

The Shelburne Community Welcome resumes service as province reopens

Written By **Fatima Baig**

The Shelburne Community Welcome is known for welcoming new residents to Shelburne. They provide gift baskets with small items and tokens for new residents, so they have the opportunity to get to know Shelburne and small businesses better.

"When a new resident moves into town our job is to welcome them. How we welcome them is with the cooperation of local business and they provide a small item or token or coupon, some insensitive for new residents to go into their business and their stores," said Bella Carter, co-founder of the Community Welcome in Shelburne

The Shelburne Community Welcome was rebranded from The Welcome Wagon during the start of the pandemic last March, according to Sandra Gallagher, who helped Carter co-found the Community Welcome program.

"The Welcome Wagon ended when the pandemic started, and that's when we were just becoming a part of the Welcome Wagon? so we thought why not continue on with it. So, Bella and I spent last summer putting it together contacting business and asking for gifts and who wanted to participate, and we had an overwhelming response from the business," she said.

"By the fall we were able to get our baskets together that have been donated [to us] by our local factory, and we were able to start visits to the new residents."

The Community Welcome officially started up in November but plans for the program began last March as the pandemic was starting. Since starting up, the Community Welcome had to pause services in February, April, and May of this year due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The Community Welcome program has since resumed porch visits outside, thanks to the lockdown ending.

According to Gallagher, new residents were understanding of the program's pause, as they were put on a list to receive baskets when services resumed. She said her and Carter enjoyed once again having the opportunity to deliver baskets and build friendships.

"It was great. It's fun going out and visiting them. Some of them are busier, so they don't have as much time, but other ones, like the other day I had a lady who had her chairs out on her front porch, she was out there all dressed up waiting for me, and we had an hour visit with her, and she wanted to know all kind of questions, and we developed a friendship," Gallagher said.

Carter believes services like The Community Welcome are important because they allow residents to become familiar with some of the small businesses in Shelburne and get to know their neighbours better.

According to Gallagher, the face-to-face interaction with those who receive the welcome baskets is important because it provides a connection with people, especially those who are lonely.

"I think they make a connection with you, and there are some who are very, very lonely. They just moved into the community. They haven't been out and maybe have children at home. Maybe a one-car family so the husband is gone with the car, so you can tell they are happy to see somebody welcome them into town," she said.

Gallagher also noted that she found new residents felt disconnected during the lockdown and pandemic since many events weren't occurring. There weren't that many places open, and that's why it was important to continue the service as soon as they could.

Members of other communities have reached out to the Shelburne Community Welcome, interested in creating a welcome community in their area. Gallagher and Carter say they will help them get started.