This past year, when thinking about the challenges our families, friends, neighbours, and even ourselves have been facing, it’s been easy to feel a bit helpless: I’m only one person, what can I do?

More than ever, it’s important to take notice of the good that continues to happen across our communities. That’s why we decided to fill the pages of the spring Carizon Newsletter with inspiring people who are making a difference – One person, one story, one step at a time.

From Afonso, who worked with his children and Carizon to help his family plant their roots, to the Lowrys, who know first hand the lasting impact that one person can make. We share the story of the 100 Men of Wilmot who leverage the power of one, times many, to create a community that cares and we profile a volunteer who’s building brighter futures, one student at a time.

That’s the power of one – and we hope that you see yourself in these pages and feel the difference you’re making in the lives of the people whom you connect with each day.

Thank you, to every one of you, for all that you do to support the people and families we have the honour of serving. As you read, remember that through the power of one, you’ve helped families to rewrite their stories to ones of hope, courage, and possibility.

AFONSO'S FAMILY STORY

For Afonso, every day was a struggle. Along with managing his own wellbeing, Afonso was also supporting a wife with complex mental health issues while raising two young sons and navigating chronic housing instability.

But with one step, followed by another, Afonso and his family's story became one of possibility.

For years, Carizon worked with Afonso and his family. When Afonso's wife courageously sought more intensive support and was admitted into hospital care – Carizon supported her as she took that brave step.

The Carizon team also knew that Afonso would need help – while he was able to attend to practical needs like taking care of the home, it was his wife who offered a nurturing voice for the boys.
Afonso had one simple wish: to have the boys sleeping in their tidied bedrooms as a surprise to welcome his wife home – the spaces had simply become too full of the things that get collected when frequent housing instability creates a fear of losing everything.

Carizon believes that families know best when it comes to what support they need and what that support might look like. For Afonso and his family, the best support was to help clear the bedrooms, freshen the space, and ready it for the boys. And that's exactly what the Carizon team did together with Afonso and his sons.

The Power of 1 Gift Every Month!

Sean and Deanna Lowry joined the Carizon monthly giving program because they knew that their monthly contributions would go a long way, providing cost-effective support to ongoing programs that help families thrive in our community.

"Carizon gives us a way to feel like we are helping, however small it may be, during a time when it's very hard for us to know what to do. The scale of what's happening in the region is hard to grasp and can be overwhelming if you try to imagine what impact one person can have.

The fact that we can support Carizon helps us feel like we are a part of something bigger, that matters.

It's humbling to hear just how much people from Carizon push through to help the community, despite what toll it may be taking on them. There is no end to what we wish we could give, and it's because of what you do every day.

I want to thank you for giving us a resource to offer when we find people in our lives that are in crisis or need help, for giving us a way to feel like part of the rebuilding in the community and for allowing us as parents to look to Carizon as a north star that represents service, community, and compassion as we raise our kids."

– Sean and Deanna Lowry

Carizon is deeply grateful to our family of Monthly Donors - If you'd like to join our Monthly Donor community, please contact us at development@carizon.ca or call 519-572-0652
Launched in November 2020, the Voices: Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse program is open to everyone of all ages and genders who have experienced some form of intimate partner abuse.

Overcoming an abusive relationship takes courage.

The Voices program allows individuals to gather and celebrate their strength while helping others through advocacy and empowerment.

This survivor-led group gives voice to the experience of intimate partner violence (IPV) and helps shape and inform new and existing services offered by the Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region which is a collaboration of 12 agencies, including Carizon, focused on providing support for anyone at risk of and/or experiencing family violence.

The Voices program gives victims a platform to find a sense of connection and offers a safe place to share their stories with a focus on stopping the silence that enables abuse.

The past year has been difficult for everyone, and people in our Region are struggling. And the bottom line is, when someone struggles, their families struggle as well. When there is a struggle, there is a great need for support. We understand the importance of a quick response during these difficult times and we are working hard to ensure that no one stands alone in our community and that families in need have the critical care and vital services to help them thrive one program at a time.

Here there are just a few of our uniquely-tailored responses to community needs:
Our emotions impact our financial habits and financial problems cause stress and relationship problems among other negative effects. Our Healthy Wallets, Wealthy Minds program equips families with the emotional and practical skills as well as the knowledge to manage finances during this difficult time.

Every week, staff and volunteers have supported the nutritional needs of more than 120 families in the Erb West and Paulander Community Centres throughout the pandemic. Our Food Distribution programs help reduce the stressors associated with food insecurity while providing neighborhood volunteers opportunities to build connections.

Providing a safe place for youth in low-income communities, our Pathways to Education staff and volunteers create positive social change by supporting students overcome barriers to education, graduating from high school, and building foundations for successful futures.

Supporting families during the pandemic, over 500 participants attended a new series of virtual workshops focused on building resiliency, parenting, managing anxiety, and stress during this time.

We ensure that people in our community have access to coordinated counselling services while reducing the barriers that prevent access to these crucial supports. Through your donations, we are able to provide subsidized or fully-funded counselling sessions to individuals in need.

As needs continue to rise, so does the number of individuals reaching out for support. We remain the one of the few agencies in Waterloo Region to offer in-person counselling for those individuals and families who cannot be served through virtual counselling including individuals experiencing domestic violence and children and individuals requiring specialized trauma treatment.

Empowering youth to create social change in our communities through a virtual anti-racism group with the Newcomer Mental Health and Well-being program. This space provides the opportunity for a conversation about systemic racism and ways to champion inclusivity in our lives. Our program is proud of our collaboration with Shamrose For Syrian Culture - together we are supporting the needs of refugees.
A heartfelt thank you to our volunteers for caring so deeply for our community. **1,600 hours of giving.** That is how much time our volunteers donated to Carizon's in the last quarter alone. When we think about the **lives touched by even just an hour of your time,** we couldn't be more grateful. Our families are stronger because of you.

**AN INTERVIEW WITH CARIZON VOLUNTEER PETER S.**

**WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO VOLUNTEER AT CARIZON?**

I had a long history of volunteering before moving to Ontario several years ago, but never tutoring. Carizon has a good program that let’s you flex your teaching skills, and at the same time it's remarkably rewarding to help out students.

**CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT WHAT YOU DO AS A VOLUNTEER?**

High school students are the group we work with, which is also about the time in school when the topics begin to get more complex. Students bring their homework assignments and (we) give a helping hand. You never know what subject or topic they will bring to you each week – could be biology or math, history or even social sciences! I'm a scientist at heart so I love it when students come in to ask for help with those concepts.

**WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT VOLUNTEERING?**

There was a time in the last few years where I considered changing my career to be a high school teacher. However, I was already on a good career track which I did not want to abandon. So I asked myself, how can I do both of these things? I started googling opportunities locally and eventually found the Pathways to Education tutoring program. This program provides a remarkably effective way to directly help students in the community and at the same time gave me the chance to “teach” and also keep my current career going. I like to think I've found the secret to having my cake and eating it too!

**WHO YOU ARE DURING THE DAY VERSUS DURING THE EVENING? AND HOW DOES VOLUNTEERING FIT INTO THAT?**

Well, I'm not exactly billionaire by day and batman by night – though I wish sometimes I was! I have found a life balance that works for me. By day I work as an analyst at an insurance firm, Economical Insurance Company, which has a strong culture of community outreach and provides ample support for getting involved in volunteering. I'm a pretty social person, so after work I find ways to have fun that gets me around other people, normally through sports (Ultimate frisbee) and other hobbies like improv acting clubs and board games with friends. Add in volunteering to the mix and I consider myself lucky to have found a very fruitful balance of different things that I enjoy. I'm grateful that these opportunities exist for anyone who wants to reach out and get themselves involved.
LOOKING AHEAD TO MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

Our collective mental health needs are at their greatest, with one in three people experiencing a mental health problem due to the pandemic. Now, more than ever, we need to make our mental health a priority and be there for one another.

As Mental Health week approaches, let’s take the opportunity to pause and talk about our mental health openly. Between May 3rd and 9th, join us on social media to help create positive conversations and decrease the stigma associated with mental health.

Be sure to check out www.carizon.ca and www.carizonforthecommunity.ca for resources and tools, and please share the local supports that are available with your network to help families thrive.

CARIZON IS TURNING 8!

April is our birthday month! Carizon has a long history of community love and collaboration. Eight years ago, two social services agencies decided to maximize their impact and serve the community where and when is needed most by merging to form Carizon Family and Community Services.

"CARIZON" - Our unique name comes from the combination of two words: care + horizon.

We’d love to hear from you!
If we don’t have your email on file, and would like to receive regular updates from us please call us at 519-572-0652 or email development@carizon.ca. You can also contact us if you need to update your contact information or if you would like to change the way we communicate with you.