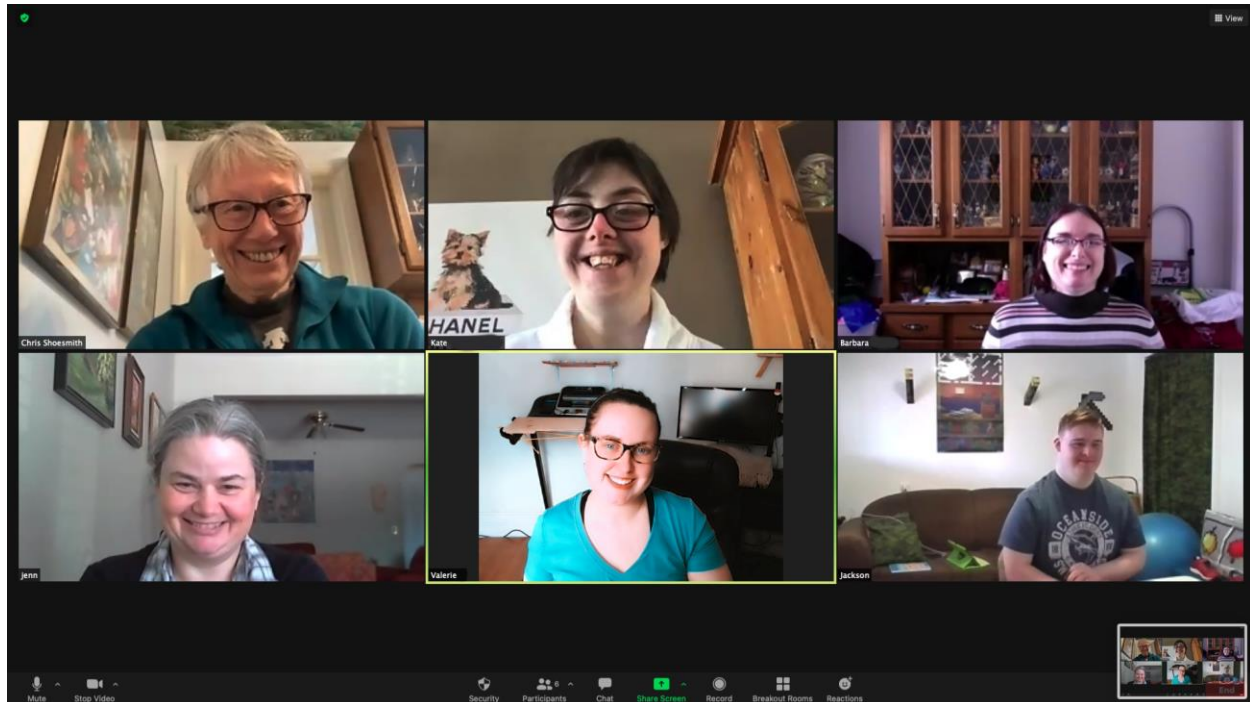


Shifting to a Virtual Role... Volunteers Share Their Thoughts

Chris



Chris Shoesmith is enjoying her new venture as facilitator of one of our online book clubs. Reading the book, “Mary Poppins Returns” is sparking lots of laughter and conversation, and as Mary Poppins would say, “It’s practically perfect in every way!”

When asked if she ever thought she would be volunteering in an online program, Chris replied with a laugh, No!, it's been a nice surprise though, that it's gone so well! I was expecting it to be difficult because I'm not tech-minded, but it's been very smooth. I'm on an iPad so it's a little more restrictive, but working with Val in Adult Education, having another person there to do the games and share the screen is so helpful to facilitate together. I would do it again based on this experience.”

Adjusting to an online format rather than in-person has been a learning experience, but Chris notes that she didn't have to make any change in her teaching style. “Because I'm a retired teacher I fell back into teaching mode. I jumped back into something I've loved doing for the last 40 years. It brings me that satisfaction of feeling useful and helpful. I organized facilitating the book club the same way I would organize a lesson in a classroom, with accommodations for each person's abilities. We start with some questions to refresh what we talked about last

week and where we are at in the story. We're having fun talking about the meaning of some of the words or expressions from the past that are used in "Mary Poppins Returns" that we don't hear people saying today, like "plum out"!"

Chris has also been able to use her knowledge as a former science teacher by contributing some activity ideas on fundamentals in science for an upcoming science program that Val is preparing for Adult Education. "I didn't think I would ever be drawing on my science background as a volunteer, but am certainly happy to help out more in that respect again."

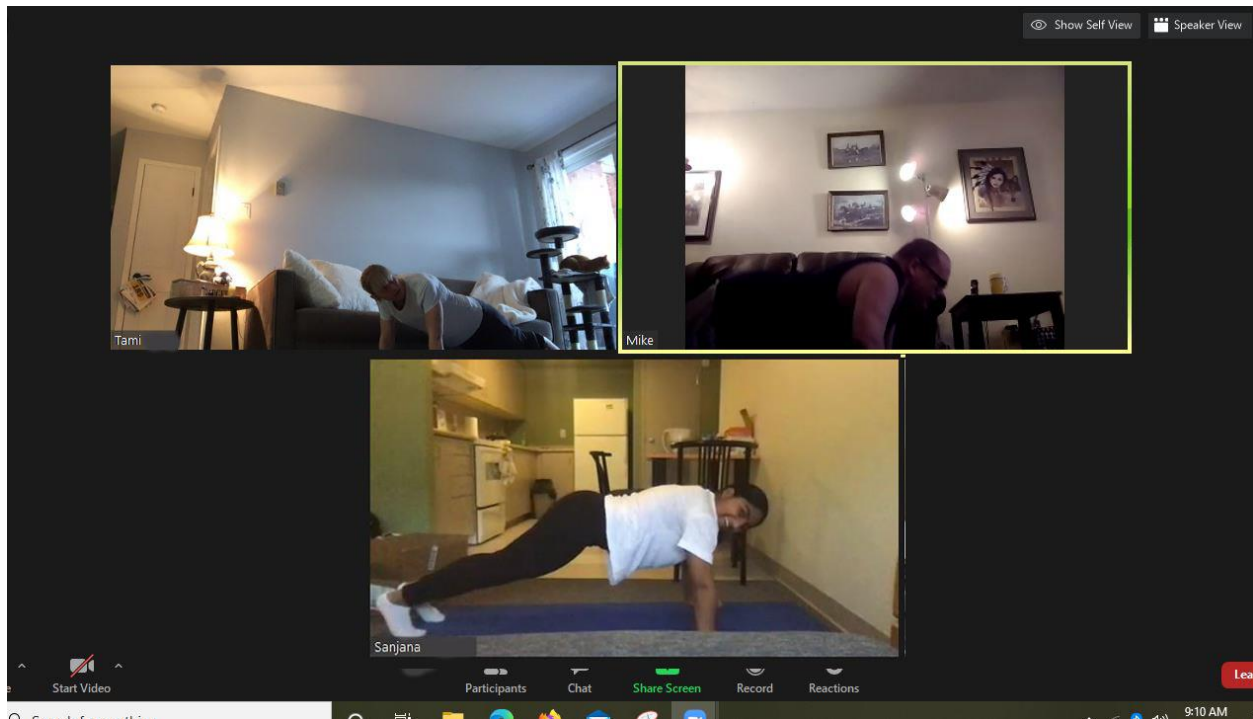
What has she learned from the experience of facilitating an online program?

"Well, I'm more capable on the iPad than I thought I was! Before I did this, I did use Zoom a bit with my own family and friends to keep in contact. It was nice to see them but not the same feeling as having them with me. But, I have found with the book club group that it's been easy to get to know and feel comfortable with the participants and establish a rapport with them. I didn't think that was going to happen, but it has! I was a hands-on teacher doing projects and science experiments with students and didn't use technology to teach. I was a bit biased about using technology to teach and connect with people, but this experience is dispelling that bias."

Reflecting on the value of the online book club program and what she likes the most about it, Chris says, "Its very satisfying to see how people can progress through the book we are reading. It's an eye-opener for me as to how much interest and information I can help people obtain. It's the same feeling as when I tutored one-to-one. Just seeing on their faces how much they are enjoying being there. And the commitment that the participants are putting in to attending every week shows how important it is to them. They are all accepting and supportive of each other. Its giving that human contact that we are missing in-person, not only for the program participants, but for all of us, during this pandemic."

"They're a lovely group of people, and it's going really well."

Sanjana



Sanjana Vuyyuru has been a valuable part of the fitness program, assisting twice a week and jumping in to lead the class whenever needed!

“Once I knew I would be attending Western University I was looking for volunteer opportunities in the London community and found Hutton House online and read about all the great programs. I was wondering if there was a virtual opportunity and was really glad that you had one for me!”, says Sanjana.

Sanjana has a passion for fitness, and with her experience teaching yoga at a virtual summer camp, she was able to easily adapt to teaching fitness online! She has found the role fits into her interests and future career goals. “I played competitive tennis and was also on the badminton team in high school. I just fell in love with how fitness is great for your physical and mental health. I have found with Hutton house it’s great to exercise with others because we can all motivate each other, and it connects with something I want to be doing in the future. I want to get my fitness instructor or personal trainer certification, and even further down the line I want to pursue a career in healthcare where I can really advocate about how important physical activity is toward improving both your mental and physical health.”

“What I like most about this experience is the social aspect, connecting with the participants in the classes and getting to know them. In the warm-up and cool-downs, we really get to talk to each other. When I moved to London, I didn’t know anyone and I’ve grown to feel a nice sense

of community through volunteering for the fitness programs. I also enjoy working with the Fitness Facilitator, Tami; she's so creative and easy to work with."

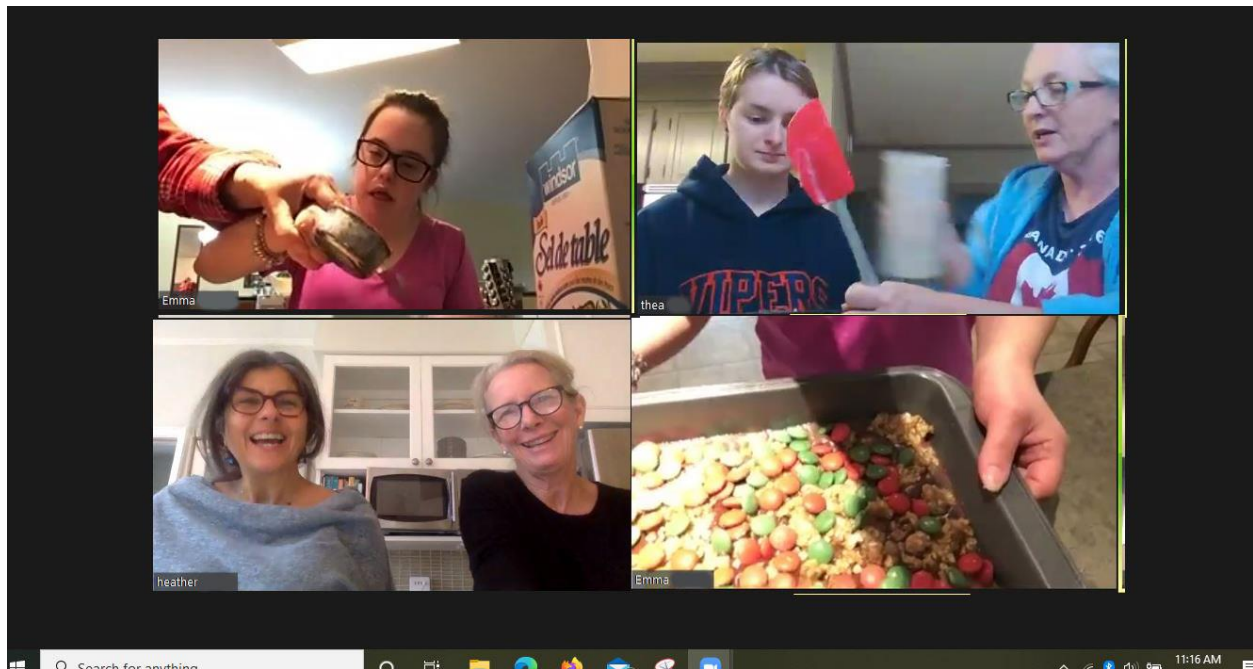
"The main advantage of online fitness is that the participants can still maintain good physical health from the comfort of their own homes and not have to worry about the commute. It's always great when you can see someone in-person in a gym setting - they can use a larger amount of equipment and you can check people's form more easily when they are doing movements. However, to compensate for that, Tami has incorporated resistance bands which are safer to use than weights. If your form is not exactly perfect using resistance bands it's more forgiving and there's less chance of an injury. We're making it work online."

"I would say the biggest thing I've learned from this experience is the importance of adapting to new circumstances and keeping a positive attitude. With Covid happening, I've learned that you can adapt without too much effort - you only have to learn the basics of Zoom, get some resistance bands and learn how to do some variations of exercises that work the same muscles as you would be in a fitness centre using machines or other equipment."

"The value I'm feeling is, I'm sure the same as for all of the program participants - you get to meet more people and motivate each other to live a healthy lifestyle. Plus, we're all having fun learning some unique exercises that Tami comes up with that I've never seen before, and we can continue doing them from home. Tami brings your imagination into it, like today we were all doing "wood choppers" and pretending we were chopping wood! With the gyms closed and not being able to see your friends in-person over the past year, this has been a really an important avenue for all of us to maintain our mental health."

"With all of the programs Hutton House offers online, you're still able to build a good sense of community with your program participants. It shows a pandemic can't limit that - you can still have a great time learning some new skills and doing some fun classes with others in the community."

Heather & Marina



Stir it up! Heather Morris & Marina Knox are having fun sharing their skills in our cooking programs.

I know that you both have experience volunteering with food and cooking programs, however that's in person, so how does your online volunteering experience compare with the in-person for you?

Marina: Well we didn't know at first how it would work, but it's worked out really well! At the beginning we had two participants, three participants, and this morning we had ten. We are now volunteering with two full groups a week. And what's fun is each group they can say hi to each other and have a little conversation among them and we can watch what they are doing as we're all cooking. It's worked out really surprisingly well. And you know under these circumstances I think everyone's still so excited to cook, and we have time to complete the recipe and even sometimes time to share it together.

Did you ever think that your skills would ever be used in an online program?

Marina: No actually. After visiting Hutton House we really just got everything completed and then everything shut down due to the pandemic. We had other volunteering we were doing as well, in other locations, but nobody we were involved with went to the capacity that you have.

So when you called and you asked, we had no idea what to expect and it's grown into something that is enjoyable for everyone. We enjoy it, and the participants enjoy it. It's good positive feedback we're getting.

What do you like the most about this experience?

Heather: What I like is the excitement of the participants and just the joy around cooking. It just feels like “food is love”, and that's what's happening there.

Marina: I have to say similarly with myself. I think the biggest thing was when we jumped from having just two on the screen to ten on the screen. There's a real buzz, wouldn't you say Heather?

Heather: Yes, and excitement!

Marina: They're happy to be there, they want to get started and they're talking and engaged. So, it's really nice.

What have you learned from the experience?

Heather: Well, what an outstanding organization you people are running, and the program you're offering and the people you're attracting. Your Facilitator, Tammy, is amazing, your student intern, Emma, is amazing, what you do is amazing. It makes you just feel good, when you see what a lovely community you have all created.

Marina: I think even just interacting with the young adults, who do have some challenges and disabilities- just learning from them, and seeing their disposition and how they manage with things like cooking. Even today, one of the participants had spilled some maraschino cherry juice. We said, “Oh you know, I think you can solve that problem!” and he said, “Yes I can!” He made this awesome creation; he was using food coloring- he just took a lead on the whole thing. We're dealing with individual personalities. Some just want to be there, they're happy to just be there and listen. So, I think for myself, it's about letting it all happen organically. It's a different way of thinking and being in the kitchen.

Do you think you're getting to know people as well as you would in person?

Heather: Oh yes! It would be different face to face, but definitely we're still getting a connection.

Marina: It's nice too because sometimes you go off script and have conversations, because you know, they have a dog or its Christmas time, etc. Heather always asks if anyone has cooked over the weekend, and they're so happy to say if they did.

If you could sum it up for yourself, what you see as the value of the program?

Heather: Well, I think a number of things. One, having some structure to your day is so good for everyone. To see their friends, with ten of them in the class, they can really go back and forth and if you're alone at home you can be lonely, so the socialization is important. And I think with the cooking too, everyone is growing. We have so many substitutions, everyone is always out of something. They show us what they substitute, and they're getting really good at it!

Marina: We do a jeopardy game at the start, and it's all learning. They like the game- some are more competitive than others! Even this morning a participant commented and noticed we were using a whisk, which was a question in the game! They also end up with a recipe booklet.

Heather: One participant said she cooked on the weekend, she used the oatmeal recipe from last session, but she substituted raisins for chocolate chips.

Marina: She was using the language, the kitchen terms and tools lingo. And your student intern, Emma makes these beautiful recipes for the booklet, she makes it really picturesque. So, the participants actually come out of the program with a themed recipe book that they can use!

Thank you so much for your time Heather and Marina! You're doing such a wonderful job and we're lucky to have your support!

