



Celebrating the 2024 CharityVillage Award Winners

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, once again, it's time to honor the exceptional individuals who make a remarkable impact in the nonprofit sector and help Canadians across the country. Welcome to the fourth annual CharityVillage Awards gala!

Yes, tonight we celebrate the extraordinary individuals whose exceptional contributions have greatly impacted their organizations, and the entire nonprofit sector. And we give tribute to outstanding organizations who've achieved exemplary results for the betterment of their employees and the communities they serve. And now, without further ado, here's your host for tonight's ceremonies, President of CharityVillage, Mary Barroll!

Mary Barroll: Well, thank you! And welcome to a special edition of CharityVillage Connects, a podcast that explores topics vital to the nonprofit sector in Canada.

As the year 2024 comes to an end and 2025 begins, we are celebrating the extraordinary achievements of exceptional volunteers, nonprofit professionals and their organizations, along with their commitment, passion and drive that will keep the nonprofit sector in Canada moving forward into the New Year and beyond! We're shining the spotlight on the winners of the 2024 CharityVillage National Awards!

Maria Guardado: I wasn't expecting to win, to be honest, because there were so many amazing people and I'm truly honored and privileged and it means the world. So, thank you so much to the judges and the panelists and to everybody at CharityVillage. I'm so deeply honoured and words cannot express my gratitude.

Lois Tuffin: For me, it was a little baffling. Honestly, when you said my name, I was like, what, really? What happened? I've won a lot of awards for my journalism work and for other things in the community, but this is different.

Marla Smith: We were absolutely blown away. Last year we were a finalist and this year to be a winner was really just a wonderful opportunity to shine a light on the good work that takes place at Niagara Children's Centre every day and the amazing partnerships that have really chosen to invest in Niagara Children's Centre.

Anukrati Nigam: All of our team members, they work from a place of passion and compassion. And we often go above and beyond to ensure that our programs and activities are beneficial to those that we are serving or trying to reach. So, it is nice to be recognized for all of the extras that we put in individually and collectively.

Carolyn Saenz: We wanted to put forward this nomination not just to recognize our efforts, but to also highlight what's possible when we lead with values like power sharing, equity and collaboration. We hope this nomination inspires others to adopt similar principles and practices in their work.

Hannah Westner: Looking outwards, it's nice to be able to demonstrate that management at Learnsphere is leading by example. To have that recognized nationally is really rewarding. You know, we're really pleased that CharityVillage is shining a light on workplace mental health within their list of nonprofit awards.

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Hasan Ali-Abidi: I grew up in subsidized low-income housing and that's kind of where my passion for nonprofit work came in and being from one side receiving the supports of other nonprofits to actually being able to join a nonprofit on an executive level and help people who are in my situation, that probably highlighted my impact in the work I do.

Mahlikah Outten: I feel like we're on this trajectory of really being recognized for all of this work that we've been doing for a very long time. And so, this really solidifies that DEI centering that we have at the center, what we do and why we do it and we stand out because we talk the talk and we walk the talk, you know, we really embody DEI.

Margaret Jetelina: I think really what helps our program stand out is that not only are the volunteers making a difference in the community, which is often the reason they join in the first place, but they receive so much in return as well.

Pulsara Batra: Being named a finalist is incredibly meaningful to our team, to the volunteers who support us and to our entire organization. It is a recognition of the dedication and hard work we put into supporting homeless, trafficked, and at-risk youth and we truly, truly appreciate the acknowledgement.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Mary Barroll: You just heard what our 2024 winners of the CharityVillage National Awards had to say upon hearing that they'd been recognized by their peers for being among the very best in the nonprofit sector. In this special episode, each of them will be sharing a bit about their work and some of the secrets of their success. Their stories are truly inspiring and are sure to give other organizations, of any size or mission, some valuable insight. But before we hear from these guests, I want to tell you about the National CharityVillage Awards, and the outstanding achievements they recognize.

Our aim with these awards is to highlight excellence in areas that are crucial to future success and resilience of every nonprofit organization, and to the sector itself. In this episode we'll be recognizing exceptional efforts in the fields of fundraising, volunteer management, workplace mental health, diversity, equity and inclusion, outstanding impact by individuals, and much more. And to even the field among many diverse organizations of different sizes and resources, we've split our awards in each category for nonprofits with over 20 staff members and for those with under 20 staff members. All winners are chosen by an independent panel of judges, made up of subject matter experts with expertise in the award category, who generously volunteer their time to help CharityVillage celebrate excellence in the Canadian nonprofit sector.

These awards, first announced at our Annual CharityVillage National Conference and Awards held in November of 2024, have already sparked excitement within the nonprofit community. If you're eager to learn what set the winners apart in the eyes of our independent judges, you're in for a treat! We'll dive into their remarkable achievements and the strategies behind their success. So, sit back, relax, and get ready to enjoy the show—the awards are about to begin!

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Announcer: And now it's time to draw back the curtains and begin this exciting awards gala! Up first on the CharityVillage Awards: the winner of the Best Fundraising Campaign for an organization with less than 20 Staff! Welcome back our host, Mary Barroll, to announce the winner!

Mary Barroll: Fundraising is the lifeblood of the nonprofit sector, driven by passionate individuals who work tirelessly to connect donors with meaningful causes, constantly seeking creative and innovative approaches to generate support. So, our first award winner, in the category for Best Fundraising Campaign, for an organization with under 20 staff, is, drum roll please...the Niagara Children's Centre. Accepting the award on behalf of the Niagara Children's Centre is Marla Smith, Director for Development, who's here to tell us more about the organization, the work they do and the winning fundraising formula that captured our judges' nod for a win. Congratulations Marla!

Marla Smith: Thank you so much. Niagara Children's Centre is a pediatric rehabilitation centre for children and their families who need support for developmental, physical, and or communicative delays. And we support them on an outgoing patient, on an outgoing patient basis.

Mary Barroll: Wow, that's great. And I'm curious from your perspective, since of course you're the winner, what do you think really stood out about your nomination and the submissions that were made about your organization?

Marla Smith: I think some of the things that really stood out were the impacts that we've been able to make as a smaller charity serving a really diverse and important group of individuals, largely children with special needs. I think the impacts that we've been able to make and the connections that Niagara Children's Centre has been able to engage with corporate partners, foundations, special events, really drew the community into what we were doing and gave a place for families to feel accepted in their own community.

Mary Barroll: Well, that's wonderful. It's great to hear the kind of work that you're doing. What does it mean to you and your organization to actually win one of these awards?

Marla Smith: We were absolutely blown away. Last year we were a finalist and this year to be a winner was really just a wonderful opportunity to shine a light on the good work that takes place at Niagara Children's Centre every day and the amazing partnerships that have really chosen to invest in Niagara Children's Centre. They've had many opportunities to support other worthy organizations and they've chosen Niagara Children's Centre, and I think that platform allows people with diverse abilities to feel accepted in their community. And I know when I was able to share the news that we were the winners of this amazing award through CharityVillage, the families of the donors and the staff all felt a sense of pride and knowledge knowing that an organization that means so much to them was recognized in such a lovely way.

Mary Barroll: Let's hear it for the Niagara Children's Centre and the fantastic work they do!

MUSIC TRANSITION

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Announcer: For our next category of the CharityVillage Awards... the award for the Best Nonprofit Employer for Workplace Mental Health! Once again, here's Mary to announce the winner!

Mary Barroll: Thank you! With burnout becoming a widespread challenge in the nonprofit sector, forward-looking organizations are adopting strategies to foster mentally healthy workplaces where staff and volunteers can flourish. This award honors organizations that are supporting work-life balance and team well-being through innovative and adaptable initiatives. In the category of Best Nonprofit Employer for Workplace Mental Health, the winner for an organization with under 20 staff members is... LearnSphere! Accepting the award for LearnSphere is Hannah Westner, Senior Project Manager. Hannah, congratulations and well done! Can you tell us more about what you do?

Hannah Westner: Thank you so much. We are really honored to be nominated and to win. LearnSphere is a small organization that provides business skills, education, and organizational management to small and medium-sized businesses across Canada.

Mary Barroll: Terrific. And what do you think made your nomination stand out to our judges? We use independent judges, so we'd love to know what it is that you think really compelled them to vote for you as the winner.

Hannah Westner: Well, we had some stats on our application around really low levels of staff turnover. Our CEO has been in the roles for 25 years or more, and other senior staff have all been there for a long time. We were proud to say that everybody takes their full vacation allowance every year. So that was a good statistic, but I think what was probably more significant was we had a meaningful testimonial from every single staff member describing the impact of the workplace on their own mental health and their appreciation for management's efforts at promoting mental health in the workplace.

Mary Barroll: I'm sure that's very compelling to have heard from the employees themselves. That's terrific. I would love to know what it means to your organization and to you and the employees about being named the winner of the award.

Hannah Westner: Well, was very gratifying for sure. You know, I think within the team it really helped. It made us feel good that we could recognize our management team in this way and validate the work that they do to build a supportive and inclusive culture for us every day. You know, it's definitely a sense of team pride, knowing that we're part of a team where well-being is really important. Looking outwards, it's nice to be able to demonstrate that management at LearnSphere is leading by example. And to have that recognized nationally is really rewarding.

Mary Barroll: A well-deserved win for LearnSphere. Congratulations!

MUSIC TRANSITION

Announcer: For our next category of the CharityVillage Awards...here's the Award for an individual who made the best contribution to Youth Advancement! Here's our host to announce the exceptional winner!

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Mary Barroll: Although fostering youth advancement in the workplace requires a collective organizational effort, we all know that its success ultimately hinges on the commitment and contributions of passionate individuals. And this year's winner of the award for Best Contribution to Youth Advancement by an Individual is truly exceptional. The 2024 award goes to... Hasan-Ali Abidi, Director of Operations at Play Forever. Hasan-Ali, congratulations on this amazing win! Can you tell us about your organization?

Hasan-Ali Abidi: Play Forever, we're a nonprofit organization and we provide free programming for underserved communities, low-income families and youth. So, all of our programming is centered around sports, and we tie in stuff like education, recreation, health, mental health, services like that and programs where we offer them to youth who are not able to reach these programs. And all of our programs are completely free. That's what we stand for.

Mary Barroll: Well, that's a really extraordinary contribution to make to young people who may not otherwise have access to those kinds of services that are so important to getting through early part of your young lives, especially with the challenges today. What do you think made your nomination stand out?

Hasan-Ali Abidi: I would say first off, it's more of a testament to our organization, like super humbled and honored to be part of an organization like Play Forever to even have the opportunity to do the things I do. In terms of like the individual award, I think just my story coming from these programs which I'm serving. I grew up in subsidized low-income housing and that's kind of my passion for nonprofit work came in and being from one side receiving the supports of other nonprofits to actually being able to join a nonprofit on an executive level and help people who are in my situation, that probably highlighted my impact in the work I do.

Mary Barroll: Well, it sure does. And what a great story about you being able to benefit from all these people working so hard in charities and nonprofits and then turning around and giving back to your own community. I think that's a wonderful story. What does it mean for you and your organization to be a winner?

Hasan Ali-Abidi: I think just highlighting the work we do as an organization is very impactful. It's a huge thing we're doing, especially at a young age. This is where all the development starts and ensuring they have the right resources available at their hand is very important.

Mary Barroll: Let's give a warm congratulations to Hasan-Ali for stepping up and giving back for the advancement of youth! A truly inspiring young man.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Announcer: For our next category of the CharityVillage Awards...we turn to the wards for the Best Nonprofit Employers' contribution to DEI in the workplace! Let's welcome back Mary to announce the winner.

Mary Barroll: We all know that nonprofits are first and foremost dedicated to providing services, guidance, and support to specific communities and causes. Equally important

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though, is their responsibility to reflect the values and principles they champion externally within their own organizations. This award highlights organizations and individuals who exemplify socially responsible hiring and onboarding practices. It recognizes their dedication to fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, community outreach, and accessibility through policies that create a workplace reflecting these ideals.

This year, in the category of nonprofit employers with less than 20 staff members, our judges were so impressed with the amazing finalists, we had a tie among two very special organizations! This year we celebrate two co-winners, and the winners are...East Scarborough Storefront – A Project of Makeway, and Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development. Accepting the award for the Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development is the organization's Director of Programming for Neighbourhood Impact, Mahlikah Outten. Congratulations, Mahlikah! Perhaps you can start by telling us a bit about what you do.

Mahlikah Outten: Definitely for our center, it's really about having this vision of stronger communities together. And we do this through facilitating community connections, through innovative learning. We are in the heart of Reach & Park at 540 Dundas East, near Sackville in downtown Toronto. And our catchment area includes Reach & Park, St. Jamestown and Moss Park, along with the GTA.

We currently serve mostly newcomer and immigrant populations from diverse backgrounds, which continue to experience, you know exclusion from various services and programs, large in part due to systemic barriers. Many of our participants are also in the shelter system. They're refugee claimants that are navigating the immigration and settlement system and they are waiting for secure housing. So, our core programs at the center are the Immigrant Women's Integration Leadership Program, as well as Academic Upskilling and the Regent Park Sewing Studio. And all of these programs are really centered around employability skills like numeracy, communication, collaboration, problem solving, writing, adaptability, reading, creativity and innovation, as well as digital skills and this fosters a sense of belonging so that participants may in turn empower others.

Mary Barroll: Well, that sounds like a wonderful mission, and it sounds like you do fantastic work working with a very diverse client base. What do you think made your nomination stand out to the judges?

Mahlikah Outten: I think it's because over these 40 years that we've been in existence serving our communities, we've continued to demonstrate exemplary diversity, equity, and inclusion best practices. And these best practices are evident in our inclusive hiring. We ensure that our staff reflect the cultural diversity and the intersectionalities of identities of our community members. We also have an outstanding track record of hiring graduates from our programs and residents from our communities. And I feel our approach to building authentic collaborations with grassroots organizations that inform and represent local community needs is an important aspect of holding ourselves accountable with our DEI practices. Finally, I feel like having a hybrid work culture, which provides that flexibility, that accessibility, and takes into account the overall health

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and wellbeing of staff, volunteers and program participants, enable us to flourish in a mindful, heartfelt and relatable way in our work environment.

Mary Barroll: Well, I love that story about actually hiring the folks that have been going through your programs. What a great introduction to working in Canada, particularly those that are new newcomers to our society. It's wonderful to hear how you've integrated that into your actual recruitment for your own organization. What does it mean to you to be nominated and winning the CharityVillage national awards. What does it mean to your organization and to you personally?

Mahlikah Outten: Well, in December of 2023, our organization was the recipient of the City of Toronto's Access, Equity and Human Rights Constance E. Hamilton Award for Women in Equity and I feel like we're on this trajectory of really being recognized for all of this work that we've been doing for a very long time. And we stand out because we talk the talk and we walk the talk, you know, we really embody DEI.

Mary Barroll: Well, on behalf of CharityVillage, I want to congratulate you for this amazing win and the wonderful work that you're doing within our community.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Mary Barroll: And now, accepting the award on behalf of the co-winner for our Best Nonprofit Employer - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, East Scarborough Storefront – A Project of Makeway, here is Carolyn Saenz, Associate Director, Systems and Infrastructure. Carolyn, congratulations on your win!

Carolyn Saenz: Thank you.

Mary Barroll: Well, why don't we start off by telling our audience just exactly what your organization does and what your mission is and how you work.

Carolyn Saenz: Sure, so East Scarborough Storefront opened in 2001 with a commitment to serving the Kingston-Galloway / Orton Park community, otherwise known as KGO. And KGO is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse communities in Canada and also the largest First Nation Metis Inuit community outside of downtown Toronto.

Our work at Storefront is guided by a community development framework that we call the Connected Community Approach, which focuses on strengthening relationships among people, organizations and institutions. We call it CCA for short.

CCA creates conditions for local solutions to emerge and thrive through collaboration by proactively sharing knowledge, identifying strategies, and aligning efforts, we connect local initiatives to broader strategies. This ensures that KGO is not only a recipient of change, but also an active participant in shaping equitable collective outcomes.

Mary Barroll: I'm curious as to what was it about the CharityVillage awards that made you want to nominate the organization and the work that you do in this area for the award? What was it that was meaningful to you?

Carolyn Saenz: The Storefront's work shows how community-driven, equity-focused approaches can lead to real systemic change. So, we wanted to put forward this nomination not just to recognize our efforts, but to also highlight what's possible when we lead with values like power sharing, equity, and collaboration. We hope this nomination inspires others to adopt similar principles and practices in their work. It isn't just a pat on the back for us, it's rather a recognition of the shared leadership across our community with residents, partners and other stakeholders who have come together to drive meaningful change.

Mary Barroll: I'd love to know what you think about what it was in your nomination that really stood out to the judges.

Carolyn Saenz: Our commitment to racial justice likely stood out because it's real deep and ongoing commitment that has become everything that we do. Our CCA framework was actually transformed into a playbook as a way to connect with the community and create real impact. It's used by all of our staff. So, applying equity and power sharing has meant that we can create this change, not just to address individual issues, but to also influence and transform larger systems. These actions show our commitment to long-term change, it's not short-term fixes. So yeah, what sets us apart is this holistic approach that we're taking. We apply all these principles across all facets of our work from program design to policy development to staff training and governance. It's a comprehensive baked in approach ensuring that every part of what we do is aligned with our values and principles.

Mary Barroll: I'd like to wrap up by asking you what it means to you and your organization to have won this award and be recognized in this way for the CharityVillage Awards.

Carolyn Saenz: It definitely validates the progress we've made embedding equity into what we're doing, and it reinforces our vision to create a connected and equitable community. It's not just about what we've accomplished, but we're also holding ourselves accountable and it's inspiring us to continue driving this real important work, especially as we are now preparing to update and expand our action plan with more of an intersectional lens.

Mary Barroll: Well, on behalf of CharityVillage, we want to say congratulations, Carolyn, for this really impressive win and the contributions that you're making to both DEI within the workplace and within the communities that you serve.

Carolyn Saenz: Thank you, thank you once again for this honor, thanks.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Announcer: Next up on the CharityVillage Awards: the Winner of the Best Volunteer Program by a nonprofit organization with more than 20 Staff! Here's Mary with more!

Mary Barroll: Our next award recognizes organizations with over 20 staff who are finding exceptional ways to recruit and engage their volunteers. Volunteers play a vital role in our sector and contribute greatly to an organization's success. This past year saw continuing challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. This award is

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dedicated to those that found ways to overcome the obstacles and maintain a strong volunteer program. And once again our judges were so impressed with the exceptional finalists – that we have another tie of two amazing organizations, the co-winners for the Award for the Best Volunteer Program are...Covenant House Toronto and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society! Congratulations to two exceptional winners! First here to accept the award on behalf of Covenant House Toronto, we have Pulsara Batra, Manager of Volunteer Services and the Mentoring Program. Pulsara, please tell us what your organization does.

Pulsara Batra: Sure, Covenant House is the largest youth shelter in Canada, and we serve youth experiencing homelessness and trafficking. And, you know we have a very large variety of programs at Covenant House and youth ages between 16 to 24 can access our services.

Mary Barroll: And what do you think it was about your nomination and the kind of work you do that really captured our judge's eye and got you the win?

Pulsara Batra: I believe what set our application apart was the profound impact of our diverse and mental base, volunteer and mental base, along with the various programs and services offered to young people at Covenant House Toronto. Our volunteers play a vital role in supporting youth and helping them to reach their full potential. We also prioritize strong volunteer onboarding process to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and safety of young people we serve. Finally, but most importantly, our volunteer engagement process. We focus on keeping volunteers connected, engaged, and ensuring their roles at Covenant House Toronto are meaningful and fulfilling for them.

Mary Barroll: I'm very happy to hear about all the work that you do. What does it mean to you and your organization to be nominated and named a co-winner in this very important award? How do you feel?

Pulsara Batra: Being named a finalist is incredibly meaningful to our team, to the volunteers who support us, and to our entire organization. It is a recognition of the dedication and hard work we put into supporting homeless, trafficked and at-risk youth, and we truly appreciate the acknowledgement.

Mary Barroll: Congratulations to Pulsara Batra and Covenant House Toronto for all the lifechanging work you do!

And now I'm very pleased to introduce you to our second co-winner for the Best Nonprofit Employer –Volunteer Program for an organization with over 20 staff, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society! Accepting the award is Margaret Jetelina, Senior Manager, Marketing & Communications. I'd love to hear more about your organization. Can you tell our audience what it is that you do and your mission?

Margaret Jetelina: DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society is a registered charity in Surrey, BC. It opened its doors 46 years ago in response to growing needs in the community, particularly for immigrant and refugee communities. Today, Surrey is really the fastest growing city in BC, welcoming about 28 new residents every day. And at DIVERSEcity, we offer many programs and services for them, everything from newcomer settlement services to diverse employment programs and english language

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classes, as well as counseling, and then also our volunteer program, which is why we're here today. Together, all of these social services help people in the community build their lives and to strengthen the community overall. And that's pretty much our mission, to strengthen communities. Underpinning all this work, DIVERSEcity is really guided by a commitment to social justice, equity, and truth and reconciliation. And ultimately, it's the people behind diversity from its board to its staff and all its volunteers who are the changemakers doing the work and making an impact in the community.

Mary Barroll: Well, that's great. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about your volunteer program.

Margaret Jetelina: Definitely. So, we wanted to nominate the volunteer program and just to highlight the importance of volunteerism as a whole for our work here at DIVERSEcity and in the community overall. It really has been a hallmark in supporting our delivery of our services for many decades. We have a stable of about two to three hundred volunteers annually who contribute to the delivery and success of our programs and services. All these volunteers are guided by a small but mighty team of coordinators who recruit, onboard, train and empower them with the skills and information they need to not only achieve the goals that they want, but to help support delivery of services to some of our community's most vulnerable populations.

Mary Barroll: What do you think really made your nominations stand out and made you get this win?

Margaret Jetelina: Our volunteer program is inspiring on so many levels. For starters, our volunteers really help us provide the important services we're doing in the community. So that could be anything from delivering groceries to isolated seniors, to helping us lead English conversation circles, to supporting us in our community kitchen, and so many other types of services. For example, this week we're actually wrapping up our annual Bundle Up Coat Drive campaign, which gathers coats, hats and gloves for families in need. And this campaign truly depends on the support of volunteers. They're the ones who come, sort through all the coats, organize, help distribute the coats just in time for the colder weather and the holiday season. And then in the new year, the volunteer program shifts gears and starts busy training volunteers and preparing for tax time. So, the volunteers help people file their income taxes, through our annual income tax clinic. Another really interesting, innovative part of our program is that we've launched a volunteer brokering initiative and that partners with other local nonprofit organizations. So, it matches our volunteers with opportunities with their organizations. So, that helps diversify the experience they have access to, while supporting our partners, as well, and helping build the community and strengthening the community overall. And I think really what helps our program stand out is that not only are the volunteers making a difference in the community, which is often the reason they join in the first place, but they receive so much in return as well. So, for newcomers who are volunteering, that could look like valuable work experience that they can put on their resume. And that's often the first experience they have in Canada and this might help them overcome entry barriers they face in the labor market. For others, it could look like skill building or learning opportunities.

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Mary Barroll: That's such a lovely sort of full circle of giving and how giving gives back to yourself. I would love to know what it means to you and your organization to win one of the awards at the CharityVillage National Awards, especially for the volunteer program.

Margaret Jetelina: I think recognition for the work we do is always a wonderful thing. It's an important way to share the stories of the people who are doing the work every day, supporting people and building communities, whether that's the volunteers themselves or the staff supporting the volunteers. Working in the nonprofit sector can be really challenging work and an award like this kind of puts a spotlight on those teams and people who are really giving their all to make an impact in the community.

Mary Barroll: Congratulations to DIVERSEcity for their terrific work and the exceptional volunteer program that helps make it happen!

Our next award winner has pulled off double success with back-to-back victories! The winner of the Best Volunteer Program for a nonprofit organization with under 20 staff and the award for the best individual achievements as a volunteer management professional. There's no doubt that volunteer managers are crucial when it comes to creating successful volunteer programs. Our next award recognizes individuals who have achieved exceptional success in this area. I don't want to keep you in suspense any longer -- let's now take a moment to celebrate the winner of the award for the Best Volunteer Management Professional AND the award for the best Volunteer Program for an organization with under 20 Staff! This year's winner is... Anukrati Nigam, Program and Administrative Officer at PEGASUS Institute. This really is a winning sweep of the volunteer awards, having won the individual award for exceptional contributions to a volunteer program, as well as the winner of the award for the best volunteer program by an employer for an organization with under 20 staff. What a superstar! Congratulations.

Anukrati Nigam: Thank you so much.

Mary Barroll: Tell me a little bit about your organization. What does the PEGASUS Institute actually do? What is its mandate?

Anukrati Nigam: PEGASUS Institute is a registered Canadian educational charity that works at the intersection of peace, global health, and environmental sustainability. The Institute has a solid base of justice and equity and amplifying the voices of equity-seeking populations and groups. We seek to connect, network, and share information on a global scale to develop more collaborative, diverse, and innovative solutions. We strive to bring many perspectives from many different contexts to the table with the ultimate goals of improving health and equity for all life forms.

Mary Barroll: Well, that's quite an accomplishment. An amazing contribution you're making both locally and globally. What do you think made your nomination as best volunteer program by an organization stand out to the judges?

Anukrati Nigam: So, at an organizational level, I think for the judges, it was our reach at the global level, and especially the fact that we have this multilingual programming, which is such an asset, especially with the diverse Canadian society that we have, and the mentorship programs, because I also think mentorship is a key component,

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especially while building the next future generation leaders. And overall, PEGASUS Institute ensures to provide an educational and professional networking platform as well that helps the next generation leaders in the fields of peace, global health, and environmental sustainability. So, we're trying to really use an umbrella for all these three fields and bring all the people in together and I think that might have stood out for the judges.

Mary Barroll: It is quite remarkable that you've won both the organizational award and then the individual award too, Anukrati. I wonder if you feel comfortable telling us what you think stood out for the judges about your own individual contributions to the volunteering space.

Anukrati Nigam: So, at an individual level, I also think it could be the testimonials that I provided in my application by the volunteers and the employers that I've worked with in the past year. That was the main boost. For me in terms of my work, I ensured there was consistent volunteer engagement and that needed consistent programming and regular programming to be provided to the volunteers so that they could engage with us and that ensured that there was new enrollment coming in. So, communications is also a very important aspect to ensure our programming reaches our intended audience. And that's how we can have a lot of volunteers consistently engaged through them and ensure that they're also benefiting from our programming.

Mary Barroll: Well, I would love to know also what it was about the CharityVillage awards that made you want to apply.

Anukrati Nigam: First of all, I would like to thank my colleague Rachel Vines, who brought it to our attention that the CharityVillage Award nomination applications were going on and that our work could be a good fit in some of the categories. And it turns out that she was right. We often utilize CharityVillage as a resource and platform for sharing information about PEGASUS Institute. And we also recognize the reach that this could have if we qualified.

Mary Barroll: Now that you're basking in the glory, what does it mean to you to be both nominated and having won both the organizational award and the individual award? What does it mean for your organization and what does it mean for you?

Anukrati Nigam: At an organizational level, for us, the recognition of the dedication of a small group of people, because we are very short-staffed, who run a great variety of programming on a minimal budget and having global impact and reach means a lot. All of our team members, they work from a place of passion and compassion. And we often go above and beyond to ensure that our programs and activities are beneficial to those that we are serving or trying to reach. So, it is nice to be recognized for all of the extras that we put in individually and collectively. And our team members are the best. We are working like a well-oiled machine. So, I really appreciate that at an organizational level we were recognized.

Mary Barroll: What does it mean for you individually to have won an award and be recognized in this way?

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Anukrati Nigam: For me, it's more like a chicken and egg situation. I'm really happy that a lot of work that I did in collaboration with my fantastic team members and a large volunteer base was reflected in the application and nomination for PEGASUS Institute. And then, it just seemed fair like that my individual hard work was also recognized through the nominations. It's all good. Everything is all joy and glory at this point.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Announcer: And now, it's time for the CharityVillage Most Outstanding Impact Awards by a Volunteer! And here once again is your host, Mary Barroll!

Mary Barroll: As we've noted, volunteers are essential to the success of most nonprofits, and, often, they are the unsung heroes behind the scenes. With our final award we pay tribute to two very dedicated volunteers who, in another two-way tie, won our Outstanding Volunteer Impact Award. The co-winners of the Outstanding Impact by a Volunteer Award are...Maria Guardado and Lois Tuffin!

We'll hear from both of these exceptional volunteers, but let's start with Maria Guardado, who volunteers at an extraordinary number of organizations including the Toronto Foundation for Youth Involvement in Politics, the Junior League of Toronto, Youth Without Shelter, Results Canada, the Jean Augustine Centre for Young Women's Empowerment, Raising the Roof Canada, Grito de Mujer/Woman Scream Canada, Arab Community Centre of Toronto and Fuel Changemakers. Wow, Maria, that is an impressive amount of volunteer work! Congratulations for winning this important award!

Maria Guardado: Thank you so, so much. I'm truly, truly honored. There were so many amazing people in this category, and I'm truly honored winning this award.

Mary Barroll: Well, maybe you could start by telling us a little bit about your organization.

Maria Guardado: Yeah, so the Toronto Foundation for Youth Involvement in Politics, the TFYIP for short, is a youth-run organization, nonprofit, that really seeks to engage young people in political operations and just get civic engagement up to par. We really do focus on emphasizing youth leadership and giving young people the resources they may need to get involved, whether that be at a local level, through the municipality, or the provincial level or even on a federal level, trying to connect young people to their local representatives and or just giving them the right advocacy tools.

Mary Barroll: That sounds terrific. I wonder what was it about the CharityVillage Awards that made you want to nominate? Did you nominate yourself or did the group nominate you?

Maria Guardado: I just nominated myself, what really motivated me in general is like I know the amazing history of CharityVillage, it's a resource that I've used as well for volunteering in the past. And I think what really pushed me was, you just see something, and you never know until you jump an opportunity that it's meant for you or not. And I just saw the opportunity and really just wanted to grab it by the horns, so to say. And yeah, I just put my name forward. I didn't know what would come of it. I just saw it, saw the opportunity, and I took it.

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Mary Barroll: Well, it paid off. What do you think it was that made your nomination stand out to judges?

Maria Guardado: I think in my application I did focus on a lot of the work that I do at the TFYIP but I did include numerous works that I do in the community so I guess my heavier portfolio would be the TFYIP. That's what I'm majorly involved in, but I think that the fact that I really, really am of service to the community and that I do a lot and have taken the TFYIP to numerous levels, including on a national level and now an international level. I think that's what really set my application apart. Even though, it's funny because prior to me applying, I just missed the brink of the international sector, in terms of, I had the stages of it implemented but it wasn't carried out until after the fact of applying and whatnot so, even though I didn't mention it, it wasn't completely 100% confirmed but then it all worked out in the end. S yeah, I think that's maybe what set my application apart, my commitment to service, my commitment to young people, my commitment to women, to children, to marginalized group, just basically my commitment to the voiceless. So, I think that's so, so, so important is to stand up for those who are often forgotten.

Mary Barroll: Well, thank you for that. What does it mean to you personally to having been chosen a winner of this very prestigious award?

Maria Guardado: Honestly, I am so incredibly and deeply honored. I checked out a lot of the semi-finalists and they were such amazing people doing amazing work from all over the country. Honestly, I'm truly honored to even be mentioned alongside with them as well. So, thank you so much to the judges and the panelists and to everybody at CharityVillage. I'm so deeply honoured and words cannot express my gratitude.

Mary Barroll: Congratulations again to Maria Guardado. We are also delighted to recognize the outstanding work of our other co-winner of the Award for Outstanding Impact by a Volunteer, Lois Tuffin from Volunteer Peterborough. Lois, congratulations on winning this prestigious award. Can you tell us about your volunteer work?

Lois Tuffin: We started a matchmaking service between volunteers who wanted to do marvelous things and agencies that really, really needed them. That service existed in our community up until 2016. And then for reasons that beyond people's control, it disappeared. So, when there became a volunteer crisis during and after the pandemic, we identified this huge gap and holy cow, did it ever get filled fast. So, I call myself the founder/instigator of the group. And I currently chair the board of a fantastic group of people who are doing life-changing work every day.

Mary Barroll: Well, that that sounds fantastic. But what do you think about the nomination that really stood out for the judges?

Lois Tuffin: Well, so I only saw the letters of nomination like yesterday. So, haha, now I know what people said about me. I think one of the things, probably because we took something from zero to 1,500 volunteers, 162 organizations. So, I think the numbers themselves speak to the amount of impact that our group is having. And I think just the fact that I have been relentless. I put in 20, 30 hours a week sometimes just to keep this thing financed and organized and rolling and innovating and checking with people that

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are doing this work in other communities and checking with people in our communities to make sure it works. So, I have been raising the money, I have been recruiting the team, and I think the fact that I just threw so much at it. I have been trying to share my enthusiasm and it has really helped me bring the world other champions and I'm creating a whole new generation of leaders. So that's really fun.

Mary Barroll: Well, the numbers speak for themselves for sure. That's amazing. You have an opportunity to blow your own horn here. What an extraordinary accomplishment that you've made. I wonder what it means to you and your organization about what it means to you to be a co-winner of this very, very important award.

Lois Tuffin: Well, I think for me, it's as part of a unity. There's a whole group of us that are doing things, but the fact that somebody would stand up and say, hey, our team is pretty cool, and our team leader has been doing some pretty hard work and that she inspires us to do these good things. I think that was really reassuring. For me, it was a little baffling. Honestly, when you said my name, I was like, what, really? What happened? I've won a lot of awards for my journalism work. And for other things in the community, but this is different. Because it's something that I have created and led, it was very meaningful to have that work recognized and to give us a chance to talk about it a little bit more and encourage other communities to, if you don't have a volunteer center, talk to a volunteer center and get one rolling. It makes such a difference. I have a thousand testimonials in my head. Yeah.

Mary Barroll: Well, we will be telling your story about the success that you've had and the amazing way that you've sort of created something from nothing that is so powerful. And, you know, that will give you an opportunity to spread the word and make sure that other people not just only join you as a volunteer, but also even as you say, you might end up mentoring a lot of other volunteer organizations in different communities and to be able to tell them your best advice.

Lois Tuffin: Our goal was always to start a movement. We're trying to start a movement, get people thinking about volunteering and then get going. So yes.

Mary Barroll: So, you tell me tell me a little bit about the movement that you want to inspire.

Lois Tuffin: So actually, our group had a really interesting origin story, if you give me a few minutes to tell. About two and a half years ago, the federal NDP leader was in Peterborough for a campaign event. And he, Jagmeet Singh, was greeted by some protesters who said some awful things and racist comments and threatened him. And a lot of us who live here and are proud of our community were very embarrassed. So, that happened on a Wednesday. That Saturday, a group of us were leading a food drive and we had hundreds of volunteers out on the street gathering 26,000 pounds of food. So, we thought, how could we possibly run a city where this bad thing happened, and this good thing happened? And we realized if you offer people something positive to do rather than something negative to do, maybe they, at least they have a choice. So, then we just started to tap into what is it that makes people want to get involved. So, then we did focus groups, we did a lot of research about what are people looking for and then we built our model. It's interesting for us because we're probably the only volunteer

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center that has started post-pandemic. So, we are starting with the current technology, the current mentality, and we don't have a lot of baggage and legacy stuff to move ahead, so it's allowed us to really evolve quickly.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Announcer: Well, what a star-studded awards gala this has been! This has been an event full of inspiration, recognition, and celebration, but all good things must come to an end. Here's our host Mary Barroll for some final thoughts from our winners before we close the curtains on this magnificent gala event.

Mary Barroll: As we come to the end of our 2024 CharityVillage Awards gala, let's hear from our award winners about the impact these awards have on their organizations' missions.

Hannah Westner: It's definitely a sense of team pride, knowing that we're part of a team where well-being is really important. And looking outwards, it's nice to be able to demonstrate that management at Learnsphere is leading by example. And to have that recognized nationally is really rewarding. You know we're really pleased that CharityVillage is shining a light on workplace mental health within their list of nonprofit awards. So, it's really important to bring attention to this issue.

Anukrati Nigam: We often go above and beyond to ensure that our programs and activities are beneficial to those that we are serving or trying to reach. So, it is nice to be recognized for all of the extras that we put in individually and collectively. It was an honor for me personally to be recognized at CharityVillage. It's such a huge phenomenon and a hub for all the charities across Canada. This could mean more people are aware of what we do and could be welcomed into our networks to share and develop even more educational materials, information and ways forward in working on some of the most complex global issues.

Marla Smith: This year to be a winner was really just a wonderful opportunity to shine a light on the good work that takes place at Niagara Children's Centre every day and the amazing partnerships that have really chosen to invest in Niagara Children's Centre. When I was able to share the news that we were the winners of this amazing award through CharityVillage, the families of the donors and the staff all felt a sense of pride and knowledge knowing that an organization that means so much to them was recognized in such a lovely way.

Hasan-Ali Abidi: A lot of people, especially with the cost of living rising, a lot of families are not able to afford to send their child to a summer camp or provide them with after school tutoring. And so being nominated for this award highlights the work we do and hopefully can bring attention to what we're doing and bring companies and organizations involved in our work to help support these communities.

Malikah Outten: I feel like we're on this trajectory of really being recognized for all of this work that we've been doing for a very long time. And so, this really solidifies, right? We are teachers, we are artists, we are activists, we are researchers, and we're leading in this area. So, whatever we do at the center really ripples out you know, into other parts of the community and the social service sector and beyond.

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Pulsara Batra: Our goal has always been to empower youth accessing our services by helping them build skills, provide healthy, positive relationships. This recognition reinforces the importance of that mission. And I also hope our journey can inspire other organizations and provide an opportunity to share the knowledge and strategies that have helped us making a difference.

Carolyn Saenz: Applying equity and power sharing has meant that we can create this change, not just to address individual issues, but to also influence and transform larger systems. We hope this nomination inspires others to adopt similar principles and practices in their work. It isn't just a pat on the back for us. It's rather a recognition of the shared leadership across our community with residents, partners, and other stakeholders who have come together to drive meaningful change.

Maria Guardado: What it means is that my investment into building social capital is paying off, volunteerism is so, so important and being able to help your communities and help others, it really, really does pay off. Even though it costs nothing but your time and attention, And I think it just speaks to a louder volume that people should get involved, because you never know what might happen.

Margaret Jetelina: I think recognition for the work we do is always a wonderful thing. It's an important way to share the stories of the people who are doing the work every day, supporting people and building communities, whether that's the volunteers themselves or the staff supporting the volunteers. Working in the nonprofit sector can be really challenging work and an award like this kind of puts a spotlight on the teams and people who are really giving their all to make an impact in the community.

Lois Tuffin: The fact that somebody would stand up and say, hey, our team is pretty cool and our team leader has been doing some pretty hard work and that she inspires us to do these good things. I think that was really reassuring. And I think because it's something that I have created and led, it was very meaningful to have that work recognized and to give us a chance to talk about it a little bit more and encourage other communities to, if you don't have a volunteer center, talk to a volunteer center and get one rolling. It makes such a difference.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Mary Barroll: Congratulations to all our amazing winners and finalists for the 2024 CharityVillage National Awards! At the CharityVillage Awards, we celebrate excellence, dedication, passion and achievement in the nonprofit sector – to shine the light on unsung heroes and acknowledge outstanding contributions. We are honoured to present these awards to the truly exceptional individuals and organizations who overcome obstacles and contribute to the betterment of their workplaces, their communities, the nonprofit sector, and to Canada. For a full list of our 2024 Award winners – including those who were not able to take part in this podcast – plus complete video interviews, visit our awards website, charityvillageconference.com. And mark your calendar for our CharityVillage National Conference and Awards for 2025 which will be an extra special event – join us to help celebrate our thirtieth anniversary serving the Canadian nonprofit sector and don't forget to make your nominations for the CharityVillage Awards – you never know – you and your organization might come out a

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winner! To all our finalists and winners, and all the extraordinary nonprofits and charities, professionals and volunteers across Canada, on behalf of the whole team at CharityVillage, congratulations for all your achievements and a heartfelt thank you for your service.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Mary Barroll: CharityVillage is proud to be the Canadian source for nonprofit news, employment, crowdfunding, e-learning, and so much more. You can find us online at CharityVillage.com

In our next episode: With elections happening across the provinces and the potential for a federal election at any time, how to navigate political change is top of mind for many nonprofit leaders. How can your organization engage in government relations, lobby for social change, and access government funding, especially during such an unprecedented time of uncertainty? Get insights and advice from sector experts in the next episode of CharityVillage Connects. I'm Mary Barroll, thanks for listening.

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