

SPRING 2026 VOLUME No.14

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NEWSLETTER

LET'S TALK ABOUT:

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

EARTH DAY

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SUPPORT WORKER





FROM THE COMMITTEE

Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of the PHSS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion newsletter. As spring brings renewal, growth, and fresh perspectives, our DEI journey continues with intention and purpose. This season invites us to embrace new beginnings, nurture connection, and celebrate the evolving diversity within our community. Through stories of cultural expression, shared traditions, and lived experiences, we recognize the strength that inclusion brings to PHSS and beyond. As we move forward together this spring, let's continue to uplift the voices, perspectives, and experiences that inspire growth and create a stronger sense of belonging for all.

Thank You!

PHSS DEI COMMITTEE

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SPRING CALENDAR

April

Sikh Heritage Month

Autism Acceptance Month

Passover 1-9

World Autism Awareness Day 2

Good Friday 3

Easter Sunday 5

Easter Monday 6

International Day of Pink 8

Orthodox Easter 12

Vaisakhi 14

Earth Day 22

International Dance Day 29

June

Pride Month

National Indigenous History Month

National AccessAbility Week May 31-6

Easter Seals Red Shirt Day of Action for Accessibility and Inclusion 3

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji 16

Islamic New Year 16-17

Autistic Pride Day 18

June Day 24

May

Asian Heritage Month

Beltane 1

Vesak/Wesak 1

Red Dress Day 5

Victoria Day 18

Shavuot 21-23

Pentecost 24

Eid-al-Adha (Expected) 27-28

Asian Heritage Month: Why It Matters

Since the early 2000s, Canada has formally recognized May as Asian Heritage Month, a time to reflect, learn, and celebrate the histories, cultures, and contributions that continue to shape our communities and our country.

This month matters because these stories are part of our shared story. Communities with Asian heritage have been part of Canada for more than two centuries, contributing to healthcare, science, business, public service, education, arts, and community.

Asian Heritage Month also creates space to acknowledge more difficult parts of our history. This includes both historical and ongoing experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and racism. Recognizing this matters, because belonging is not built through celebration alone. It is built through honesty, learning, and action.



Why Do We Recognize Asian Heritage Month?

Asian Heritage Month was created to make sure these stories and contributions are recognized and understood.

It gives us space to:

- **Recognize contributions** - Generations of people have helped shape Canada in meaningful ways across many areas.
- **Reflect on History** - Looking at both progress and challenges gives a more honest picture of where we are today.
- **Appreciate cultural differences** - Traditions, languages, and lived experiences add depth to our communities.
- **Build stronger connections** - It opens the door for conversations that help people better understand each other.



Why This Matters at PHSS

At PHSS, we talk about person-centered care and support. This is a reminder that culture is part of who someone is.

When we understand cultural values, family dynamics, communication styles, and lived experiences, we provide support that is respectful, relevant, and meaningful. This is not just about awareness. It's about improving how we listen, respond, and build trust with the people we support and with each other.

This month also reinforces that representation matters. The strength of PHSS comes from the diversity of the people who make up our organization and our community. Different perspectives make us stronger, more thoughtful, and more responsive.

Belonging does not happen by accident. It is built in everyday moments through respect, curiosity, inclusion, and the effort to understand each other more fully.

Asian Heritage Month

A Few Statistics

- *In the 2021 Census, just over 7 million people in Canada reported full or partial Asian heritage*
- *More than 3.6 million people reporting Asian origins live in Ontario*
- *South Asian populations were the largest racialized group in Canada, at nearly 2.6 million people (7.1%)*
- *Chinese populations in Canada numbered 1.7 million people (4.7%)*

Local and Regional Events (Spring-Summer 2026)

Holi Festival of Colours

April 25, 2026 | Victoria Park, London
A community celebration with music, colour, and shared experience

Asian Heritage Month Award Gala

May 2, 2026 | Toronto
Recognizes leadership and contributions across communities

London International Food & Drink Festival

June 26–28, 2026 | Victoria Park, London
A mix of global cuisines, including strong Asian representation

Sunfest

July 9–12, 2026 | Victoria Park, London
One of London's largest multicultural festivals

South Asian Cultural Festival

July 25–26, 2026 | Dundas Place, London
A local event with performances, food, and community gathering



FONKI is a Montreal-based visual artist who blends traditional Khmer culture into contemporary urban art through murals, portraits and ancestral motifs across the world. He is also the co-producer of award-winning documentary “The Roots Remain” which follows his return to Cambodia and exploration of cultural identity through art.



Between 1881 and 1885, over 17,000 Chinese men immigrated to Canada to work as construction labourers on the Canadian Pacific Railway. It's estimated that over 600 Chinese men were killed in accidents due to unsafe working conditions, while receiving less than half the pay of white labourers. Chinese workers were left out of the iconic picture called the “Last Spike”, which documented the construction of this high-profile project.

Closing Thoughts

Asian Heritage Month is a good reminder to slow down and learn from each other.

At PHSS, belonging is built through everyday actions. It's in how we treat people, how we listen, and how we create space for others.

**You matter.
Your story matters.
You belong here.**

A Day in the Life: Supporting Autism with Respect, Flexibility, & Heart

Written from the POV of a staff supporting a person who has autism.

Every Day Starts Differently

No two mornings begin the same. Some days begin with calm energy, where the space feels peaceful and welcoming. Other days begin with silence, slow pacing, or the need for extra time. Communication is limited to a few words, so I pay close attention to expressions, gestures, and the small cues that shape how the day will unfold.

There is a quiet strength in watching someone move through the morning independently. Breakfast is often made without needing reminders, a routine built from confidence and familiarity. Sometimes support is needed, sometimes it is not. My role is to recognize the difference and respond in ways that respect autonomy.

Building the Day Together

Daily activities are always flexible. We often spend time walking in parks, following familiar paths, or simply enjoying fresh air and quiet surroundings. These walks offer rhythm, and a gentle invitation to connect with the world beyond the home.

Grocery shopping has become its own meaningful routine. Moving through aisles, choosing items, waiting in line, and managing the sensory challenges of a busy store. All of these moments create opportunities for independence and growth. Some days the routine goes smoothly; other days require patience, additional reassurance and flexibility.



Car rides are another essential part of the day. The movement, the changing scenery, and the sense of predictability often bring a calmness that words do not always provide. It is a space where communication happens without speaking – through relaxed shoulders, steady breathing, or a simple nod of comfort.

Understanding - Not Assuming

Working with a person who communicates with limited words requires more than listening. It requires observing, responding, and understanding the world through their lens. Small changes in body language, pacing, or facial expression communicate far more than sentences ever could.

Challenges may appear suddenly, unexpected noises, crowded spaces, or a change in routine can create moments of discomfort. My role is to stay steady, patient, and attuned. We pause, adjust, or step outside when needed. Over time, trust has grown from consistency, not perfection.

The Quiet Wins That Shape the Day

Progress does not always look like a big milestone. Sometimes it is:

- Completing breakfast independently
- Staying calm in a crowded grocery store
- Trying a new walking trail
- Using one new word
- Making eye contact at a moment when connection is needed
- Entering the car with confidence
- Letting me know, in their own way, that support is welcome

These moments do not always get noticed by the world, but in support work, they are everything. They remind me why patience, presence, and understanding matter.

What This Work Teaches Me Every Day

Supporting a person with autism, both in a support worker and coordinator capacity, has changed the way I understand communication, independence, and inclusion.

Here is what I have learned:

- **Flexibility is essential.** Each day is different, and plans shift based on emotional and sensory needs.
- **Small gestures speak loudly.** A brief glance, relaxed breathing, or a steady step reveal how someone feels.
- **Independence is personal.** It may look like making breakfast, choosing clothes, or navigating a store; and each success deserves recognition.
- **Routine builds confidence.** But support builds trust.
- **Presence is more important than words.** Being calm, patient, and responsive creates safety.







This work does not just strengthen professional skills, it deepens empathy and expands how I see human connection.

Autism Acceptance Through Everyday Life

Autism is not something to “fix” or “solve.”

Autism is a different way of experiencing the world. A way that can be beautiful, brave, and insightful in its own rhythm.

Acceptance happens in the small moments:

-  Matching the pace of a walk
-  Helping navigate sensory challenges in a store
-  Sharing quiet, peaceful car rides
-  Respecting independence in daily routines
-  Being steady when emotions rise
-  Recognizing that communication happens in many forms

These everyday experiences bring Autism Acceptance to life more than any event or slogan ever could.

This story represents one person’s daily experiences, but it also reflects the heart of what DEI truly means:

Creating environments where every individual is understood, supported, and valued for who they are



NASA astronaut and Artemis II Commander Reid Wiseman took this picture of Earth from the Orion spacecraft's window on April 2, 2026, after completing the translunar injection burn. Credit: NASA/Reid Wiseman.

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. “

-Jane Goodall



EARTH DAY

Earth Day, celebrated around the world on April 22nd, is a time to honour the only home we have. Today, it is our responsibility to help sustain and protect this blue planet that sustains us. With approximately 8.3 billion people living on Earth, the amount of waste generated globally is staggering. A report published by the World Bank estimates that we generate about 2.01 billion tonnes of municipal waste every year, a number expected to increase to 3.40 billion tonnes by 2050. According to UNESCO, plastic debris kills more than one million sea birds and about 100,000 marine animals every year.

So, what can the average person do about this global issue? Conversations about cutting carbon emissions, energy use, and reducing industrial waste are important, but they often remain confined to government policy discussions and expert circles. In our everyday lives, however, we can still make meaningful contributions by remembering the 5 Rs: Refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and rot.

While the problem may feel overwhelming, small everyday choices can make a real difference. Here are a few simple ways to help.

- Choose reusable products: such as cups, shopping bags, and egg cartons
- Recycle properly: sort paper, plastic, glass, and metals correctly to ensure these materials can be reused instead of ending up in landfills
- Compost organic waste: kitchen scraps like tea bags, banana peels, and lemon peels can become fertilizer for plants
- Practice mindful consumption: avoid unnecessary purchases, choose eco-friendly packaging, and bring reusable bags when shopping
- Donate, repair, or repurpose: old clothes, for example, can be reused as cleaning rags
- Buy in bulk: save money, reduce packaging waste, and cut down on trips to the store

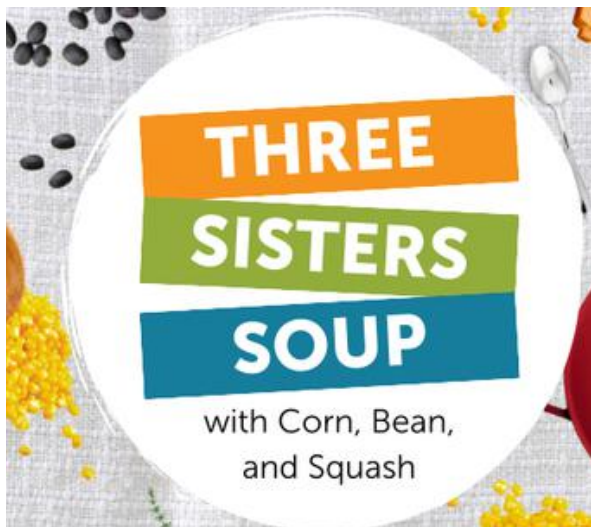
THREE SISTERS SOUP

Indigenous History Month Recipe

In Haudenosaunee tradition, the Three Sisters, corn, beans, and squash, symbolize harmony and balance, as each plant supports the others in growth: corn provides structure, beans restore the soil's nitrogen stores, and squash protects the ground from weeds. Together, they represent the strength that comes from cooperation and the importance of living in reciprocal relationship with the land.

Ingredients:

- 4 lbs. winter squash
- 4 quarts vegetable stock (or water)
- 2 small diced yellow onions
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped garlic
- 2 tsps. dried thyme
- 1 tsp. ground black pepper
- 1 lb. fresh or frozen corn kernels
- 4 cans cannellini beans
- 1 bunch sliced green onions
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1 large bay leaf



Instructions:

Preheat your oven to 350 °F. Slice your squash in half and scoop out the seeds, then roast for about 40 minutes. Allow to cool once soft, then scrape out the flesh and save the liquid for later. Blend until totally smooth (you can use a food processor or blender).

Sauté onions in a large pot over medium heat until brown, then add garlic, thyme, and black pepper, stirring until the garlic turns brown as well.

Pour in the stock and follow with the bay leaf, wine, and squash. Allow it to simmer for a few minutes before adding the rest of your ingredients. Simmer for about 20 minutes total.



Transgender Day of Visibility: We Have Always Been Here

Awareness of transgender, non-binary and intersex identities has grown significantly in recent decades, as the gay rights movement has found traction and gained more widespread support. Despite this community's growing presence, transgender people continue to experience high rates of violence, poverty and discrimination.

In 2010, trans advocate Rachel Crandell created Trans Day of Visibility (TDOV) to celebrate the contributions of transgender, non-binary and intersex people. Taking place annually on March 31st, TDOV recognizes that visibility is critical to creating a safe and inclusive community for all. As more people see transgender identities represented in positive ways, it becomes possible to break down the barriers that are created by misunderstandings and misconceptions.

One of those misconceptions is the idea that transgender and non-binary identities are new to our society. While the term 'transgender' is relatively recent, recorded trans identities are recognized dating back to 1200 BCE, even if they are rarely celebrated in our history books.



Check out these notable transgender and non-binary icons:

Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (c. 1286-1328)
Jewish philosopher Kalonymus had an illustrious literary career including both original works and translations. The poem Even Bohan, in which Kalonymus laments being born male and wishes to have been created a woman, is embraced by the LGBTQ+ Jewish community as an expression of gender dysphoria and transgender identity.

Dr. James Barry (c. 1789-1865)
Believed to have been born intersex and assigned female at birth, Dr. Barry took on a male identity and went on to become a successful military surgeon and physician. He is known for reforming medical standards in the British army and improving care to vulnerable patients.

Marsha P. Johnson (1945-1992)
One of the most notable gay rights activists of the 1960s and 1970s, Johnson's move to New York City immediately after high school signaled the beginning of her life as a woman. Johnson is widely known for protesting at Stonewall, speaking out about transphobia in the early gay rights movement, and establishing STAR, an organization to shelter transgender youth.

Mental Health Week



From May 4–10, Canadians come together to address the growing mental health crisis. This year’s theme, “Come Together, Canada,” highlights the importance of connection and support. In Canada, one in five people will experience a mental health problem in any given year, and many report feeling lonely, including 17% of youth, 13% of adults, and 10% of seniors.

Poor mental health can stem from a mix of biological, genetic, and environmental factors. As poet John Milton wrote, “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.” Isolation and disconnection can worsen mental health, which is why it’s important to talk openly about it, with loved ones, in our workplaces, and in our communities. Human beings thrive in connection, so let’s face these challenges together.

Local Mental Health Resources

London:

- Canadian Mental Health Association Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services – Provides counselling, crisis services, and community programs.
- Reach Out Crisis Line: 519-433-2023 (24/7 support).
- Mental Health and Addiction Crisis Centre – 648 Huron St., open 24 hours for people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- St Joseph Health Care London Offers specialized inpatient and outpatient mental health services

Ottawa:

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region – 24/7 confidential crisis support line: 613-238-3311.
- Mental Health Crisis Line: 613-722-6914 (available 24 hours).
- Ottawa Public Health – Provides information, counselling resources, and mental health programs.

Owen Sound:

- Brightshores Health System – Offers mental health and addiction services and crisis support through the Owen Sound hospital.

Stratford:

- Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth – Offers counselling, addiction support, housing assistance, and community mental health programs.

World Down Syndrome Day



Observed annually on March 21, World Down Syndrome Day raises awareness and celebrates the contributions of people around the globe with Down syndrome. The date, 3/21, is significant because it represents the presence of a third copy (trisomy) of chromosome 21, which is associated with Down syndrome. Many people participate by wearing colourful or mismatched socks. Check out these organizations to find support and resources from Down syndrome organizations near you.



A charity focused on raising funds to provide responsive, compassionate support services to children, youth, adults and families living with Down Syndrome in London, Ontario, and surrounding areas.



DSAO | DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO



DSAO is a charitable, non-profit organization composed of local Down syndrome associations from across the province of Ontario.



**DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION**
**ASSOCIATION SYNDROME DE DOWN
RÉGION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE**



A non-profit organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for individuals with Down syndrome.

Accessibility Resources



The AccessNow app helps people find and share information about accessible places by rating stores, restaurants, parks, transit stations, hotels, and other public venues. Users can search for locations with specific accessibility features and contribute reviews to build a community-generated database of inclusive spaces. The platform aims to make environments easier to navigate for people with disabilities.



Partners for Planning is a national non-profit organization that supports people with a developmental disability and their families to be proactive in planning for the future. Their Planning Network is an online resource hub that provides free resources to people and their families based on their Planning Framework. More than 50,000 people visit the Planning Network every year.



Family Alliance Ontario (FAO) represents thousands of families across Ontario who support a person with a developmental disability. Their volunteer leaders participate in advisory boards and committees at provincial and local levels to ensure that families are given options and choices. They support a growing network of affiliated family-directed organizations, so that together they can become a stronger voice.

Spotlight on the Passover Table



Passover is an important Jewish holiday that commemorates the Israelites' liberation from slavery in ancient Egypt. The holiday is a time for reflection, family gatherings, storytelling, and shared meals. This year, Passover was observed from the evening of Wednesday, April 1, 2026, through the evening of Thursday, April 9, 2026.

The first nights include the symbolic Seder meal, where families gather to retell the story of the Exodus and reflect on themes of freedom, remembrance, and community. Take a look at the image below that explains the Seder meal and what it represents.



COMMUNITY EVENTS



London

London Poutine Feast

Date: May 21 - 24

Location: Victoria Park

This is more than a food festival, it's a celebration of Canadian comfort, local culture, and shared good times. From classic curds and gravy to creative flavour-packed twists, every bite is part of the adventure!

London Latino Festival

Date: May 23

Location: Covent Garden Market

Experience the rich cultures of Latin America with live performances, local talent, and high-energy bands that will keep you moving all day long. From salsa to reggaeton, this is more than just a festival. It's a celebration of community, culture, and connection.

Mamma Mia!

Date: May 28 - June 7

Location: Palace Theatre

Get swept away to a sun-drenched Greek island where love, laughter, and ABBA anthems bring three potential dads and one unforgettable wedding crashing into Sophie's life.

Motown Gold

Date: June 19

Location: Aeolian Hall

Motown Gold is a live musical celebration honoring the legendary Detroit-based record label that launched the careers of icons such as The Temptations, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, The Four Tops, and Smokey Robinson.

Ottawa

Mother's Day Flower Fun Run

Date: May 10

Location: Dow's Lake

Walk or run 1K (for kids under 12) or 5K past hundreds of thousands of blooming tulip beds and the Rideau Canal / Dows Lake and raise funds for the Canadian Tulip Legacy.

Ottawa Polish Fest

Date: May 16

Location: ByWard Market neighbourhood

Join us for an afternoon of family fun filled with Polish food, folk dancing, fun and so much more! Located in the heart of the ByWard Market, this festival is fun for everyone.

Glengarry Renaissance Festival

Date: May 30 - 31

Location: Maxville Fairgrounds

Experience the excitement and wonder of the Middle Ages at this annual festival in Maxville, Ontario.

Owen Sound

Tulip Fest

Date: May 9 - 26

Location: Sandhill Creek Flower Farm

We are very excited to be opening for our second Tulip Fest this May! We have planted rows and rows of beautiful tulips on our family farm for visitors to enjoy, in fact, we planted over 350,000 bulbs on 4 acres!

Owen Sound Pride Parade

Date: June 13

Location: Owen Sound River District

Join us for an unforgettable Pride Parade & Block Party with live music, food trucks, and patios. Celebrate community with a fabulous Glow Party to light up the night. Pure joy, networking, and fun. Don't miss it!



**EMPLOYER
PARTNER**

As an Employer Partner with the Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion (CCDI), PHSS is able to provide a number of resources for staff to support us on our diversity and inclusion journey! If you haven't already; be sure to self-register today by scanning the QR code!

(Be sure to use your PHSS staff email address when signing up!)



CCDI Registration

www.phsscommunity.com