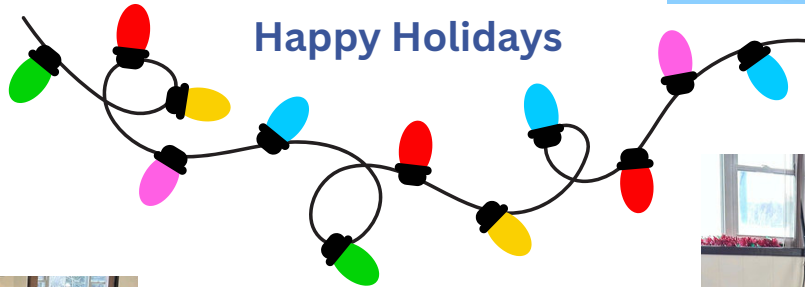




CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

A Madawaska Valley Association For Community Living Publication
19491 Opeongo Ln. Barry's Bay ON
(613) 756-3817

January 2026



Happy Holidays



This December, MVACL proudly hosted our 3rd Annual Christmas Lunch Celebration, bringing together the people we support, our dedicated staff, students from the our local high school, and others from our community. The room was filled with laughter, conversation, and the joy that comes from spending time together as a community. A big thanks to Andrea Budarick for providing us with the most delicious lunch.



One of the highlights of the day was our Secret Santa gift exchange, where people thoughtfully chose and shared gifts with one another. It was a beautiful reminder that the spirit of the season is found in kindness, connection, and giving from the heart. Members from our Board of Directors happily served up the delicious meal. Thank you to everyone who helped make this celebration so meaningful and memorable.





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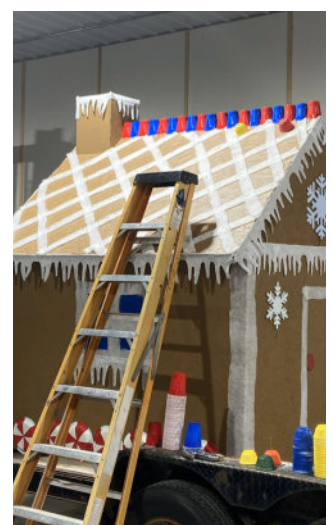
MVACL SPREADS HOLIDAY CHEER AT THE SANTA CLAUS PARADE

MVACL was proud to take part in this year's Santa Claus Parade with a festive float that truly captured the spirit of the season. A big thank you to Tracy Biskup and her husband Chris Keller for their incredible creativity and hard work in spearheading and designing our Gingerbread House float and also for generously donating the use of their truck and flatbed.

The parade was a wonderful opportunity to showcase MVACL's commitment to inclusion and the people who make it so special. Thank you to everyone who joined in on the parade, waving enthusiastically at families lining the streets. Smiles, laughter, and lots of holiday spirit followed us along the route.

Participating in the parade is a meaningful experience for our organization. It allows us to connect with the wider community, celebrate the season, and highlight the important role inclusion plays in making our community stronger and more welcoming for everyone.

We are grateful to be part of a community that celebrates together and supports one another—especially during the holiday season.





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THANK YOU

We are pleased to share that MVACL received a generous donation from Northern Credit Union's Giving for Good campaign. This generous gift is being directed to our Accessibility Fund, helping to remove barriers and create more inclusive, accessible spaces for the people we support and our local community. Donations like this make a meaningful difference by improving access, dignity, and participation in everyday life. We are grateful to Northern Credit Union for their commitment to our community and for helping make accessibility possible.



Lacey Liedtke, Courtney Pilgrim, Heather Lehovith, Rhys Geddes, Maryann Dombroskie, Richard Parisian, Monica Prymack, Lea Walsh



Honouring the Memory of

Marie Anne (Emanskie) Landon - March 13, 1946 to February 13, 2025

&

Janet (Landon) O'Connor February 22, 1934 to October 17, 2025

Marie Landon was a long-time supporter of MVACL. Among her final wishes was that her estate honour the charities she cared deeply about. MVACL was fortunate to be among them. Her daughter, the executor of her will, made a very generous donation of \$2,500 in her mother's memory.

Her aunt, Janet O'Connor passed away a few months afterward. Janet had a daughter with a developmental disability, and in her honour, Marie's daughter donated an additional \$2,500.

Both gifts will directly support MVACL's Opportunities Fund.

The MVACL Opportunities Fund is a vital resource that supports adults in our community with developmental disabilities who are experiencing financial need. The fund helps individuals access their communities, participate in recreational activities, pursue educational opportunities, and obtain therapeutic services or devices not covered by ODSP. By reducing financial barriers, the Opportunities Fund empowers people to build skills, achieve personal goals, and experience greater independence and inclusion.

The Opportunities Fund has also received many other thoughtful donations throughout the year, and we are deeply grateful to all who continue to support this important work.

Future editions of this newsletter will no doubt highlight individuals enjoying events and experiences they may not otherwise have been able to access.

Did you know?

If you would like to donate to MVACL you can now specify which of 3 funds you wish to support:

- 1. Our Opportunities Fund**
- 2. Our Accessilty Projects Fund**
- 3. The General Board Fund**

Every single dollar makes a difference

For further informaion on how to make a donation please contact our Front Desk at
613-756-3817



Happenings at Community Connect

Over the past few months, our Community Connect events have been wonderfully well attended. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and helped create such a warm, welcoming atmosphere. While our activities are always a highlight, what participants enjoy most is the chance to meet new people, build friendships, and strengthen community connections.

As we look ahead to our upcoming February events, we invite all members of the community to join us—everyone is welcome.

We are also excited to grow our programming with fresh ideas. If you have a passion, skill, or hobby you would like to share, we would love to hear from you. Community members interested in volunteering or leading a class are encouraged to reach out. Your creativity and involvement help make Community Connect a vibrant place for all.

Upcoming Events – February

1. February Bingo

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Cost: \$30 (includes 5 games & lunch)

Lunch: Pizza, muffin & juice

Registration Deadline: February 6

2. February Craft – Wooden Snowmen Decor

Date: Friday, February 20, 2026, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Cost: \$30 (includes craft & lunch)

Lunch: Vegetable soup, roll, cookie & drink

Registration Deadline: February 13

3. February Lunch & Learn – Who Am I? (Side by Side Modules)

Date: Friday, February 27, 2026, 10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Cost: \$15 (includes lunch)

Registration Deadline: February 20

4. February Movie Night – Pinocchio

Date: Thursday, February 12, 2026, 4 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Cost: \$30

Dinner: Chicken stew, roll & juice

Snacks: Popcorn/chips & pop

Registration Deadline: February 6



Devin, Lisa, Orpha & Matthew showing off the crafts they made at Community Connect



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STAFF CORNER

"COME ON DOWN!!"

"YOU'RE THE NEXT CONTESTANT ON THE PRICE IS RIGHT!!"

With a number of planned activities throughout the year, it's always hard to pick a favourite. The Price Is Right Live at Casino Rama may have been one of them for many.

Watching The Price Is Right live at Casino Rama was one of those experiences that feels bigger than TV – the energy, the crowd hype, the lights, and that moment when everyone's shouting prices like they're contestants themselves.

There's something surreal about seeing the games, the host, and the prizes up close – you realize how much fun and interaction goes into it. Even if you're not on stage, the audience becomes part of the show. It turns a classic game show into a full-on event. With that being said, the effort, ideas, and positive energy that everyone brought to the planning were exceptional.

To all twenty participants who attended, and those who helped behind the scenes, thank you.

It was a great night out – **definitely one for the memory books!**

Melanie Plebon





Staff Corner

I'm often asked about my job and whether I enjoy it. My answer is always the same: **YES!**

No two days are ever the same, and there is always something new to learn. But the best part of my job is seeing the smiles on the faces of the people I support. Hearing "You came back!" paired with a huge smile reminds me every day why I do what I do. Knowing that I can make a difference in someone's life makes my work meaningful. And sometimes, the people I support make a difference in my life.

There are days when I arrive at work after a rough start to my morning. But the moment I walk in and am greeted with a smile, a cheerful "Hi," or a side hug, everything changes. Those small moments have a way of making even the hardest days brighter.

I have been with MVACL for over four years and have shared so many experiences with the people I support. Some days are calm and relaxing, spent at home doing activities they enjoy – watching television, building with Lego, working on puzzles, flipping through flyers, playing games, tapping our toes while taking photos of our feet, listening to music, or making grocery lists of favorite foods. Other days involve going out for groceries or attending appointments.

Some of the best days, however, are spent out in the community attending events. These outings bring so much joy and excitement, especially when it's something the person truly loves. One of the most rewarding parts of my job is seeing the world through their eyes and watching them experience new places for the first time.

I've attended Community Connect events with people I support and have loved seeing them enjoy crafts and socialize with friends. I've also been fortunate to take individuals to many wonderful places, including the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto, Winterlude in Ottawa/Gatineau, Pingle's Farm in Oshawa, Sandhill Farm in Huntsville, O'Hara Mill in Madoc, Santa Claus parades in Barry's Bay and Bancroft, Casino Rama for The Price Is Right, Medieval Times, Toronto Blue Jays games, Ripley's Aquarium, Christmas festivals, concerts, and many more. No matter where we go, what matters most to me is ensuring the people I support have opportunities to experience the things they love.

Being a DSP at MVACL has taught me so much. It has strengthened my ability to advocate, not only for the people we support at MVACL, but within the broader community as well. I look forward to many more years of supporting the people in our association, as well as those who will join MVACL in the future.

Jennifer Mountney





NEW MEMBERS OF THE MVACL TEAM



Annie Dooley



Kaley McCormack

Congratulations!!



Maryann Dombroskie and Amanda Levean
have successfully completed
the **DSW Apprenticeship** program
through Loyalist College.



HR Happenings



Hello everyone,

We're excited to share some great news—MVACL will be offering a pension plan.

Effective April 2026, eligible employees will be enrolled in the CAAT Pension Plan. This is a significant step forward in supporting your long-term financial security and retirement planning and reflects our ongoing commitment to investing in our people.

What is the CAAT Pension Plan?

The CAAT Pension Plan is a jointly sponsored, defined benefit (DB) pension plan that provides predictable, lifetime retirement income. It is well recognized for its strong governance, long-term sustainability, and professional investment management.

Why this matters to you

Predictable lifetime income: Your CAAT pension provides income for life, offering peace of mind and protection against outliving your savings.

Shared contributions, shared security: Both you and MVACL contribute to the plan. Contributions are pooled and professionally invested, helping manage risk and reduce costs—without requiring you to make complex investment decisions.

Inflation protection: CAAT aims to provide inflation protection through conditional cost-of-living adjustments, helping your pension keep pace with rising living costs over time.

Supporting your financial wellbeing: A strong pension is one of the most valuable benefits you can have. Knowing your retirement is supported allows you to focus on your career and personal goals today.

Whether retirement feels far away or closer on the horizon, the service and contributions you make now help build meaningful value for your future.

Over the coming weeks, we'll share more details about eligibility, contributions, enrollment, and upcoming information sessions where you'll have the opportunity to learn more and ask questions.

We're genuinely excited to offer this benefit and look forward to supporting you as you plan for the future.

Thank you for everything you do.

Warm regards,
Jaclyn
Human Resources
MVACL





Health & Safety



Disinfecting High-Touch Surfaces: A Key Step in Staying Healthy This Cold & Flu Season

Cold, flu, and other respiratory illnesses spread more easily during the fall and winter months—especially in group living environments. As Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), you play a vital role in protecting the health of the people you support, your coworkers, and yourself. One of the simplest and most effective prevention steps is regularly disinfecting high-touch surfaces.

Why High-Touch Surfaces Matter: Viruses that cause colds, flu, and COVID-19 can live on surfaces for hours—or even days. When multiple people touch the same objects throughout the day, germs can spread quickly without anyone realizing it. In our homes, common high-touch surfaces include:

door handles and light switches, handrails and stair banisters, remote controls, phones, tablets, and keyboards, kitchen counters, appliance handles and tables, bathroom fixtures (faucets, toilet handles), shared mobility aids or adaptive equipment. Disinfecting these surfaces regularly helps break the chain of infection.

Cleaning vs. Disinfecting: What's the Difference?: **Cleaning** removes dirt and grime and **Disinfecting** kills germs. Both steps are important. Always clean visibly dirty surfaces first, then apply an approved disinfectant and allow it to sit for the recommended contact time listed on the product label.

Best Practices for DSPs: Disinfect high-touch surfaces **at least daily**, and more often when someone is sick, pay extra attention to shared spaces and items, follow the instructions on disinfectant products to ensure they are effective and safe, wear gloves when required and wash your hands after cleaning.

Encourage the people you support to participate where appropriate, using accessible instructions and supervision.

When Someone Is Sick: If a Person Supported or Staff member has cold or flu symptoms; Increase the frequency of disinfecting high-touch areas, disinfect shared items after each use when possible, support good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) and wear a mask.

A Shared Responsibility: Keeping our homes healthy is a team effort. Consistent disinfecting routines help reduce illness, prevent outbreaks, and ensure everyone can continue daily activities with fewer disruptions. Your attention to these everyday tasks makes a big difference. Thank you for helping keep our homes safe, healthy, and welcoming—especially during cold and flu season.



Jason



From the Board President

Happy New Year to our MVACL family and the Madawaska Valley community!

With a new year upon us, it brings to mind the incredible journey we shared over the past year. From the laughter on the baseball diamond with our Challenger program to the new friendships formed at Community Connect, 2025 was a year defined by the resilience and heart of this organization.

As your Board President, I am particularly proud of how we navigated the challenges facing our sector. Despite provincial funding pressures, our focus never wavered from our mission: working together to improve the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities.

This January marks the beginning of an essential chapter for the Madawaska Valley Association for Community Living. Over the next few months, we will be finalizing and launching our Strategic Plan for 2026–2029. This roadmap isn't just a document; it is a promise to the people we support and their families.

The "Valley" is a special place because of the way we look out for one another. As we look forward to the next few years, I am filled with optimism about the barriers we will break and the dreams we will help fulfill. Thank you for being part of our story. Here's to a productive, inclusive, and joyous 2026!

Warmly,

Joanne

From the Executive Director

As we begin a new year, I want to take a moment to reflect on where we have been and, more importantly, where we are going—together.

The past year brought its share of challenges and important conversations, and I want to acknowledge the collective effort it took to reach the successful settlement of our collective agreement. This milestone represents more than a signed document; it reflects mutual respect, open dialogue, and a shared commitment to fairness and sustainability. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time, patience, and professionalism throughout that process.

With this agreement in place, we can now shift our full attention toward the future. A new year brings renewed energy and an opportunity to move forward with clarity and purpose. Our work at Community Living is grounded in collaboration—between teams, across roles, and in partnership with the people we support, their families, and our broader community. When we work together, we are stronger, more resilient, and better positioned to fulfill our mission.

Looking ahead, there are meaningful opportunities for growth—both as an organization and as individuals. Whether through new initiatives, professional development, innovative service approaches, or strengthening the culture of inclusion and belonging within our agency, this year offers space to learn, adapt, and evolve. Growth does not always mean change for the sake of change; sometimes it means building thoughtfully on what we have learned and doing more of it, together.

I am deeply appreciative of the dedication and compassion our support workers, managers, admin team, families, friends and our Board of Directors, demonstrate every day. The impact you have on the lives of the people we support and on one another does not go unnoticed. As we move into this new year, let us do so with optimism, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to collaboration and excellence.

Thank you for all that you do and for the role you play in making MVACL a place where people feel supported, valued, and empowered.

Wishing you a positive and fulfilling year ahead,

Monica