just looked up at me apologetically and smiled. He made some kind of notation on the ticket and advised me he could not destroy it once written, but when I went in to pay it, the ticket was somehow disqualified and I did not need to pay it.

Thanks Ron!

Mireille Mitchell, RN BHScN  
Regional Manager, Quality and Risk, Central Region North Bay



## For Lillian

After dropping out of school workforce for a lot of years I decided I needed to have a career, not just for me but for my three sweet girls. So I went back to school to get my high school diploma and then on to the CCA program. Being at the NSCC taking CCA was the absolute best time in my life. I had amazing teachers and met some awesome people. I learned so much and was so confident with all of my abilities and the things I had learned. After graduation, I applied at VON. It was the only place I truly wanted to work. After a short few weeks I got the call I had worked so hard for, saying "Penny we would like to offer you a permanent full time position". I felt so full of excitement and then all of a sudden I felt complete doom. Tons of questions running through my mind ... what if I can't do it ...what if I hate it ...what if the clients hate me ...But I set out my first day anyways hoping all these fears would leave.

My first ever client was Lillian a sweet little old lady in Advocate (over an hour drive away). I introduced myself, completed her visit and carried on about my day. Over the next couple of months, I worried every day whether I had made the right decision and whether I was cut out to wear the VON crest. And then one night I looked at my schedule and saw her name - Lillian. That same sweet little old lady from my first day. I walked in and I said, "good morning I have been here before but you probably don't remember me". She smiled so sweetly and said, "of course I remember Penny Lewis from Five Islands, how could I ever forget you?" I melted, at that moment I knew I was making a difference and that there was no way I could ever hate this job.

Penny Lewis, CCA  
Cumberland



# Together We Change Lives

I have been teaching a seated exercise class, every Tuesday, at a local retirement home for the past few months. There is a resident I will call Jane, who takes it upon herself to bring others out of their rooms and down to the exercise class every week. “Every little bit of movement is good for you!” she tells them, while knocking on doors and rousting them out. She encourages them to participate and if they are unable, to at least sit and enjoy the company of others. Jane has numerous health issues herself but doesn’t let them interfere with her spreading good cheer and encouragement to others.

When I entered the home last week, a dear lady who had not participated for a few weeks, was sitting in her wheelchair, eyes cast down, in the foyer. I greeted her and asked her if she was going to join us. I noticed that she seemed very weak and unresponsive so I thought it would be best not to pressure her into coming. I continued on down to the room and started setting up. A few minutes later, Jane appeared with this dear soul and positioned her close to me. “Now you don’t have to exercise if you are not up to it Ethel, but at least you are here with us and not sitting all alone in that foyer!”

The class started and within a few minutes I noticed Ethel moving her wrists in circles for warm up. Next she was moving her feet and ankles. Still not much expression but I was surprised that she was actually following along. I kept my eye on her and noticed that as the class went on, she was coming out of her shell and by the end of the class she was tossing balls and catching them with a big smile on her face! The other residents were cheering her on and applauding each time she caught the ball.

I could not believe the transformation! Through the encouragement of a caring fellow resident and the participation in our SMART class, her day was brightened....if only for one hour.

Rose Entz, Coordinator SMART/Fall Prevention  
Oxford





# The Doll

I love working with Tri-County VON Community Support Services because I get to positively impact peoples' lives and they bring me so much joy – and laughter - in return! One client and her caregiver husband have forever touched my life. The love these two showed each other was evident despite the numerous hours of demanding caregiving that he provided to his wife living with Alzheimer's disease. They were just the two of them, having lost both of their adult children several years before. He was her everything; she was his life. As the disease progressed, he admittedly looked forward to his only 2 ½ hours of weekly respite at the Adult Day Program. He would smile, and leave to have time to himself. She would wave him off and just loved being in the group – she was such a people person. As her language skills diminished, her group interaction was at times difficult, but I finally found the perfect way for her to express herself and also increase her sense of self-worth by introducing her to an infant doll that cooed and talked and blinked its eyes as my client lovingly held the “baby” and interacted with her. “Isn't she cute?” she'd say. “She's so good!” and she'd beam with pride. The other clients in the group were supportive and understood the bond between this lady and her “baby”. Volunteers were amazed at how well the client took care of the wee one. One day, as the client was moving her baby on her lap, the doll began to slip down and out of her hands – an event witnessed by the entire crowd in the room. Everyone, in unison, gasped out loud: “Ooooooh no!” The client, just in time, caught the falling baby. Slowly, she looked up at all of us, and with a smile said: “What?! It's JUST a DOLL, you know!” Laughter abounded. The doll was OK – and so was she.

Sandra Hubbard-LeBlanc, Coordinator, Community Support & Volunteer  
Services



## Not Just a Job

Four and a half years ago my husband's liver failed. It was the worst time of my life and I was completely overwhelmed by the workload of taking care of a very sick spouse, working full time and trying to take care of keeping our household running. He was ill for two and a half years, and during that time I don't think I would have been able to keep my sanity without the help of the VON. I was able to go to work with peace of mind knowing that he would have personal care and meals prepared for him twice a day, and someone in the house with him for 2 hours of my 8 hour work day. I truly appreciated the help the CCA'S and nurses did for us in this difficult time.

Fast forward two years after my husband passed away, I am now a CCA working with the VON in my community and making a difference in people's lives. I know the peace of mind that having a caring professional taking care of your loved one can bring, and I am proud to be part of the VON team. I don't think of this as a job, it's a lifestyle.

Shelley Garrett, CCA  
Pictou





# My Eyes Were Opened

After 25 years of acute care nursing in areas of high client flow (ER, ICU, clinical leader) I decided I needed a change as I was no longer getting that self-validation that the work I was doing was impacting the client in a positive manner. Even though I would see them “get better enough” to leave ER or ICU, I wouldn’t know what happened to them after that.

I am very embarrassed to admit this but, myself and my colleagues would often make comments like...”OMG not him/her again! Why do they not follow instructions???” when they would present to the ER after only being discharged from hospital a month ago.

In 2011, I decided to pick up casual work at VON in addition to my full-time employment at the acute care setting to “test the water”. I was very quickly oriented to what working in the community (specifically individual homes) was really like.

The hugest impact to me as a nurse was the moment when I visited a “frequent flyer” to the ER, in their home. In the hour I was there I discovered, the client lived alone, he could not read (therefore he could not take medication correctly) and he didn’t have enough funds to purchase the required medication therefore he would “spread them out” over the month. All root causes for why he continued to present to the ER in a crisis. All the times I was his nurse in the hospital I did not know these things about this client, nor did his physician. All those determinants of health (DOH) came rushing towards me like a slap in the face! I “heard” about the DOH but never understood them while working in acute care. But there they are....the demons of reality. I instantly wanted to bow my head in shame for those judgmental assumptions I had made for why this client was a “frequent flyer” when I would see him in the ER.

At this point I humbly resigned from my acute care job and came to VON permanently. I found what was missing in my ability to find validation of positive outcomes for clients we serve and have never looked back.

For this client, having VON meant he was able to receive the support and connections needed to keep him out of the hospital!

Sherry Jackson, Nurse Manager  
Antigonish

# Mike

Mike Ellah first joined the Ingersoll Day Program approximately 18 years ago as a client, one year after a burst aneurysm changed his life. He was on his way to work one day when he “felt as though fingers were running through his hair downward”. His next memory was waking up at University Hospital in London. Not expected to recover, Mike’s family was told that he wouldn’t live and that they should consider organ donations.



Miraculously Mike survived but had a long road ahead; during his one-month stay Mike experienced difficulty recognizing his kids, had memory loss and personality changes, after which he spent 3 months at Parkwood Institute in London completing the rehab program. Thankfully Mike made remarkable progress!

One year later, Mike’s (then) wife Margaret heard about the Ingersoll Adult Day Program through St. Paul’s Church; Mike started attending the program 2 days a week to provide respite and engage him in social activities, and he has been with the program ever since. Slowly Mike transitioned from being a client to becoming a volunteer by helping out a bit here and there. He says “I’m so lucky!” and that he loves giving back and being a part of the program.

Ingersoll ADP recreationist, Kelly Maloney says “Mike is the perfect volunteer”. “When he is not here we miss him.” Mike never needs to be asked to help out. While volunteering Mike anticipates a need and jumps in - whether he is running an activity such as the Coffee News or assisting in place of a staff member who is needed to support a client’s needs, Mike works fluidly with the staff...and always with a smile and sometimes even a song and dance. “Mike brings energy and helps to make the program fun for our clients” says an ADP staff member. Thoughtful, considerate and a true part of the team, this program wouldn’t be the same without you Mike!

Shushma Gligoric, Coordinator of Volunteers -CSS  
Oxford



## Personhood

In my clinical role at VON Hamilton, where I also worked for a number of years, together with Mary Gibbon, Branch Director, we developed the concept of Personhood – the essence of knowing the person in care.

Mrs O was age 98 and very depressed. We were able to learn that her two major dreams remained unfulfilled – having her poetry published and her international stamp collection organized. But she did not have money to accomplish this. Mary G. found a benefactor and her book “Just Stretching Time”, came into being. Mrs O came alive selling her books and her depression subsided. The concept of Personhood continued to be of great importance to us two Mary’s. I spoke about the Personhood concept to VON branches across Canada.

Mary Buzzell, Retired  
Hamilton



# One Special Christmas

Years ago I was a PSW Supervisor and prior to that I was on the Visiting Nursing team. I remember on one Christmas Eve, we received a last minute PSW referral from CCAC. They were requesting 24 PSW support so a client could come home for Christmas from hospital on a 48 hour pass. This client was a long time PSW and Nursing client before he was hospitalized on the Chronic Care floor.

The client and his spouse were in their 60's but their retirement years were not kind to them. He was paralyzed from a motorcycle accident and she had early onset dementia. He had to be admitted to hospital as she could no longer assist with any of his care and he could not assist with hers. She was waiting for a long-term care bed. This would be the last Christmas the family could spend together before the family home was sold and their lives changed forever. They had been in receipt of both PSW and Nursing support from VON for years and our staff were fond of them both.

Working with the offsite Planning Department we were able to fill the hours, the PSW's that we contacted gave whatever hours they could and all the visits were filled by 7:30 that evening. The PSW's all pulled together and they used time that they had set aside for their own families but were very eager to help give this last family Christmas to the client and spouse. What a memorable gift for that family, I am sure that they never forgot. It was a true example of VON Values- Respect, Responsiveness and Participation, not to mention the love and caring that the PSW's felt towards their clients. Some of those PSW's are still with the company and some have moved on but I would bet that none of them forget helping that family that Christmas.

Tammi Lynne Jones, Client Care Coordinator, SMILE Program  
Hastings Northumberland Prince Edward





## Living My Dream

I am very proud to be employed by VON for the past 16 years, and before that to have worked with VON Visiting Nurses for over 10 years in a PSW capacity for Red Cross. Until the mid-1990's there was only the two agencies that supported our community with in-home health care and both were non-profit. For-profit agencies were introduced into the community before I went back to college. I was able to witness the differences in the agencies and the commitment to the client as a whole person and not just the wound to be dressed or the medication to be given. I received much encouragement from VON nurses when I made the decision to go back to college to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse. While in college I won an award given by a local for-profit agency but the only agency I applied to work with was the VON, I never gave the other agencies a second thought. Best decision I ever made.

Tammi Lynne Jones, Client Care Coordinator, SMILE Program  
Hastings Northumberland Prince Edward



# I Love It

I was a single mother of a 2 1/2 year old, on social assistance. I didn't want to be one of these mothers that sat home and collected a cheque each month. I was on the assistance for about four years. They offered me a chance to go back to school, I had to get upgrading done because I was out of school for 20 years.

I then got accepted to the office administration course at NSCC Marconi. I struggled every day getting up early, walking my daughter to a friend's to get her and me to school. I kept saying to myself every morning, this is going to pay off in the end, keep up the good work. I graduated from the course in June 2014.

I searched every day for a job. Then assistance told me about an office administration job with a program for women at the local Women's Center. I really enjoyed it there, it was just a term position. The Executive Director told me about a job at the VON and asked if she could forward my resume to them, I said yes no problem.

In April of 2015, I got call for an interview. I had the interview and was told I would know in a couple of weeks. It was about 3 weeks when I got the call offering me a full time position, which I accepted. June 2017- I have worked with the VON as a scheduler for two years. The best day for me was when I got the letter from social assistance that I no longer qualified.

I can honestly say this is the first job I have ever had that I can say I love my job. Knowing that the nurses are happy and the clients are happy, so am I. This is the job I have been looking for my whole life. To know that there is money left at the end of the week feels so good. I call my career counsellor every June 1 to thank her for all of her help.

Kim Wells, CSA  
Cape Breton/Antigonish



## A Ghostly Encounter

It was the Halloween season and I arrived at my client's home to do personal care. I knocked on the door and there was no answer. I opened the door and found it strange that my client was not sitting in his usual chair. I said hello a few times and opened the door wider. To my surprise a white figure came out from behind the door. I screamed, as I thought I had just seen a ghost. The ghost was actually my client with a sheet over himself. I think I also startled my client a bit with my reaction. We both laughed. It made my day and the season that much more spooky.

I am always amazed that many people, no matter what age, still keep their inner child alive and can have fun.

My job is so rewarding in many different ways. VON home care is the best.

Kim Fuller, CCA  
Annapolis Valley





# I Wasn't Expecting That

Many years ago, we had a new elderly gentleman come on service for administration of medications as he was always forgetting to take them. He was not very happy with the fact that VON was going into his home. He made it abundantly clear every time we went in that he did not want us there and said he was quite capable of looking after himself. He was upset with his family for getting us to go into the home.

One night while I was there and I was going through his chart, he said, "You know I believe it would be easier to get rid of herpes than the VON!" I started to laugh and laugh and laugh until the tears were streaming down my face. I told him that was the funniest thing that I had ever heard and then he started to laugh, and ended up coming around in the long run.

It wasn't long after that when he had said to me, "You VON nurses are the best thing that have happened to me in a long time. I've always been stubborn and set in my ways but I just wanted to let you all know how much I appreciate you!"

Joanne Dunford, LPN  
Cape Breton



## Kim V.

My name is Kristin and I am a Clinical Nurse Educator. I haven't worked in community nursing for long but now can't imagine working in any other area. The expertise and skill of the nurses amaze me every day. I could write a story about each and every nurse with the VON and how inspiring they are but here is one story I want to share.

On the Belleville team there is a nurse Kim V. that is CAPCE (Comprehensive Advanced Palliative Care Education) trained and has been with the VON for 25+ years. Kim is incredibly passionate about palliative care and gives 150% to the care of the patient and family through a holistic approach.

A few months ago there was a young boy on service with a terminal brain cancer diagnosis and to keep continuity there were only 3 nurses going into the home. Near the end, nursing was in daily to support the patient and family with hydration, pain control and for emotional support. Throughout the patient's care Kim remained professional, compassionate and accountable for the care she provided. If she wasn't working she gave a full verbal report to the nurse seeing the patient that day. On the day he passed away the funeral home wanted to move him to the vehicle but the father wanted to carry him. Kim advocated strongly for the father and the child as it was also what he would have wanted. In the end the patient's father was able to carry him to the funeral home vehicle. The following day management received multiple letters of praise from the MD, NP, LHIN case coordinator and family for Kim and the care she provided to both the patient and family.

Kristin Phillips RN, Clinical Nurse Educator  
Hastings Northumberland Prince Edward





## Hold Your Horses!

You never know where working for the VON is going to take you! I used to have a rural route and one time I had a client that we treated in a barn. This client did not have a telephone or a fixed address and worked as a farm hand on a horse farm. He needed several weeks of IV antibiotic treatment and wound care. The instructions were to just show up at the designated time. Park the car. Enter the horse barn and call out his name-but not loudly enough to spook the horses. Often he would not be sitting in a chair waiting for us so it would require walking through several barns looking for a human that might give some direction! Our client had to have his IV started and received his treatments right there in the horse barn with the whinnying and snorting in the background. It was almost worth wearing gum boots for these appointments!

Esther Beatty, RN,CHPCN  
Hamilton



## End of Life Wish

I love working as a visiting palliative nurse with the VON. Helping clients and families walk through the End of Life (EOL) journey can be very satisfying. Recently I had one particular patient who had been in and out of the hospital many times. He was terrified of having to return to the hospital and begged us to let him die at home.

The client's family doctor was not in agreement with the plan for EOL at home. A visiting palliative doctor got involved. I will never forget the visit where my client was crying and begging this physician to let him die at home. I was thankful to be part of a team that could help this client.

One of the events this man wanted to stay alive for was the birth of his great-grandson. A few days after the baby was born, I was visiting in the morning and it seemed as if my client was getting close to the end. I told his wife I would come back and check on him later that afternoon.

When I arrived she had been sleeping and I woke her up. She had been asleep in an armchair beside his bed. I could see from the door that he was gone. I was thankful to be there to share in her sorrow...but also in her joy of knowing that her husband's wishes were met.

Esther Beatty, RN,CHPCN  
Hamilton

# Love ... MY ... VON

Life is a library of experiences - every day you will touch a life or a life will touch yours - they say!

My 89 year old client was extremely stubborn and selective in choosing his PSW. Somehow, I was successful in clicking on his mirror of thoughts and he would ALWAYS welcome me during my visits.

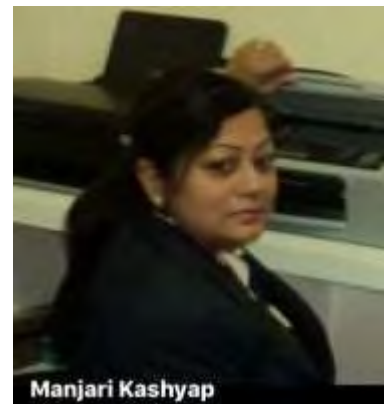
One day, he welcomed me with a BIG smile, he bathed, dressed and lunched, then came his favorite part of my visit - walking together while talking - sharing - laughing - chitchatting and joking. At times, his legs would become tired and he would sit down on his walker, still in a jubilant mood. The laughter on that particular day was exceptionally loud and joyful as he was happy because he would visit his religious place to "connect with his Lord" that evening. His daughter was to drive him there. My time was up and I left.

Morning rolled into evening and I was at home, relaxing with my family. BANG!!! I got an email that my client is NO MORE! That SHOCKED ME!!! I just could not believe it. Didn't he say that he was going to see his LORD?! Highly distressed, I called his daughter with heartfelt condolences. His daughter told me that her Dad passed away peacefully while sitting in the front passenger seat while en route to his religious place. She also added, "Dad was very happy with your care and we all are very thankful for your actions."

With a heavy heart, I spent that evening in my backyard watching the glaring stars on that full moon night, and skipped my usual "pleasure walk" with my hubby. Tears were rolling down - nonstop! May the departed soul rest in peace - I prayed! Maybe this is a part of life ....varied experience... while working for VON indeed! Love - My - VON

Remembering the words of Christine Belle -"Our job as nurses and PSWs is to cushion the sorrow and celebrate the job every day, while we are "just doing our jobs."

Manjari Kashyap, PSW  
Peel





## Mr. R.

I was a young, newly graduated nurse working with VON in rural Ontario in 1970. Mrs. R. had had a debilitating stroke and I visited twice a week to help her with a bed bath. As I look back, I realize Mrs. R. probably spent most of her time in her bed. Mr. and Mrs. R. had very limited means and VON visits were provided through charitable funds, as these were times before a provincial home care program. It was also a time before home support services and certainly, caregiver respite.

Mr. R. was often overwhelmed by his caregiving responsibilities, only one part of which was the laundry. It was not unusual to see that the clothesline had collapsed once again between its posts with the weight of the laundry as I drove into the driveway. After greeting Mr. and Mrs. R., my visit began with foraging to find soap, a basin, a clean washcloth, towel, and nightgown, sometimes needing to retrieve these from the sometimes collapsed laundry line. From time to time, I tried to suggest gently that these things could be gathered ahead for my visit, but to no avail. I tried not to show my frustration.

During one visit, I mentioned that the next week a student nurse would be at our Branch to learn about being a nurse in the community and asked if the student would be able to accompany me to visit and care for Mrs. R. They gave their consent. When we arrived, neatly gathered on the table were a clean washcloth, towel and nightgown, all neatly folded beside a basin and bar of soap. I am still moved by their thoughtfulness, wanting to make this a special visit for this student nurse who was learning to work in community. I thanked Mr. R. for getting things together.

The next visit, and after, we returned to the routine of me searching out the tools of my trade but I didn't mind a bit, ever.

Janis North, Former VON employee



## An Act of Kindness

One of my fondest VON moments was many years back, not long after I started in home support. At that time, we had weekly meetings to team schedule. There were six of us on this team. We would often build our team morale by celebrating birthdays or other special occasions at these meetings. It came to our attention that one of our clients had never had a birthday party in her entire 80 plus years, so as a team we decided to give her a party. One person made a cake, the other person brought the ice cream, someone picked up party favours and balloons, etc. And, we each got her a small gift. Then en masse we arrived to surprise her. The look of sheer joy on her face was so wonderful to witness. She said it was one of the best days of her life. We all felt so good to do something so special for a sweet lady. After her passing, a short time later, her niece told us how much that day meant to her aunt and how she often talked about it.

Everyday, helping clients stay in their own homes is what makes this job so special. But once in a while it's the other things we can do that makes all the difference to these clients and those moments are oh so rewarding.

Tammy Frail, CCA  
Annapolis Valley





## My Mentor My Friend

When I was young, I must have been around 12 years old, I met this wonderful, extremely caring VON nurse looking after my grandmother. This was before nitro patches existed and you had to apply the nitro to Telfa and tape it down. She taught me this to help assist my grandma. I met up with her a few other times after that throughout my life, but the one important time was when my husband was palliative and end of life. She was so impressed with the care I was giving my husband to enable him to stay at home, and pass, that she insisted many times I should become a nurse. After my husband did pass I did end up going to nursing school. I knew exactly the type of nursing I was going to do....community, and was going to work for VON no matter what.

I bumped into her while going to school and told her the news; I was going to be a new nurse. She was so impressed that upon hearing this she postponed her retirement to be a mentor to me. She is still in my life to this day even after retirement. She is a great mentor and friend. I will never forget the things she taught me. I strive every day to be just like her.

Tanya Solomon, RPN VN  
Grey Bruce



## Enduring Love

I have been with the VON for over 20 years and early in my career I had this experience that I have told a few co-workers over the years.

I went into a couple's home who were in their 90's, and just called out, "Hi, I'm here." They didn't respond because we usually came at different times of the day and they were used to someone being about their home. I proceeded with my required tasks and heard them speak. Thinking that they needed me, I walked to the sound of their voices, and realizing they were in their bedroom I quietly came closer. I looked around the doorway to see them laying side by side on their bed and he had his arm around her holding her close.

In her elderly age her memory was not as sharp as perhaps it once was and she asked him, "Are you my boyfriend?" He softly chuckled and said, "I hope so, we've been married for over 70 years."

My eyes watered and I thought to myself that it would be a wonderful ending to a wonderful life if they were able to end their days together perhaps just like that. But alas it didn't happen that way. Within a few short months she was moved into a nursing facility and he soon after moved into a private home. That was where they were to live out their days. I have never forgotten that and even now it brings a tear to my eye.

Heather Matthews, CCA  
Colchester East Hants





## Splish Splash

I remember when I first started with VON 3.5 years ago. I had a client (my very first day) and she was, and still is, a little fussy. She likes things done a certain way and that's ok.

I was very nervous to say the least and I dropped a basin of water on her floor, and while cleaning that up, I ripped her shower curtain down, and then I slipped and fell right on my butt, in a puddle of water. The client looked at me and asked if I was ok, and then she burst into laughter. It was so embarrassing and I felt like I was totally incompetent at that moment. After we both stopped laughing, and I got things cleaned up, we were able to do the tasks at hand.

I don't get there often but when I do, she always reminds me of our first meeting, and we laugh some more. She says "I love my adventures with Heidi". She and her husband are always pleased to see me when I arrive and they hug me every time.

Heidi Hingley, CCA  
Cumberland



## 101 Going On 25

My story begins in the winter of 2015....

I arrived at a visit of one of our older clients (101 at the time), but she was not in the house. I called her name and searched for her care giver as well. I found this odd as she is usually at home and in her bed. I walked outside to which I could hear someone chopping wood. I thought it may be her caregiver so I went out to the woodshed, where I found the client cutting and splitting wood. She had a nightie on and a pair of rubber boots. She was splitting the wood with the strength of a 25 year old man. Now if you know anything about this client, this was not a usual sight. I asked her what she was doing and she said wood needed to be brought in for the winter, I told her that there was lots of wood in the house and I requested that she come inside before she got sick. She put the axe in a block of wood and came in the house. I still don't know to this day where she got the energy to get up on her own and do this. She is quite a frail lady. She is 103 now and that has never happened again (at least that I know of).

Heidi Hingley, CCA  
Cumberland



# A Gift

My name is Lee-Ann and I am an activity coordinator at the VON Adult Day Programs in Hamilton. I have been with VON Canada since 2005 and began my career as a Personal Support Worker. I have had the opportunity to work in our Adult Day programs, Overnight Respite Services as well as In Home Respite Program.

This may sound a bit over dramatic, but I truly feel that I have been given a gift working for VON Canada and being able to work with my clients. They have taught me what love and patience and dedication can accomplish. I am so fortunate that VON gives me the opportunity to spend time with the adults who attend the day program. I have fun at my job, I stay active at my job, I am constantly learning at my job. It is so much more than 'just a job'.

Recently I realized just how special my company was when my father became very ill. I needed time off to be with him at a most inconvenient time. Time off that I was afraid could not be granted based on staffing. My employer understood my predicament and granted me a leave of absence to be with him. I am so thankful that I am with a company that values my dedication to both my family as well as my work. I will always treasure the weeks that I got to spend caring for my father.

At the day centre, we learn to 'live in the moment', as our clients are cognitively impaired. We learn that moments are special and moods and attitudes can change in a heartbeat. This little life lesson to 'live in the moment' has carried with me even outside of work. It makes one appreciate the little things that we so often take for granted. I believe that my role is one of those things in life to not take for granted. It's an opportunity to learn from others; our staff and our clients and our management.

Lee Ann Breese, Activity Coordinator Adult Day Program  
Hamilton





## You Are My Sunshine

We are very fortunate to have a lady, with special needs, who attends the SMART exercise class held in our main office in Oxford, with her worker.

Corrina is a ray of sunshine and radiates happiness through her beautiful, infectious big smile every time she walks through the door! She has a couple of favorite staff members that are summoned every Wednesday to come up to the lobby to greet her. It is such an honour and treat for us to feel so loved by her.

She gives hugs and smiles and takes great pride in showing off her baby “Lucas” often allowing us to hold him and sometimes even watch over him while she exercises. She is non-verbal but her worker knows what she is telling us through her beautiful smiles and gestures and we communicate quite well. She then often takes me by the hand so that I can accompany her to the SMART exercise room and is beyond excited to see all of the other participants. The participants welcome her with smiles and fuss over her baby Lucas often commenting on the new outfits she so lovingly puts him in. She may not follow along with the pace of the others in the room but she absolutely loves the social contact and the love and acceptance that is very evident in the room. Our Wednesday clients not only benefit from the exercises we provide, but also the love and “sunshine” that this special lady brings to our class.



Corrina and Lucas

Rose Entz, Coordinator SMART/Fall Prevention  
Oxford



# Shake Rattle and Roll

Edith and her cane were "old friends" and had known each other for the last 8 years of her 88, and there was no way she was going to trade it in for some foolish walker, whether it had brakes on it or anything else. To Edith the walker was a step backwards, a step towards less independence, and one step closer to the grave.

So I told Edith a story about a woman I knew when I worked in long term care that was just like her; Edith was listening. I told her that the woman refused to use a walker and, in short, fell and broke her hip. The doctors couldn't do anything and she was then bedridden as transfers were too painful. I told Edith that I asked that woman if I could use her as an example for other clients I had that didn't want to use their walkers and she agreed.

Edith decided to try her walker and found out very quickly that it took less energy to use, so she could go further and at a better pace. The walker was also a chair if she got tired and there was a basket to carry things in. She could also go outside now on the garden paths.

I asked Edith if I could use her story to help others. Edith gave me the sweetest smile, asked me to get her walker out of the back room, laughed and said I could add her to my stories to help others.

After that, when I went to visit Edith she would make a point of giving her hips a little shake and say "shake rattle and roll". I always put that in the story now and it works even better when needed. "Shake rattle and roll".

Wayne Taylor, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



## Stepping Out - Cheering Up

As we age we risk the chance of outliving those who are closest to us and those we love. This was very true for one of our Adult Day Clients. She was a socialite in her day and enjoyed hosting many gatherings to celebrate important occasions or just to be with friends. Her well-accomplished husband enjoyed traveling with his wife after retirement and together they had an opportunity to see the world. But as the years went on, and after he had passed away, the now elderly client found herself not only alone, but also very lonely.

We all know the negative effect that isolation and loneliness have not only on our physical well-being but on our mental well-being as well. Someone suggested the VON Adult Day Program as a place to socialize and enjoy the company of others. Our client loved the social interaction, the physical activity but most of all the music therapy at every session. She often tapped her toes and swayed to the music and it was not unusual for her to get up and have a little dance. She lit up the room with her bright smile and loved to have a chat with all the clients, volunteers and staff. We managed to capture her blowing some bubbles and showing a big grin as we took a picture. It was entered into a Provincial Aging-Well Calendar contest and won. She was beaming and proud as we gave each client a calendar and had them look at the beautiful photo of our client.

Sadly our client has passed on and she is greatly missed by all. Her son thanked us for providing such compassionate care to his mom and giving her an opportunity to be social again, remarking the big difference it made in her life and said that his mom truly lived for the VON Adult Day Program.



Anonymous  
Tri-County



## My Inspiration

When I was young my mom was a VON. I remember her getting ready to go to work at the hospital in Gravenhurst Ontario, white stocking, white shoes, white nurses' uniform, and above all the great nurses' hat with a blue stripe. She was a nurse at the hospital, but on the way home she donned the blue and red cape.

She would pick me up at school and we would walk to each patient she would see to make sure they were adjusting at home from their hospital visit or check on them as they could not get to a doctor. There was babies to elderly. She always told me that I had to sit and be quiet while she worked. She did not drive so she walked everywhere. As we lived in a rural area, sometimes I felt like we walked for hours, there were days when it was very dark when we got home.

I was very young but I still remember some of what she did for her patients. I always told her I wanted to be a doctor or nurse like her. As I got older and realized that we did not have the funds for me to get that kind of training, I went into something else. When my mom got ill and I looked after her, we would talk about when she was working. When she passed I was lost without her. It took me about a year to get my mind in gear. I decided I was going back to school for training. So at 52 I did what I thought was impossible.

I am working for THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES and very proud of who I am and who my mother was.

I take my hat off to ALL the nurses, PSWs, and all the ladies and gentlemen that make up the VON, for you are the angels of those in need.

Sandy



## LOL :)

I had a new client not in my area, so I turned CellTrak on. When it said “you have arrived”, I got out of the car and a lady in her housecoat came out on the step to meet me. I introduced myself and she said, “Come in”. I didn't really have time to say her name as she just kept talking. I usually make sure I know their name before entering. It was summer so I didn't have a coat, and she could see my name tag and my VON bag. I didn't have time to get the VON book as this lady's daughter was there and they wanted me to see the grandchild. We talked for a few minutes, and this lady stated, “I have a wedding to go to this afternoon, so I took my bath and just didn't get dressed because I'll soon be getting ready for the wedding”. I said, “I wish you would have waited for me”, and she said, “my daughter was here”. Then her daughter said that she always takes her bath by herself. Then the lights went on and I said, “I am here for your bath; are you are on home care?” She said, “No”. Not sure who she thought I was, but she was a very friendly lady, welcoming anyone in. Needless to say I was a little embarrassed. She stated, “Well, if ever I need home care I hope you come back”. I've never trusted technology since. The civic number was put in wrong.

Always a lesson to learn from mistakes - never trust electronics and no matter what, make sure the first thing you do, no matter how fast they talk - find out their name. I guess we are all human and make mistakes, and good to know we can laugh about them.

Then there was the time...

I had a cancellation so was sent to Bridgetown, which I'm not familiar with, so I put on my Celltrak. When nearing my destination, Celltrak said to turn a few meters ahead, so I did. I drove up this road and Celltrak said, “You have reached your destination”. I was at a field with a cow in it. I thought to myself, this is not the place. So, I called the client's home and her husband gave me the directions. I was beginning to think - are we extending our services? :)

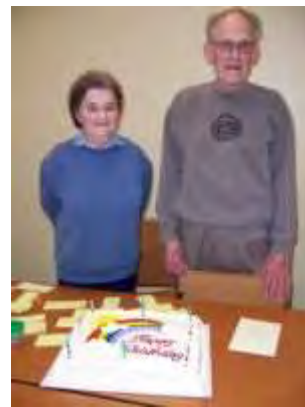
This visit was really unique as the client was the daughter of a woman I had had as a client for 6 years. I thought, maybe I've been here too long if I'm helping children of my past clients. :)

Crystal Burrell, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



## George and Anne Munson

I have been really struggling with what to write about this extraordinary couple. Digging deep into my memories to come up with a story that would do justice to them and the contributions they made to VON. To clearly articulate who they were and what they meant to myself and my colleagues who worked with them. And then I realized, the reason I admired and was inspired by this couple was not because of a single or even a couple of random acts. I was inspired by them because of who they were every day.



George and Anne were volunteers at the Peterborough VON office. George was our “handy man”. He came in at least once per week with his tool box to fix anything and everything. Whether it was putting up a door hook or bulletin board, installing a new computer or fixing – well anything – he always had a huge smile on his face and kind words.

Anne was a volunteer at the office for over 35 years! She was still working at GE when she started but after she retired she devoted more and more time to us. As I recall, she sometimes came in three times a week. Putting client files together, filing – or any other administrative assistance that was needed. Anne knew all of our names, the names of our children (one of my children was born on her birthday), she brought candy every week for us and she took the girls for coffee every Friday morning. When George became sick he insisted that Anne continue her work with VON as it gave her such joy.

This incredible couple is no longer with us and they are missed deeply. They will be remembered for their kind hearts, humor, easy smiles and laughter and of course their endless generosity. This is who they were every day; we would all do well to be inspired by that.

Karen Guy  
National Director, Safety, Health and Wellness



## **A True Story from Hamilton, Ontario**

One day as I was working the evening shift I was asked to visit a client to administer a Fleet Enema. Needing to call the client, prior to my visit, I was accidentally given the number for Blue Line Taxi (our local taxi service). I called them to ask when I could visit - but they already have a whole fleet and didn't need mine!

Helen 't Hart, RN  
Hamilton



# Yummy

On my first visit with a client, I noticed when I walked in that he was frowning. I asked the client what he would like for breakfast and he gave me his order. When I completed the cooking, the client's frown deepened. I apologized for breaking his egg yolks, his frying pan was so old that everything would stick. All I got from the client was a grunt. Halfway through his breakfast he started to call out, "Ella, Ella, come here", and he put his plate on the floor. Ella took one look and wolfed down what was on the plate and promptly licked her lips. At this point, my client looked up at me with a smile and said that that was the best breakfast he ever had - Ella doesn't like runny eggs. Never in my wildest dreams did I think my cooking would be judged by how fast a dog ate his breakfast.

Monica Burns  
Pictou





# The Power of Suggestion

The first time I went to see Doug I remember thinking how fortunate for him to have all the things he needed to deal with his condition. He had ramps, a ceiling lift from bedroom to bathroom, a portable lift, a power chair, a scooter, a shower chair and more, not to mention an incredible wife and loving extended family as well as a involved faith community. I quickly found out that he was not taking full advantage of all these things. I made it a point to encourage him to embrace those things to improve his quality of life and that of his loved ones.

After a number of respite visits filled with chess games, conversation and some convincing, Doug agreed to try his shower chair. He had a shower for the first time in over seven years and loved it. He decided to try transportation services - he was able to go to his 40 year high school reunion. This was followed by him taking his wife to a restaurant, for the first time in over 20 years. He began using his power chair and scooter to visit friends and neighbors, go to yard sales and the corner store, and go in his yard with his dog or for a walk with his wife.

He became happier and was planning on making changes at his cottage. This however did not happen, as Doug passed away before he had the chance.

It never ceases to amaze me, how a little suggesting can make someone decide that they want to live the best life they can with what time and ability they have, once they give it a try, with encouragement and support, it can open many great opportunities for them and their loved ones.

Doug's wife assured me that they had lived and enjoyed life more in his last year of his life than they had in a long time, and was so happy to have had someone reach out and help them discover just what it was he could do if he only knew he wanted to.

I often tell Doug's story and other people's stories in an effort to reach out to them, and it always works to one degree or another. Isn't it interesting how we all seem to learn easier by example, once we are given one.

Wayne Taylor, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



## The Old Days

We used to boil forceps in the home. We would call and remind the family/client to "put on the pot" prior to our visit so it would be sterilized to use for dressing changes when we arrived. We had clients make their own saline by boiling water and adding a tablespoon of salt to a sterile mason jar

We used to come in to the VON office to get our day's worth of charts. We carried them all in our bag and returned them to the filing cabinet at end of day.

We used to load our bags each morning with folded paper towels (folded by volunteer groups).

We had small bottles of "green soap" to wash with at the client's sink.

We used to use client's telephones to call the next client

We used to wear blue and white uniforms with pale blue striped shirts/dresses for the summer. I believe we had a uniform allowance!

We used to run foot care clinics at the local library several times a month. The folks would line up on chairs, pay a small fee and we nurses would come after our 6 baths and a few dressings and other visits to sit in a row and clip toe/finger nails.

Margaret Jonkman, RN  
Brantford



# Alice and Her Daughter

A client comes to mind, I'll name her Alice. She was bedridden with MS she lived in a very unkempt house along with many cats, a dog or 2 and a disheveled daughter. She was a 'complete bed bath', 2x/week along with assessment, bowel routine, catheter care and change q/monthly, and often wound care.

I was the primary nurse in here and went through a pregnancy while attending this client over a long period of time. I had difficulty keeping my "cookies" down while stepping on soiled newspapers with high ammonia fumes and dog /cat "doo" or kitty kibbles. I don't think the client had any/much care between nursing visits. We ended up increasing the visit frequency to daily but it was a difficult place to get staff to go into.

I was surprised one day while on mat leave, to see a strange car in my laneway. Here was the daughter driving! I didn't know she had clothes, let alone drive. She arrived at my door with a beautiful crocheted baby blanket, which she said she made for me! I was so touched! After a friendly chat, I thanked her and she drove back to the city.

Sometimes people surprise you by showing appreciation when you didn't know they "had it in them". Each client has the right to be respected and treated with dignity. I often think to myself, "what if the roles were reversed?" How would I want to be treated? Dire situations have a way of giving one a reality check.

Margaret Jonkman, RN  
Brantford



# When I Think of Susan...

I think of what she said to me when I was scheduled for total hip replacement surgery a year ago and never having had surgery in my life and very stressed and very worried. I was 70 at the time. Susan said to me...the following very reassuring and comforting thoughts..."My Mother had her hip replacement surgery at 92, and if she did fine you should be fine too". I think her mom was diabetic too.

This was a comment I brought with me to the hospital on the morning of surgery and even into the OR when they wheeled me in and the surgeon and nurse supported me (my hip was now totally gone) as I tried to walk to the surgery table. The surgeon commented on me being so calm. He thought it was my nursing background as an RPN. I said I was thinking of a lady who had her hip done at 92 and is now 97. Her daughter works at the VON and told me about her Mom for my comfort and reassurance...and its working!

During recovery I was bored out of my mind especially the last 6 weeks for physio to correct my duck-like walk. Susan welcomed me to come and visit at the office and talk to ease the boredom. I thanked her for her kindness but declined because I know how busy she and everyone is in the office. But I will never forget how kind it was for her to offer this comfort to me despite her being so busy.

Thank you, Susan Kneeshaw, for your kindness to me. I have never forgotten how good it made me feel.

I sometimes use this act of kindness as a model for inspiration, to extend myself to clients when I am very busy or tired from demanding clients. It's like a shot in the arm of good-will energy!



Arthur Skinner, PSW  
Middlesex-Elgin



# The Snow Nurse

I've been a proud VON nurse since I graduated 21 years ago. When I get dressed in the morning to head to work as soon as I put that VON lanyard around my neck the pride I feel is palpable. When I was a child I dreamt of the day I would become a nurse. VON has always stood out in health care, the compassion, dedication and commitment shines from the CSA's, volunteers, management, and frontline workers, we are truly a team.

A few years back in one of our major storms I was off work, I was the "snow nurse" for a client who lived "close" to me and was in need. Snow nurses are chosen based on the closest nurse who is able to walk to the client's home to help them. When I got the call that I was to make my way over to the client's house which by the way was over 2km away, I got dressed in the most layers I could as it was -18 and literally a blizzard. Without another thought, off I went hiking in knee deep snow to the client's home to disconnect a chemotherapy bottle. Over an hour and a half later I arrived frozen and wet. The client was crying when I arrived, and I immediately went into "nurse mode" to find the source of her tears, was it pain, sadness, depression, dire straits? No, the client was crying because I had hiked the hour and a half in the snow to her aid, she was so appreciative of the compassion I had shown her, she was so grateful for the VON and their hardworking selfless staff. I will never forget this lady who hugged me, offered me a warm tea and a chat before my hike back home in the storm.

To this day I never thought of my hike as anything but due diligence, to help and to serve the client in need. VON nurses are born, not bred and what we do, I truly believe, we do because we love to help, we love to nurse, and we do so in a selfless humble way. I am proud to be a VON nurse and will continue to provide the best possible care for our clients. Here's to another 120 years!!

Cheryl Andrews  
Hamilton





## A Joke a Day

Joining the VON team has been a positive experience for me. As a staff member for the SMART program I have enjoyed meeting and working with some wonderful people. As a way to break the ice with new classes I began telling 1 or 2 jokes. Now the highlight of the class is, what will peoples' responses be? Not one class goes by without someone telling me how funny that joke was, or..... that was the worst groaner I've ever heard. The challenge has become the search for jokes on particular topics – suggested by the participants. Animals, Canadians, travel, the wackier the better! Here's an example, the great thing is that everyone needs a laugh.

“What did the eggs say when the cops showed up?”

“Everybody scramble! “

For people dealing with the challenges of life, laughter is indeed the best medicine.

Maybe a joke a day does keep the doctor away!

Lori Ververs, Registered Kinesiologist  
Simcoe County



## The True Value of Care

My story is about a man with Down syndrome named David (fictional names). He, along with his mother Jane, were clients of mine when I worked in the Cape Breton Branch. One day as I was in for my visit with both these clients, Jane was doing her monthly bill payments. David had rearranged their living room into a makeshift office. As I walked in, David said “Hi Karen I was waiting for you...I have something for you” and he gave a little slip of paper with a \$100.00 written on it. He said, “Mom is paying her bills so I thought I should pay you for being the most wonderful nurse that takes care of me”. I heart-warmingly accepted this non-monetary note. He melted my heart that day...that truly made me love working for VON.

Karen Dunlop, LPN  
Greater Halifax





## Not for the Faint of Heart

It was your typical warm spring morning, driving to my next client which is 45 minutes from town. Country drives are the best.... in the summer months of course. I'm greeted at the door by a lovely sweet old lady. We sit down at the table and we talk about her weekend. I check her sugars and make sure she's taking her medication properly. As I'm writing in the chart I hear this strange sound; like a little animal. I asked the client if she could hear the noise; she couldn't. I look under the table and there's a mouse caught up in an old mop head! I mention this to the client and she says, "oh my" getting up she walks towards the wood stove and grabs the poker. She's a short little woman, but mighty. She starts hitting the mouse with the poker until it was dead; as I'm standing there mouth open staring at this happening. She's laughing at me as she throws its limp body out the door. Well this is just one of many stories in my day. Every day is different, one day, I could be crying learning that a client has passed away.

I've been an LPN for 27 years and VON has been the best place to work out of all institutions. We are very blessed to live in a country where this service is available.

Vanessa MacLeod, LPN  
Pictou County



# Blue Blooded

When VON was awarded the Home Care Contract in NS for Visiting Nursing, fresh “blood” was needed to help with the new business. Looking for work closer to home, opportunity was knocking. I was interviewed and offered casual employment, bringing the # of staff to 12! (Today there are 225+) I stocked my closet with blue and white clothes, loaded my car and VON bag with all the necessary supplies and ventured out for my very first home visits. I couldn’t imagine providing nursing care without all the bells and whistles found in a hospital but I knew right away, this was where I belonged.

In '96 we build a new home and moved my mother in with us who had been living alone for years, and struggling with her own health and challenged to maintain the family home. Seeing first hand just how hard it is for so many to live alone it was the right time for her and us to make a change. I was now able to do my part not only at work, but at home, to help someone stay in their home as long as possible.

Fast forward 22 years..... I’ve worked in visiting nursing, as a manager of a nursing program, a director of 3 different sites and now a regional director. I’ve been on a million working groups and projects, I’ve learned and have taught & I know every acronym known to man. I now understand the true meaning of giving through our volunteers, I’ve laughed and cried, I’ve been very proud and very distraught, I’ve made best friends and lost some too... but my career at VON has been nothing but full.

Mom is still with us and is now getting VON home care which she loves. She’s much frailer than she was 20 years ago but is still in her own home and will be for as long as she can. I’m now living the life of the “caregiver” and it’s one of my biggest learning curves, to accept the help that I have done so much over the years to promote. Being on the other side gives me a whole new appreciation and perspective and validates my purpose in life... doing exactly what I’m doing, serving those in need, at home and at work.

I feel like I’ve grown up at VON and it’s become part of who I am. That fresh blood is now true blue!



Carol Curley, Regional Executive Director  
Northern and Eastern Nova Scotia



## S.M.A.R.T Guys

My story begins in our office that we like to call the 'old train station' located in Streetsville, Mississauga. Here in this cozy office I have the chance to work with a team of talented people who have the ability to change lives with just a phone call. A team who will band together after hours just to get a job done and celebrate every milestone with cake.

However, my true story is about my team of S.M.A.R.T Guys. We work with seniors who need gentle exercise to boost them back up. These Guys aren't only the 'muscles' of the office, but are the motivation for some of our more 'stubborn' seniors who may often refuse exercise because their children put them up to it.

In my role, I get to play matchmaker, pairing client with trainer but I also get to see how their expertise change people's lives. I've met people who needed walkers before the program, to not needing anything at all, and those who tell me how excited they are that they can get out of the chair easier. These small, ordinary success stories are the reason why we're here, and the reason why I love doing what I do.

Well that is my VON story. In short, I get to work with an amazing group of people who get to make a difference every day!

Josefina Berroya, Kinesiologist  
Peel



# A VON Adult Day Volunteer Angel

My story is about an amazing lady that I met when I started working here 17 years ago and who I consider to be a VON Angel.

In 1988, VON became Bev's family. Her husband suffered a debilitating stroke at a young age and began to attend our Sudbury Adult Day Program daily while she worked. She soon started her volunteer journey by helping with occasional outings and special events. She always believed that the Day Centre was a safe, caring place and it gave her peace of mind.

In 2001, after her husband's passing, Bev became a very passionate volunteer for us. She was the kind of volunteer that all organizations wish for... dedicated, hardworking, caring, and giving. She volunteered 2-4 days a week and never missed a special occasion or fundraiser. She sewed, baked, cooked, made crafts, and cleaned at the Day Centre. She sat at the mall for hours handing out information, sat on several committees and always took the time to tell people about the work we do. She was an incredible supporter and spokesperson for VON!

Over the years Bev's health declined significantly and, with the support of our team, she recently made the difficult decision to become a client. She still attends 2-3 days a week and spends her time here socializing and getting involved with activities. She still helps out when she is able and has never stopped promoting our program in the community. Though she now attends the Day Centre as a client, she remains a life-long volunteer!

She has made a difference in all the lives she has touched. She is the glue that holds a team together and never fails to put smiles on the faces of everyone around her. She is the model of a super volunteer and her passion makes other people want to give back! It is difficult to find words to explain all she is and all she has done for us. Personally, I feel honoured to have her in my life and to have been a part of her volunteer journey.

Nicole Gervais, Activation Programmer, Team Lead  
Sudbury



# 50 Years of Nursing

I am a visiting nurse and have worked in the Parry Sound area and the Grey Bruce area. I have had wonderfully easy cases and those difficult ones that teach us much. One of my favourite stories is about caring for an elderly couple, first the husband and then his wife. They lived in a quaint cabin on a small lake and were well into their 90s. The gentleman always complained about everything and his wife always had a beautiful smile. Both of these beautiful people died on service. After the gentleman died, we cared for his wife through her grief until her death. I believe I was the primary nurse for over 5 years. The profound reality of caring for clients is continuity and having planners that recognize that so that the same nurse is seeing and following her clients. But in addition remembering to mentor our new nurses for at least 2 years if they are just starting their career in community nursing and securing them and selling community care.

My other client was on service for some time on a pain pump - we all have stories about pain pumps - my client, being a mechanic, was always way ahead of me in problem solving the pump and that made my job a pleasure as we problem solved together. Our whole Parry Sound team worked with that client and we did great team work.

Now after 50 years of nursing, I am still a valued nurse on the Grey Bruce team, and with the new system, I not only value my team members but am reminded how important our office manager is as well as our nursing admin and every member of our team. Let us strive to take the time to listen more to our patients and our staff and to meet their needs and after meeting those needs support each other as we become leaders in health care, as we have less resources let us make connections which are strong with our hospitals, health centre and community health clinics. Let us strive to value each other and continue the journey of travelling through Ontario and Nova Scotia and providing the road less travelled.

Jean McCauley, RN  
Grey Bruce



## Squeaky Clean

Back in the day when we had to go into the office to pick up our assignments, before cell phones, pagers or email, nurses could end up in some interesting situations. Sometimes the office didn't specify East, West, North or South on a street. In those days RNs also still did quite a bit of personal care. This patient was a late add-on so I did not have the chart and planned to document when I got back to the office. I arrived at an elderly Mr. Smith's house and introduced myself. He welcomed me in, let me do his vital signs and general assessment and asked for help with his bath. It wasn't till I was about to leave that he said what a good idea it was on VONs part to send a nurse to help him, and could we come back next week? That's when we realized that this nurse was at the wrong end of the street! Good PR though!

Nella Sandrock, RN, BScN, CHPCN-C  
Hamilton



# I Am Human

In the mid-eighties when the HIV/Aids epidemic broke, I was a palliative care nurse in the city core. There was a small number of us who ended up with substantial HIV caseloads. These patients tended to live downtown close to the very few health care professionals who would provide care. Once again VON stepped in to address a need even though some of our significant others did not like the idea. We received as much information as there was to be had at the time, which was very little. Most of these patients were actively dying, mostly alone, with terrible symptoms and without support. Most people were afraid to go near anyone with this new and dangerous virus. We practiced universal precautions, and armed with some basic facts and a prayer, stepped in to provide desperately needed care. I will never forget meeting my first HIV patient. I took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. A very weak and emaciated young man came to the door and opened it a little. I said "Hi, my name is Nella" and put out my hand to shake his. He stared at my (ungloved) hand and then took it in his as a smile lit up his eyes. "You are the first person that has dared to touch me in months. I feel human again. Please come in." The memory still brings tears to my eyes. I went on to learn much about this disease. I met some of the most incredible people and went to more funerals than I can count because prior to 1992 and the introduction of a cocktail of antiretroviral drugs, almost everyone died. It was some of the most difficult but also most rewarding nursing I ever did.

Nella Sandrock, RN, BScN, CHPCN-C  
Hamilton





## A Proud Member of the VON Team

When I was preparing for my job interview with VON I did some research on the organization and felt an immediate connection to the story of Lady Aberdeen and her motivation to help those without proper access to health care. The fact that 120 years ago a woman started this organization in our country really appealed to me. This added to the fact that the original goals of VON to deliver the right services to people living at home have never been more important, made the job something special. Having worked in community health care in my previous roles, I had firsthand knowledge of how disconnected many people, especially seniors, can be to services.

Thankfully I was successful and am now a full-time VON employee. Every day I have contact with seniors or adults living with disabilities and help to connect them to services that make their lives a little easier, allowing them more independence and quality of life.

I look at the supports offered through VON's Community Support Services like mortar they need to fill in the gaps left by homecare. The homecare experts do an incredible job of ensuring clinical services are in place but do not have the means to ensure the day to day needs of the client are being met when it comes to meals, transportation, exercise and meaningful socialization. Getting to be the person who puts those much-needed services in place for a senior gives me an amazing amount of satisfaction. I will often hear from client's what impact the VON has made in their lives, whether it is the weekly visit from a volunteer, a much-needed ride to an appointment or a hot meal delivered with a smile. Knowing I am a small part of this service delivery, makes me an incredibly proud member of the VON team.

Teresa Waldner, Volunteer & Community Engagement Coordinator  
Peel





## A Big Thank You

I have been a personal support worker for 18 years with VON. I have seen a lot of clients come and go over the years in our Adult Day Program. I have so many touching stories to share but I could not just pick one, for each and every client has touched my heart in so many different ways, I treasure them all. I would like to say THANK YOU for all the knowledge and wisdom you have given me every day.

There is a saying that goes like this, "People come into our lives for a reason, or a season or a lifetime."

I would also like to thank all of the wonderful PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS out there, you are all amazing!

Lisa Dodds, PSW Adult Day Program  
Dorchester



# A Legacy of Caring

In the summer of 2003, with much of Ontario experiencing a power outage, I took my resume to the Mississauga VON office to apply as a PSW. The lack of electricity had a skeleton staff sitting outside under a tree, and with my resume accepted, an immediate interview was conducted under another tree by Joanne. I was hired and so there under a tree, my relationship with the VON began - it must have been a lucky tree.

Being a part of the VON continues to be a learning experience – client interaction is exceptional, as the generation we service is nothing but unique. These are the nicest, kindest people I have ever met, many 80+ years old, and occasionally I have the privilege to provide service to someone over a hundred years old. I love the cultures; they are different and still so similar, and the many stories of our clients' pasts are very interesting, from having loved to losing a loved one, raising families on farms or here in the city. Some clients have lived in provinces as far away as Newfoundland, while some are immigrants with English as their second language, which can be a challenge but as a PSW you find a way to provide the care that is needed.

To this job you have to bring patience, understanding, compassion and tolerance, and I find the satisfaction outweighs everything else. I remember a client who was Canadian with Scottish heritage, she spoke fondly of playing the drums and pipes with her husband at festivities. Another client at the age of 92 was very witty, and told me that after retiring, she and her husband travelled in an RV throughout Canada and the United States, she would quote specific events during their trip including the death of John F. Kennedy. I was so impressed with this lady and her adventuring spirit that I named my GPS after her - Alice.

My work is fulfilling and therapeutic, and at the end of the day I am proud of the care I provide for my clients and the wonderful organization I work for. After being around for 120 years, we have to be caring in the right way. I live by the Blue Ribbon Motto - "Who I am makes a difference" and so I am proud to be a part of the VON's 120 year legacy.

Nayantara Jokhu, PSW  
Mississauga



# One of a Kind, Roy

Roy was an elderly man in his 80's when he was recommended to the Assisted Living Services for high risk seniors program in the Peterborough/Lakefield hub. He had an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) from his childhood and managed his own apartment for most of his life but needed a little help as he grew older. I was the lucky one to get him. When he was younger he had someone care for him after his injury and her name was Maggie. To Roy, all of us was Maggie. He would love to say in his sing song voice, " Oh Maggie Maggie Maggie ",when I came for his visits.

He loved his many hats and enjoyed trying them on for me. I would take his picture on my phone and show him, he really got a kick out of that. Roy also enjoyed playing his tape cassettes of old country music and dancing in his chair to it. One day I recorded him singing and dancing and showed him. That was a favourite of his to replay. I helped Roy with his ADL's, accompanied him to NP appointments, scooter shopping, specialist appointments and anything else he needed assistance with.

One day, Roy ended up in the hospital and had a much needed surgery. He didn't do so well with recuperating there and was soon very sad, depressed and not eating well. With his ABI he didn't quite understand why I didn't see him all the time so I did make a point of checking on him a few times to let him know I was still around.

The last time I saw Roy I was sitting by his bed and he just wanted to hold my hand. After a while I got up to go and said, "I will see you later" and he said, "I love you Ronda", that was the second time he said my name in the 2 1/2 years I was his primary PSW. I told him, "I love you too Roy". He died shortly after and before I got to see him again. It has been over 2½ years and he still holds a special place in my heart and I treasure the wonderful memories with him as he was a one of a kind.



Ronda Dickie, PSW  
Peterborough



# "I Am a Visiting Nurse"

When people ask me what I do, I proudly tell them "I am a visiting nurse". I don't think that means much of anything to most people. But to me, it means a lot.

It is my personal Better and Worse Homes and Gardens Tour. I am not sure if I have been inspired by the better or scared by the worse, but I have become a much more conscientious housekeeper. When I worked in the multicultural GTA, it meant the United Nations World Tour without leaving home. Where I live now, it is the Town and Country Tour. The thought of working in a space with 4 walls and a roof is suffocating to me since becoming a visiting nurse. I absolutely love this job where the sky is my ceiling. I feel an intimacy with the landscapes of my county and the neighborhoods of my city that I would not otherwise know.

Intimacy. I think that sums it up. Long after I will have forgotten the day to day aggravations that come with any job, I will remember the intimacies I have shared with places and more importantly, people.

One day one of our "regulars" said to me, "How is \_\_\_\_\_? I miss seeing her. The nurses, you know, they become like your family". That statement has come to my mind many times over the years.

Our relationships bridge cultural, religious, racial, gender and personality divides. It may not be a sacred bond, but it is one of respect that leads to trust where we often end up knowing things about people that are so personal even their best friends and families may not be privy to. With knowledge comes power; in this case to give people dignity by not judging, and keeping their most private moments private.

Ruth Harris, RN  
Grey Bruce, Owen Sound



# This Is Why I Do What I do

My current role with VON is as a Client Care Coordinator with the SMILE Program. I work in the office and provide assistance to seniors at risk by funding IADL support for unmet needs. One day, close to Christmas, I received a call from a senior in distress, he had told our receptionist that he was at the end of his rope and if he didn't receive some help he was going to kill himself. I spoke with him, and as we spoke and he calmed somewhat, his story came out.

He was living in a new community with his spouse; they didn't know anyone and had no family nearby. His wife suffered an acute medical event and was hospitalized at a considerable distance from him, he was all alone, he had no food in the apartment, he couldn't get out for groceries, and he didn't know how to cook or do laundry. He felt his situation was hopeless. I was able to admit him to the program and contacted the local CSS agency.

It turned out that the CSS agency was located directly across the street from his apartment, the CSS Coordinator visited him that same day and arranged hot meals to be started immediately (including Christmas dinner), she set up homemaking and transportation. Over the next few weeks we had many conversations with the client and he was so happy with the turn of events. Eventually his spouse returned home and they are still on the SMILE program many years later. Many times this client has said that he felt that at that time when he called SMILE that he was at the darkest time of his life and he never believed that things would have turned out as they have. He and his wife now know members of the community through their contact with the CSS agency, they are supported physically and emotionally.

This is why I love my job and I am so proud of the work we do to help seniors in need.

Tammi Lynne Jones, Client Care Coordinator, SMILE Program  
Hastings Northumberland Prince Edward



# My Dream Career

When I was growing up we would see VON nurses around in cars with the VON symbol. VON Nurses were known to be angels and the best home care nurses around. Everyone knew that VON was the most prestigious job ever. I remember taking care of the elderly with the Alzheimer's Society as a student, and as a volunteer doing respite and I would meet the VON nurses; they were so kind and the patients loved them. Meeting them and seeing what they did made me want to become a nurse; not just any nurse but a VON employee. I vowed I would be a VON nurse one day.

When I graduated as an RPN, back in 1993, work was very scarce. I was luckily hired with Grace Hospital. While on maternity leave I was laid off due to the Grace Hospital's closing. I decided to stay home and raise my first daughter. I opened a daycare out of my home but after 2 years I missed being a nurse. I decided to get back out there with nursing.

I applied to VON Canada in Windsor for home care. I was interviewed and got the job. I felt like I was on top of the world. I was a home care RPN for 2 years with VON. I learned more in those 2 years than I had in all of my nursing years in school or in hospital. I worked with the best and the brightest of nurses. The most caring managers and the support systems were immeasurable. I had the best experience as a new Grad that I fell in love with nursing, home care, and VON. The best company and people to work with. I found my passion and love for home care because of VON. I became a home care nurse after that for many years. I would even speak at Colleges for other new Grads to recruit to home care.

VON made me want to be a better nurse and become all I can be. I would have stayed a VON Nurse for life if allowed. I ended up going back to school to become an RN. I re-applied to VON years later and love the opportunities I have been given. VON is the most innovative and most caring of companies. Windsor will always refer to home care nursing as VON, and I cannot believe I get to start and end my career with my dreams of being a VON Nurse.

When I was growing up we would see VON nurses around in cars with the VON symbol. VON Nurses were known to be angels and the best home care nurses around.

Tammy Bertrand, RN  
Brantford Haldimand



# I Loved Every Minute

I had been working as VON's Director of Communications for about a year and a half when I was asked to pull together a video for an upcoming event. Off I went to London, Ontario with a loose script, a videographer and some vague idea about capturing the range of offerings that VON had available. My job on the video shoot was to warm up the participants and get them talking so that they weren't thrown stilted in front of the camera. I expected to get some good stories and maybe a few good photos. What I didn't anticipate was how it would feel. I knew we were making a difference, I just didn't understand the depth of change we were bringing to the lives of our clients.

Our first stop was at a seniors' exercise program. As I started chatting with the lady who had volunteered to be interviewed I thought she'd talk about mobility and fitness, she told me that the program had saved her life. After the death of her husband she felt alone and abandoned. The program initially gave her a reason to get up, then it gave her a reason to keep going, it gave her a family.

One couple told me that on their first day in London they were feeling sorry for themselves. They had been tasked with growing a new community program for the Salvation Army. A small program had been started by VON, but the community needed more. They walked around the then dilapidated building in search of their VON contact to talk about next steps. They found her in a tiny closet like room; she was bent over washing the feet of an elderly man. She looked up at them and smiled. Something in the serenity of her expression gave them hope and they knew that everything would be fine.

That's the thing about VON, it's never about the big flashy things, it's about the quiet perseverance and steadfast support. I laughed and cried at the stories I heard about once a week when I worked there and loved every minute.



Debra Yearwood, Former Director Communications  
Ottawa



# Dorothy

Dorothy is a 99 year old VON client in good health and fine spirits. She is an only child born in Toronto to a Canadian mother and an English father. Dorothy grew up in Hamilton where she attended public school and has always loved the outdoors, participating in many sports - tennis is her favorite.

From 1942 to 1945 Dorothy worked as an Occupational Therapist with the Red Cross at a military hospital in England. After the war she stayed on and taught crafts and swimming to the handicapped. At the age of 42, she embarked on another adventure - retiring and moving to Cape Cod for 9 years before returning to Toronto. She remains most proud of having served with the Red Cross both here and abroad.

She says she was never interested in getting married and has no children, and calls herself a loner although not lonesome. She engages in varying activities and her hobbies include sewing. With the daily "Toronto Star" paper, she reads the news and then proceeds to do battle with the daily crossword puzzle. While having lived in Toronto for many years she visited the Canadian National Exhibition just once - in 1939.

To this day, Dorothy does her own grocery shopping. Every Tuesday she hops on the VON bus and goes to the stores for groceries. She uses her walker to bring home her supplies. Just recently as she was downsizing her closet, having lost weight and wanting to donate some clothing to the Diabetic Society, she came across an unfinished dress that she began making in the 1980s. Dorothy is now on a mission to complete the dress before her 100th birthday next year.

Our clients who live daily with such drive and zest at a senior age, are an inspiration. They try to do their best and be their best always. I work as a PSW with the VON and I am privileged to be able to provide service to such seniors who make a lasting impression on me, and live by example.

Nayantara Jokhu, PSW  
Peel



# Above and Beyond

A palliative client, with military experience, was assigned to me. After a few months of care, he shared with me that earlier that day he attempted to attend the Fly-In of our annual air show. He found the experience overwhelming and came back home. He wished he could go there to see it.

I had an inspiration - what if someone from the air show could do a short home visit? I changed into my clinical whites and called the family to obtain permission to use their info. This family had experienced a family tragedy a few years prior and were questioning their faith. I went to the show gate, flashed my ID badge and the gate guards radioed their night security head to come to the gate. That year, one of the commanders of the Snowbirds was a local gentleman. Upon arrival at the gate the request was presented to him. He gave me a tour of the flight line before taking me to see the show manager. At the conclusion of the meeting, I was driven back to the gate.

On Sunday evening, I contacted the family to enquire whether they heard anything. I was told that "Yes!", they had and someone would be there the next day at 1200 sharp! At 1200 precisely a minivan pulls up to the townhouse complex and out steps 1,2,3,4 members in flight suits. It was the ground crew team from the Viper West Demonstration team of the U.S. Military Air Force. They brought t-shirts, hats, pins, posters ...and a tape of one of their training flights. They proceeded to give a rolling commentary as the tape was played as to what was occurring. All the family members were there. All the men were teary and crying, all the women were awestruck at the ground crew.

On the Wednesday afternoon, I stopped by to say hello to the client. I was informed that he passed away that morning. Happy that his dying wish had been fulfilled. I found out that the team had been notified of his passing. All the departing aircraft (including the "Hercules") did a Wing Pass around the complex as they were departing. At his funeral, I was told that I had restored their faith by my selfless gesture.

Stephen Hewitt, PSW  
Middlesex-Elgin





# The Great Gatsby

A client was sent home from hospital at 2 AM. Dropped off by patient transportation services after a lengthy hospital stay. He was discharged from transportation at the bottom of his 24 step stairs to the 2nd floor inside the home. The family (daughter and spouse) had to get him upstairs themselves and get him into bed.

I received the urgent call out at 7AM that morning. No prior assessment had been done in the home. I assessed the environment, utilized a wooden chair as a bath chair, cleaned him up and had to shave a 3 week growth of beard with an electric razor and a lot of effort. At the conclusion, he informed me that he was exhausted but felt like the Great Gatsby. He retired back to bed.

Two days later he was readmitted back to hospital where he passed away. The family expressed their appreciation to me for what I did for their family member and how great he felt at the end of my visit.

Stephen Hewitt, PSW  
Middlesex-Elgin



## Mutual Care

Started out for work on a Saturday winter morning. The weather wasn't bad at the beginning. The further I went, the worse the weather got. The roads became one lane, the snow was so heavy that tree branches were across the road and, I was driving on the wrong side. Many times I thought I was going to be anchored on the wrong side of the road as the branches were over the road. I finally arrived at my client's. After I was finished my work the client's wife gave me a brown paper bag with a banana, apples, crackers, cheese and a cookie. I said, "I have my lunch". She said, "That's alright, but you may get stuck and have to be in the car, so here's a little lunch, I want you to take it, I'll feel better, and could you call me when you get home so I know that you're safe". I thanked her. I made another visit in Annapolis. After that visit the sun came out and plows were on the road.

This just shows how some clients and families are so thoughtful, caring and worried about us. They do realize the effort we make. It also shows how Nova Scotia weather changes. That was an exhausting day. I was so thankful to get home that day safe and sound. It was a terrible day but knowing someone cares, made it so much better. I called the client's family, said I was safe and sound and thanked her for being so concerned.



Crystal Burrell, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



## Grandma!

Some rich memories of VON for me are those of my Grandma Elizabeth Drummond. Grandma lived in Petit Cote, Quebec. She was part of a group raising money to buy a car for the community nurse. My family recalls that she was a member of the VON board.

Mary Buzzell, Retired  
Hamilton



## More Than a Meal

Working with the VON in the Meals on Wheels program, I have found it to be very rewarding to help seniors maintain their independence and while doing so get to share in their life stories. It's always so rewarding to hear how our program impacts the clients' lives for the better.

Joanne Lipartiti, CSS  
Peel, Waterloo, Wellington & Dufferin



## Halloween

Two years ago on Halloween I dressed up as Mrs. Brown. in dress code lol a navy and white dress and a wig. I went to clients' as usual and introduced myself as Mrs. Brown and told them I was there from the VON to help them. Well the look on their faces was priceless, one said oh no not another new worker, they looked me up and down, after a few minutes, I started to laugh and told them who I was. It was too funny and it was good to see them have a good laugh, and then went back to work.

Janet Hebb, CCA  
Annapolis Valley



At the VON Pictou Nova Scotia site, there's an inspiring wall of employee thoughts and stories. Enjoy some of them on the next few pages.

## What VON means to me...





## What VON means to me...

Working as a home support worker in the community for VON is very rewarding because you know you are making a difference in people's lives every day for clients and the client's families. It feels nice to be able to help a person stay in their home where they are happiest.

Meghan MacKenzie CCA

What VON means to me is a wonderful group of people that are helping people in our community to live in their homes with support from VON, and family members of these people receive a break from caring for their family members. It is a wonderful group of people that I work with on a daily basis. And even though there is stress at times, we seem to laugh our way through it and get on with the job that needs to be done.

Tammy MacKenzie, CSA

Having VON available in our community has allowed my Grandparents to stay in their home longer. They have met a team of wonderful, compassionate and caring ladies who showed them nothing but respect, and gave them quality care. These ladies have shared some of the most interesting stories with my Grandparents, and have turned some of their most trying days, around. Thank you VON for being a positive, enriching experience for my Family, and I.

Ashley Henwood, CSA

To be a hero, a champion, a leader, a game changer.....every single day

Krystale Penny RN BScN





## What VON means to me...continued

VON means working independently within an exceptional team to provide quality care to the clients! We are client-centered family focused!

Jolene Burry



VON gives me an opportunity to be a proactive member in assisting and maintaining individuals and their family with their independence in their homes. Providing great care and compassion is key.

Margo Murphy, CCA

VON has made me closer with my community and contribute more to it. It has drawn me closer to the Elders in my community and made me proud to help see them in their homes!

Tina Fraser, CCA

I have only been a nurse for a little under 1 year and throughout my 2 years in school my goal was always to be a nurse with the VON. To me, VON means being able to provide people with the medical care they need to be able to stay in their own homes. I truly believe "health starts at home" and people do so much better in their own beds and I find pride in being a part of that. I also enjoy the time I get to enjoy the outdoors while driving between visits. It's a bonus to me to not be in a facility for 12 hours a day.

I love how supportive the nurses I work with are as well as our nurse managers. Although most visits are done with just myself, I never feel completely on my own. There are always other nurses, and managers available to answer questions and willing to offer their help.

I love being a VON nurse and hope to be one for many years to come.

Amy Guthro, LPN



## What VON means to me...continued

Working for VON is so much more than your everyday job. It brings an uplifting feeling of encouragement and ambition to be there for our clients who need our assistance in their homes. We are our clients' reliable person who can assist them with their daily needs. Being able to assist clients with their daily tasks and hearing that "thank you we appreciate everything you do " from your clients leaves you going home feeling that much more accomplished with your day.

Megan Mosher, CCA

VON services for our community not only lets us feel like we are filling a need for people, but also lets me feel like I am also providing support for the clients as well. I may not be at the homes, however speaking with the clients, setting up services and helping to console, and laugh, reassure, and care for them on the phone and getting to know them, warms my heart, we still learn a great deal about the clients and their needs. I've learned that every part of VON is a puzzle and everyone has their own piece and part to play, I'm proud to play my part.

Pepper Hughes, CSA

Working for VON means that I can help clients to maintain health and independence in their home and community. It means that I can encourage and support both families and clients through difficulties and challenges. It means that I have the opportunity to care for and work with a wide variety of amazing people who teach me so much every day. It means knowing that I am making a difference in the day to day lives of those I care for because they are able to stay in their home; safely, comfortably and with integrity. Working for VON means everything to me.

Janae Guthro, CCA





## What VON means to me...continued

Being a VON employee for the last 2 1/2 years, has meant being a part of a company that provides services for people of all ages, genders, societies, and illnesses. It's very satisfying knowing that as a company, right from Care Coordinator's, CCA's, CSA's, LPN's, RN's, Management and office staff, that we provide the best care we can offer to each and every individual that is in need of our services. It's very satisfying knowing that we all contribute to helping in the Health Care industry within our Community.

Each and every day is very satisfying and brings welcomed challenges to us all, and becomes very rewarding when goals of all levels have been met. Being a VON employee has given me a rewarding employment opportunity. I look forward to for many more years to come. Thank you VON.

Lisa Smith, CSA

\* Values \* Ongoing client commitment \* Nurses \*



Paula MacLean, CSA

By working here I have seen the impact VON has on elderly people in staying in their own homes. They want to be able to make decisions for themselves and feel useful and productive in their own lives and with a little help from VON they can be.

Anne DeYoung, CSA

VON is a second chance to stay in the comfort of your own home surrounded by family along with the helping hands and hearts of the VON team. Through teamwork, VON tries to move mountains to make sure the clients get the best care they can possibly get. CSAs, team lead, supervisors, administrative staff along with management strives to achieve success on all levels. Truly the heart of Pictou County.

Cynthia Cormier, CSA



## What VON means to me...continued

By working at the VON for almost 3 years I have learned how much the VON means to the community. It gives care and support to clients and their families by having the ability to be able to stay in their own home. I am VERY fortunate to work with amazing people both in the field and in the office. I've never seen more hardworking and friendly staff and will always be grateful to come in each day knowing what an incredible work family we have.

Reanna MacDonald, Admin Assistant



To me, working for the VON means being a part of an organization that helps keep people feeling safe in the comfort of their own homes. My grandparents received VON while my grandmother was sick with cancer, when my grandmother passed my grandfather needed them more than ever, he wouldn't have been able to stay in their home as long as he did without them. He was still on service when I started here as a CSA and I smiled every time I saw his name while I was scheduling, knowing someone was taking care of him that day. In some situations, the VON staff are the only people these clients see or speak on the phone with. Taking a step back and realizing the difference we make in people's lives in our community really is a great feeling.

Alycia Gunn, CSA

Working for VON over the past 25 years has given me the opportunity to experience firsthand, quality care to those in need of help and to maintain their independence so that they are able to stay at home, and receive the care they need to make this possible. VON has meant to me, that we can offer special care to those who need the many services that von has to offer. I am truly honoured to be a team member of this organization knowing my daily help has meant so much to clients in helping them achieve this goal in their lives. Their smiles and appreciation make this all worthwhile and to be part of our team. Knowing we were able to make a difference for someone else.

Marjorie O'Laney, CCA



## What VON means to me...continued

I would like to express my gratitude for all the experiences for the last almost 12 years. I have learned and grown as a CCA with this great company and I am so thankful that I took this path with the VON.

There have been many ups and downs since I started with VON in December of 2005; but VON was always there for me to help and assist me in many different ways. I would not work for another company after working in the VON; their compassion and what they stand for is above and beyond.

Liz Battist, CCA

VON means to me far more than a paycheck. It is a feeling of accomplishment to be able to help our clients in any way whether it is to let them come home to die in familiar surroundings or just visiting them every day when required. On our end sometimes we are the only contact they have with people outside their home. It is to hear the joy in their voice when they call to check on their visits and the few questions they ask like - what are you having for lunch today? Sometimes our clients just want someone to chat to for a few minutes. It is hard to believe that talking nicely to someone for a few minutes may make their whole day if they do not have family close enough to talk to on a regular basis. It is also the feeling of trust that a lot of our clients will place in us as they will contact us first in a lot of cases instead of family. It gets to a point where you remember telephone numbers and when the phone rings you know who it is before you answer it and you know if you are going to make someone happy. It is always sad when we lose clients but we do have the satisfaction that we did play a role in fulfilling their last wishes to stay at home until the end. It is also a nice feeling to know that the clients, in a lot of cases, put their complete trust in us. Working here is a job I truly enjoy.

Susan MacGillivray, CSA

The most important thing that VON means to me is knowing a non-for-profit organization is trying to keep people in their own homes. To keep members of my community in the comfort of their own homes.

Shirley McLeod, CCA





## What VON means to me...continued

As a new employee, I am truly amazed at just how many people in our community receive services from VON. All of the staff and volunteers here are wonderful!

Heather DeVogue, Admin Assistant

Making a difference in our clients' lives, and for some clients, we HSWs, are the only visitors they have to make their day. Working with clients one-on-one is amazing! Getting to know who they are as a person and the stories they tell about their lives are unforgettable.

Christina J Swallow, CCA

A warm smile. A kind word. It makes me feel good to help others no matter how big or small the task may be. I absolutely love my job and I wouldn't trade it for anything. Proud to be VON!

Vanessa Prindiville, CCA

To me the VON means community. Not only do we work in the community, but the ones that work here are a community all of their own. They work with each other to make sure that we are able to provide the best possible care to our clients. I have heard on several occasions people reaching out to see if there was anyone that needed assistance. Everyone works together and has each other's backs. That is what a community does, and that is why I say that the VON means community to me.

Rebecca Murray, Staffing Coordinator



## What VON means to me...continued

Before I was employed by VON I was always aware of how important they were in our community and the valuable services they provided. Then when my Mother-in-law broke her neck and came on as a client our family was extremely grateful that she could leave the RCU and be in her own home and receive the care she needed.

After working 35 years in retail, I lost my job when my employer closed up shop. I was lucky to have the opportunity to go back to school for re-training. I enrolled in the Office Administration Program at NSCC. I was terrified! Could I do this, I had been out of school for so long! I worried that I would not be able to find a job after graduation. Would someone take a chance and hire someone over 50?

Then one day my teacher excitedly told us that VON was coming up to the College to recruit as they were hiring a large group for their office. It gave me something to shoot for, I so wanted and needed this job! I was so happy to have been given the opportunity to prove to myself and my employer that I COULD do this, and all the hard work was worth the effort.

I think the daily challenges we face as CSA's keep us on our toes as we strive to deliver the best quality of service that our clients and fellow employees expect and need from us. I am fortunate to have found a place where I can work with people I consider friends, and together we can make a difference in the lives of our clients here in Pictou County.

I hope VON will continue on for another 120 years!

Brenda Walker, CSA



# CELEBRATING 120 YEARS

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