

SUMMER 2025 VOLUME No.12

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

NEWSLETTER



LET'S TALK ABOUT:

INTERNATIONAL NON-BINARY DAY
THE POWER OF SIGN LANGUAGE
BELONGING





FROM THE TEAM

Welcome to the Summer 2025 edition of the PHSS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion newsletter. As we embrace the warmth and energy of the season, our DEI journey continues with enthusiasm and intention. Each edition is an opportunity to strengthen our commitment to building a culture rooted in inclusivity and belonging. Summer is a time of growth, connection, and celebration, so as the days get longer and the sun shines brighter, let's honour the diverse voices that make our community thrive.

Thank You!

PHSS DEI TEAM

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SUMMER CALENDAR

JUNE

Canadian Environment Week	1-7
Shavu'ot	1-3
Clean Air Day	4
Hajj	4-9
Pentecost	8
Eid al-Adha	5-9
World Anxiety Day	10
Father's Day	15
Juneteenth	19
World Refugee Day	20
Summer Solstice	20
National Indigenous Peoples Day	21
Islamic/Hijri New Year	25-26
Canadian Multiculturalism Day	27

JULY

Canada Day	1
Ashura	5-6
Asalha Puja (Dharma Day)	10
Non-Binary People's Day	14
Nelson Mandela Day	18
International Self Care Day	24
World Hepatitis Day	28
International Day of Friendship	30

AUGUST

Emancipation Day	1
Lammas/Lughnasadh	1
World Breastfeeding Week	1-7
Tisha B-Av	2-3
Civic Holiday	4
Day of the World's Indigenous People	9
Raksha Bandhan	9
Obon	13-15
World Humanitarian Day	19
Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition	23
International Overdose Awareness Day	31

SEPTEMBER

Onam	5
Week of Deaf People	5-11
Ukrainian Heritage Day	7
Mennonite Heritage Week	8-14
World Suicide Prevention Day	10
Ethiopian New Year	11
Gender Equality Week	22-28
Day of Sign Languages	23
Bi Visibility Day	23
Franco-Ontarian Day	25
National Day for Truth & Reconciliation/Orange shirt Day	30

The Power of Sign Language:

A Bridge to Belonging

Celebrating Communication Without Barriers

Sign language is more than just hand gestures, it's a full, expressive language with its own grammar, structure, and regional variations. Whether it's American Sign Language (ASL), Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), or another form, sign language is a vital tool that connects the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community to the wider world.

At PHSS, inclusive, equitable communication is foundational to providing holistic care and support. Using sign language ensures that everyone can fully participate in community life and access health and social services with dignity and understanding.

A Brief History of ASL

American Sign Language (ASL) originated in the early 19th century in the United States. Its development was significantly shaped by the founding of the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American educator, and Laurent Clerc, a Deaf teacher from France, blended French Sign Language with local and regional sign systems used in the U.S., creating what would evolve into ASL.

ASL is now recognized as a complete, complex language with its own syntax and structure. It is widely used in the United States and parts of Canada and continues to grow in influence, education, and cultural relevance.

Why Learn Sign Language?

- **Fosters Belonging:** Helps break down communication barriers
- **Improves Accessibility:** Especially important in healthcare, education, and community settings
- **Boosts Cognitive Skills:** Enhances memory, attention, and visual-spatial processing
- **Expands Your World:** Connects you to new communities and cultures.



Top Resources for Learning ASL

For Beginners

Start ASL – Free beginner courses, videos, and quizzes
Website: www.startasl.com

Handspeak – ASL dictionary, culture, and grammar resources
Website: www.handspeak.com

Sign Language 101 – 10-lesson video course for beginners
Website: www.signlanguage101.com

Courses and Certifications

Gallaudet University – Online courses from the world's first Deaf university
Website: www.gallaudet.edu

ASL University (Lifeprint) – Lessons and resources by Dr. Bill Vicars
Website: www.lifeprint.com

Mobile Apps

The ASL App – Video demonstrations
Website: www.theaslapp.com

Lingvano – Interactive app-based learning
Website: www.lingvano.com

Marlee Signs – ASL basics taught by actress Marlee Matlin
Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/marlee-signs/id599888479>



Sign Language in Action at PHSS

In our commitment to person-centred care and support, PHSS encourages communication practices that honor the diverse ways people express themselves. From staff training in basic ASL phrases to visual aids in homes and day supports, our approach reinforces independence and respect.

Historical Milestones in Sign Language Development

- 1817 – Founding of the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc
- 1864 – Gallaudet University is chartered in Washington, D.C., becoming the first university for Deaf students
- 1960 – ASL formally recognized as a unique language by linguist William Stokoe
- 1988 – Deaf President Now movement at Gallaudet University leads to the appointment of its first Deaf president
- 2007 – Canadian House of Commons recognizes ASL and LSQ as primary languages of Deaf Canadians
- 2022 – Canada enacts the Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81), reinforcing communication accessibility including sign languages

Annual Dates Recognizing Sign Language & Accessibility

September (full month)

International Month of Deaf People

-celebrated globally to raise awareness about Deaf culture and rights

Last week of September

International Week of the Deaf

-highlighting advocacy, inclusion, and accessibility for the Deaf community

September 23

International Day of Sign Languages

-a UN-recognized day promoting the use of sign language worldwide

May (Canada)

National AccessAbility Week

-dedicated to accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities, including Deaf individuals

Conclusion: Every Sign Counts

From classrooms to community, every effort to learn sign language strengthens the bonds of inclusion. At PHSS, we believe that communication is a human right. Embracing ASL enriches our connections and empowers everyone to participate fully and freely. Whether you're learning a few signs or becoming fluent, every step you take builds a more accessible and compassionate world.

Learning sign language is more than acquiring a new skill, it is an act of inclusion, advocacy, and human connection. At PHSS, we believe that communication should never be a barrier to belonging. Embracing American Sign Language (ASL) is one way we ensure every person can be seen, heard, and valued—on their terms.

Whether you are learning to fingerspell your name or committing to deeper fluency, every sign shared builds a world that is more accessible, more respectful, and more connected. In the hands of community, language becomes a bridge and every hand sign counts.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

September 30, 2025



September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a day to reflect on the dark legacy of Canada's residential school system. It is a time to honour the children who never returned home, the survivors, and the families and communities who continue to live with the intergenerational impacts.

This federal statutory holiday is one step toward acknowledging the truth, promoting public awareness, and supporting the ongoing process of reconciliation in Canada. It was established through legislative amendments by Parliament and responds directly to Call to Action 80 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.



Wear Orange

Both the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day take place on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led grassroots initiative that raises awareness about the individual, family, and community impacts of residential schools. The orange shirt symbolizes the stripping away of culture, freedom, and self-worth experienced by Indigenous children over generations. Wearing orange on this day is a powerful gesture of solidarity and a reminder that **Every Child Matters**.

On September 30, we encourage all Canadians to wear orange to honour the thousands of Survivors of residential schools.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its calls to action

Between 1867 and 1996, more than 140 federally run residential schools operated across Canada. Survivors bravely came forward to seek recognition, accountability, and justice, leading to:

- The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement
- Formal government apologies
- The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)
- The creation of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

The TRC operated from 2008 to 2015 and released 94 Calls to Action as a roadmap toward meaningful reconciliation. As of today, only 15 of the 94 have been completed—progress has begun, but much more is needed.

Moving Forward Together

Reconciliation is not a one-day event, and it goes beyond symbolic gestures. For non-Indigenous people, reconciliation means:

- Supporting Indigenous sovereignty
- Advocating for land back movements
- Challenging and changing systems that continue to cause harm

Centuries of colonialism cannot be undone in a decade, but progress begins with awareness, accountability, and collective action. We all have a role to play. Please continue to listen, learn, support, and speak up for justice.

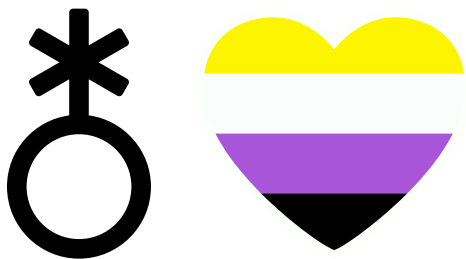




International Non-Binary People's Day

International Non-Binary People's Day is observed every year on July 14. It was established in 2012 to raise awareness and celebrate the diversity of non-binary identities—those that don't fit strictly within the traditional categories of “male” or “female.” The date falls exactly between International Women's Day (March 8) and International Men's Day (November 19), symbolizing a space that exists beyond the binary.

This day is an opportunity that gender is a spectrum, and the varied identities that can exist within the human experience. Many non-binary people identify with terms like genderqueer, agender, bigender, or genderfluid, but each person's identity is unique.



How to Support Non-Binary People in Everyday Life:

- 1. Respect Pronouns and Names** – Use the name and pronouns someone asks you to use (e.g., they/them, xe/xem, or others). If you make a mistake, correct yourself without making it a big issue.
- 2. Avoid Gendered Assumptions** – Don't assume someone's gender based on their appearance. Instead, ask or listen to how they describe themselves.
- 3. Challenge Gender Norms** – Speak up against stereotypes or discrimination in conversations, media, and institutions.
- 4. Be Inclusive in Language** – Use gender-neutral terms like “everyone” instead of “ladies and gentlemen.”
- 5. Educate Yourself** – Take initiative to learn about gender diversity through books, articles, or trusted sources rather than relying solely on non-binary people to explain.

Supporting non-binary people means creating a more inclusive, respectful world for everyone every day, not just on July 14.

Building Belonging Together

Belonging is the feeling of being safe, accepted, and valued.

At PHSS, belonging is a daily practice that touches every part of our work. It's how we support people with complex needs to live fully and independently. It's also how we build strong teams, foster meaningful partnerships, and lead with compassion and equity in everything we do.

Belonging is for everyone: people supported, staff, families, board members, and community partners.

When people feel they belong, they are:

- More engaged and connected in relationships, teams, and services
- Healthier: physically, emotionally, and mentally
- More confident to share ideas, speak up, and shape change
- Better able to trust, participate in, and strengthen community life

Belonging makes our work better, our partnerships stronger, and our impact deeper.

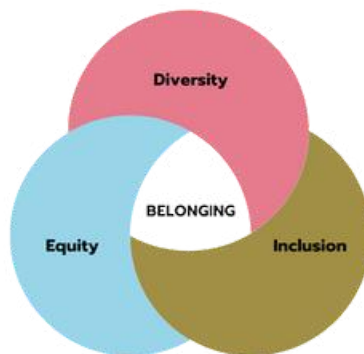
At PHSS, we strive to make belonging a felt experience for all.

Belonging Builds Healthy Communities

Belonging is more than personal, it's community. People who feel they belong are more likely to:

- Volunteer, share, and support others
- Spread kindness and inclusion
- Build stronger, more resilient networks

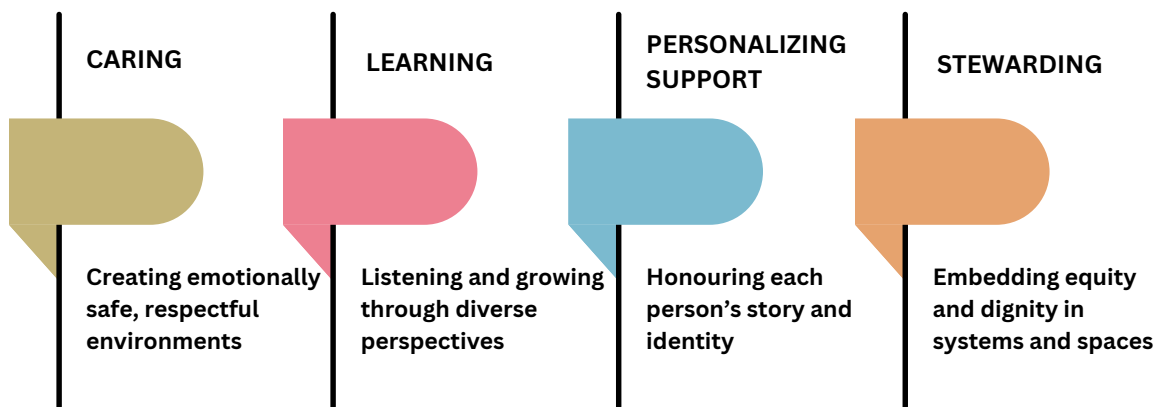
We believe belonging is how community grows.



Belonging doesn't happen by accident, it's created when diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are intentionally practiced. Diversity brings together people with different backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Equity ensures that every person has equitable access to opportunities, resources, and respect. It means recognizing that different people need different kinds of support to fully participate and thrive. Inclusion makes sure everyone has a voice and is truly heard. When all three come together, they form the foundation for Belonging, the lived experience of feeling safe, respected, and valued.

Embracing DEI is how we build spaces where everyone can say, "I matter here."

At PHSS, belonging isn't just something we strive for, it's something we live, lead, and build together. Whether you are someone we support, a staff member, a family partner, or a member of our board or community, you are part of something bigger: a network rooted in dignity, equity, and compassion. Belonging is how we honour each person's story. It's how we grow trust, foster resilience, and create communities where everyone can thrive.



Person Supported YOU BELONG HERE

At PHSS, you are not just a participant or consumer, you are a partner, a neighbour, and a valued member of our community. Belonging means that you are welcome, respected, and free to be yourself.

You can help build belonging by:

- Share what makes you feel safe and included – your voice matters!
- Join events and conversations – we want your ideas and laughter
- Celebrate what makes you unique – your identity is a strength
- Help others feel welcome – kindness builds community

Staff YOUR ROLE IN BELONGING

You build belonging when you:

- Ask questions instead of assuming
- Use inclusive and affirming language
- Acknowledge mistakes and learn from feedback
- Show curiosity about culture, identity, and needs
- Continue your DEI learning journey

Families YOUR PARTNERSHIP IS VITAL

Your insight helps us shape inclusive supports. You can:

- Share traditions, beliefs, or communication styles
- Help us know what feels safe and welcoming
- Join in events that celebrate culture and connection
- Speak up when something doesn't feel right. We want to know!

"With strong leadership, meaningful partnerships, and a shared commitment to inclusion, Belonging becomes the blueprint for building healthy and connected communities." - Brian Dunne, CEO, PHSS

Board Members STEWARDS & AMBASSADORS OF BELONGING

As PHSS Board Members, your role extends beyond oversight, it's about embedding belonging into the heart of our organization's leadership. Your decisions and presence shape the tone, culture, and priorities that directly impact how safe, included, and respected people feel.

Why It Matters

- Governance is where belonging begins: how we plan, fund, and assess services & supports influences inclusion across all services
- A board that values lived experience, identity, and accessibility helps ensure PHSS remains person-centred and equity-driven
- Belonging at the board level signals to staff, families, and individuals supported that their voices matter in all spaces

Community Partners COLLABORATORS IN BELONGING

As partners in housing, healthcare, developmental services, education, and community, your collaboration is key to building inclusive, thriving environments for the individuals PHSS supports. Belonging doesn't stop at our front doors, it must be felt wherever people live, learn, heal, and participate.

Why It Matters

- People supported rely on a network of care and support. Belonging must be consistent across services & supports
- True community requires that everyone regardless of ability or identity can access services with dignity
- When partners embrace inclusive practices, individuals feel supported, welcomed, understood, and empowered

Kerala's Festival of Harvest, Heritage & Unity

Onam

Onam is the biggest and most vibrant festival celebrated in the Indian state of Kerala. It marks the **beginning of the harvest season** and is celebrated in the Malayalam month of Chingam (August–September). Onam honors the legendary King **Mahabali**, whose reign is remembered as a golden age of peace, equality, and prosperity. It is both a cultural and spiritual celebration that brings together people of all communities in Kerala and around the world.



The Legend of King Mahabali

According to mythology, **Mahabali** was a kind and just king loved by his people. Under his rule, there was no discrimination, poverty, or injustice. Fearing his growing popularity, the gods asked Lord Vishnu to intervene. Vishnu took the form of a dwarf Brahmin boy, **Vamana**, and approached Mahabali asking for three feet of land. The generous king agreed. Vamana then grew to cosmic proportions—his first two steps covered the earth and sky, and for the third, Mahabali offered his head. Touched by his humility, Vishnu allowed him to return once a year to visit his people. That annual return is celebrated as Onam.



Why Onam Matters Today

Onam is more than a festival, it's a **reminder of what a just and joyful society can look like**. It brings people together across generations and backgrounds to celebrate community, gratitude, and shared culture. Whether through delicious food, spirited games, or simple acts of togetherness, Onam continues to inspire unity in diversity.



How Onam is Celebrated

Onam is celebrated over **10 days**, with the final day, **Thiruvonam**, being the most important. Each day has its own rituals and customs, filled with color, community, and joy. Key traditions include:

- **Pookalam**: Intricate floral designs made at the entrance of homes to welcome King Mahabali
- **Onakkodi**: Wearing new clothes as a sign of renewal and festivity
- **Onasadhya**: A grand vegetarian feast served on banana leaves, often featuring over 20 dishes
- **Vallam Kali**: Snake boat races in Kerala's backwaters, showcasing skill and teamwork
- **Pulikali**: The "Tiger Dance" where performers paint themselves like tigers and dance through the streets
- **Cultural Performances**: Traditional dances like Thiruvathira, martial arts displays, folk music, and drama

Cultural Significance

- **Harvest Festival**: Onam celebrates nature's abundance and the farmers who bring food to the table
- **Inclusive Celebration**: Though rooted in Hindu mythology, Onam is celebrated by people of all faiths in Kerala, making it a true festival of unity
- **Symbol of Equality**: The story of Mahabali reflects values of humility, selflessness, and justice—reminding us of the importance of inclusive leadership and collective joy

Mango Lassi

Mango lassi is a creamy yogurt-based drink from India made with mango, some milk, a little sugar, and a bit of cardamom. A refreshing treat for hot summer days!

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Total Time: 5 minutes

Servings: 4 glasses

Equipment needed: Blender

Ingredients

- 2 cups roughly chopped ripe mangoes or 1.5 cups mango store-bought pulp [see note]
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 cup milk or water to dilute
- 2 tablespoons sugar or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon cardamom seeds optional
- 7-8 saffron strands optional
- 6-8 ice cubes optional

Steps

1. Begin by gathering roughly chopped ripe mangoes, or you can use store-bought mango pulp. Make sure the mangoes are well-ripened for optimal flavor
2. Add yogurt and milk to your blender. The yogurt acts as the creamy base for your lassi, while the milk helps achieve the right consistency.
3. Incorporate sugar, adjusting the amount to your taste preferences.
4. For enhanced flavor, consider adding a hint of cardamom seeds (or powder) and a few strands of saffron, though these are optional.
5. If you prefer your drink chilled, add ice cubes.
6. Secure the lid on your blender and blend until the mixture is smooth and well combined.
7. Serve the mango lassi immediately for best results.



Notes

Mango choice: Always opt for ripe, sweet mangoes to minimize the need for added sugar and for the best taste. Alphonso mangoes are ideal for their rich flavor, but Ataulfo, Kent, or Keitt are also great choices.

Straining homemade puree: If your mango puree is fibrous, strain it to ensure a smooth texture in your lassi.

Adjusting homemade pulp: Homemade mango pulp is usually thicker than store-bought versions. Dilute it with water or milk to get the right consistency. Milk is preferred as it balances the yogurt's tartness.

Using Greek yogurt: Greek yogurt can be used for a creamier texture. Just remember to dilute it with water or milk to adjust the consistency.

Store bought mango pulp: If you prefer buying mango pulp, try sourcing it from local Indian grocery stores for authenticity. Online options like sweetened Swad Kesar mango pulp or organic unsweetened mango pulp are also available on Amazon.

Sugar adjustment: Store-bought mango pulp may contain added sugar. Adjust the amount of sugar in your recipe accordingly.

Flavor enhancers: Although optional, adding cardamom seeds and saffron strands is highly recommended. They impart an aromatic essence and elevate the lassi's flavor profile.

DEI Inspired Summer Reads

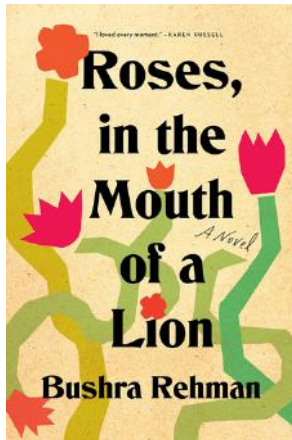
Looking for engaging summer reads that entertain while also expanding your perspective? These books highlight diverse voices and stories, offering a refreshing blend of fun, thrills, reflection, and a deeper understanding of equity and inclusion.



The Black Girl Survives in this One

Desiree S. Evans

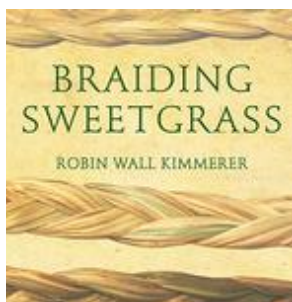
A horror anthology featuring black girls as the protagonists, challenging traditional horror tropes by showcasing the resilience and resourcefulness of the heroes. Looking for zombies, werewolves, demons, and the like? This collection has it all!



Roses in the Mouth of a Lion

Bushra Rehman

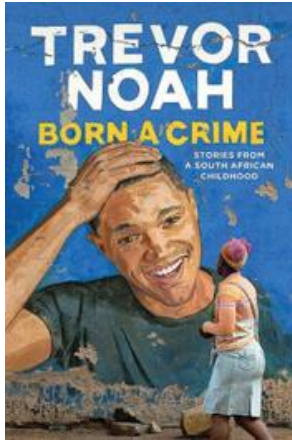
This coming of age novel follows Razia, a Pakistani-American girl growing up in 1980s New York. Razia struggles to reconcile her deeply valued Muslim traditions with her growing desire for a more independent life that embraces her queer identity. Fierce, compassionate and hopeful, you can't help but invest in Razia's journey at every turn.



Braiding Sweetgrass

Robin Wall Kimmerer

A non-fiction book that explores the intersection of Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and teaching of plants. Kimmerer presents readers with an uplifting and beautiful experience that calls on us all to reconsider our relationship with nature and practice gratitude every day.



Born a Crime

Trevor Noah

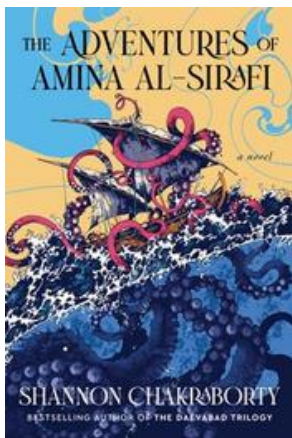
Trevor Noah delivers a heartfelt and hilarious account of his childhood in South Africa during and after apartheid. This memoir doesn't shy away from the complexities of growing up as a mixed-race child, but uses personal anecdotes to illustrate in funny and poignant ways Noah and his family grappled with race and poverty using the power of humour to cope with the world he lived in.



The Murderbot Diaries

Martha Wells

A series of sci-fi novellas, this collection features a security robot who hacks the governor module that controls its actions, gaining free will and the ability to think and act independently. As Murderbot navigates its independence, it falls (often unwillingly) into friendships that push itself to explore its identity. Action packed, wry, and full of a cast of off-beat characters, The Murderbot Diaries asks us all to consider what it means to be human.



The Adventures of Amina Al-Sirafi

Shannon Chakraborty

A rollicking tale of magic and mayhem, this story follows retired pirate queen, Amina, whose quest to rescue the daughter of a fallen comrade rapidly spirals into a much more dangerous endeavor. Mythology, history, religion and pirate lore combine to pull readers into a story you just can't put down.



A Message from your DEI Team

As we continue to grow, it is essential that our teams reflect the rich diversity of the individuals we support and the communities we serve. That's why we're encouraging more staff and people supported to get involved in meaningful ways, especially through our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Team.

We're currently looking for individuals who are passionate about making a difference, who can bring their unique perspectives, lived experiences, or simply their curiosity and willingness to learn. Whether you are a part time staff, coordinator or senior management, your voice matters.

Here are some ways you can engage:

- **Join the DEI team:** We meet monthly and welcome both staff and people supported. No prior experience is needed, just a commitment to inclusion
- **Contribute ideas:** Whether it's for our DEI newsletter, future events, or community outreach, we'd love to hear from you
- **Be a connector:** Know someone who might be a great fit? Encourage them to reach out or talk to us

Together, we can create spaces that are not only supportive, but also empowering for everyone.

If you're interested or would like more information, please email DiversityTeam@phsscommunity.com





Summer Community Activities

London

Event: **Forest City Fusion Festival**

Date: August 15–16

Location: Covent Garden Market

Experience the magic of multiculturalism at this two day event celebrating the rich diversity of London's community through music, dance, food and art.

Event: **London Fiesta Extravaganza**

Date: August 16–17

Location: Victoria Park

Featuring live music, cultural performances, and traditional Filipino cuisine, this Fiesta is a joyful tribute to the Philippine's rich traditions.

Event: **Taco Fest**

Date: August 22–24

Location: Covent Garden Market

Explore a taco lover's paradise with high energy lucha libre wrestling, taco competitions, and lively beats. There's something to spice up everyone's day.

Event: **Airshow London**

Date: September 5–7

Location: London International Airport

Aerial performances by RCAF, U.S. military, and international demo teams.

Event: **Western Fair**

Date: September 5–14

Location: 316 Rectory St

Ontario's big fall fair—rides, exhibits, shows, food, and agricultural displays.

Ottawa

Event: **Summer Maze Days**

Date: May 31–Aug 31

Location: Saunders Farm

A seasonal outdoor attraction offering a hedge maze, hayrides, splash pad, and farm fun.

Event: **Les Grands Feux du Casino Lac-Leamy**

Date: July 30–Aug 16

Location: Gatineau

Fireworks festival at Gatineau. Tickets and reservations required.

Event: **Farmers' Markets**

Date: Weekly May–October

Location: various locations (Downtown, Orléans, Carp, Cumberland, Parkdale)

Event: **Capital Pride Festival**

Date: Aug 16–24

Location: Centertown

Expect an exciting lineup of musical and drag performers at the TD Main Stage, as well as the fan-favourite Capital Pride Pageant where judges will crown Mr. Ms. and Mx. Capital Pride 2025. The Pride Parade kicks off Sunday, August 24 at 1pm.

Owen Sound

Event: **Mid-Week Music & TD Harbour Nights Concert Series**

Date: Every Wednesday June – September

Location: 1155 1st Ave West

Live outdoor musical evenings—local bands and youth musicians perform at the harbour!

Event: **Teddy Bear Picnic**

Date: August 29

Location: Harrison Park

Enjoy activity stations for children, youth, and families. There will also be lots of service providers in the park to chat with and to collect resource information from.





**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