

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to apple a day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment. I have with me as my guest today, Laura Gervais. She is the volunteer and student coordinator, at Lake Region Healthcare. She's here with me today to talk about national volunteer week, and what an important role volunteers play in our organization. Good morning Laura.

Laura Gervais: Good morning Katie, thanks for having me.

Katie Johnson: Thank you so much for joining me, volunteers do play a huge role in our organization. Obviously in our community in so many ways, but at Lake Region Healthcare, we are so grateful and indebted to our volunteers. Tell me a little bit about how many volunteers typically server our organization on a given day, or in a year?

Laura Gervais: Sure Katie. In typically a day, we have about seven to ten volunteers throughout our organization. In about a years time, we see about a hundred and twenty volunteers.

Katie Johnson: On a typical day, you say seven to ten. Where will you see your fine volunteers?

Laura Gervais: You can see them pretty much anywhere. I can just give you a brief overview. We have volunteers at the Cancer center, they're our snack bar receptionists, helping patients with their daily needs over there. Serving breakfast and lunch, and just kind of being there, just to support them. Being an ear if they need it. We have red cross drivers, so these volunteers put on about two hundred miles a day. Going to our organizations around the area, and different hospitals. They're kind of a carrier for red cross, bringing blood supplies back and forth. Even other supplies that Region sends back and forth. We have a gift shop that is run by our auxiliary. Lori Okerstrom is that manager. This is just a great program that we have here, people utilize that all the time. Getting flowers, cards, and just a lot of unique items there. Very cool.

We actually have volunteers who make baby hats and blankets. People will bring them in, and I can give them up to the OB ward, they'll give them out to new babies. We do lap blankets for different people, so that's a really cool service. We have the same day surgery receptionist. If you're ever here for surgery, you might see those volunteers in the blue coats. They're kind of liaison between staff and patients, letting family know where the patients at, in their surgery date. The info desk is probably where you see a lot of our volunteers, right when you come in there. People ask them for room numbers, just general information about the hospital. Great place that we utilize our volunteers. A lot of other areas. We actually have twelve programs. I won't highlight all of them, but we use them as much as we can. It's just really fun to see the impact.

Katie Johnson: Obviously with twelve different programs, you can use people of all ages, with all different types of skills, right? There's not just one particular type of person, that can fit in as a volunteer here?

Laura Gervais: Right. I'm always asking volunteers, do you see a need? Do you have a special skill that you can use here? We just don't always do exactly the same thing everyday, we always look for the need, and try to fill that. These are our main areas.

Katie Johnson: Is there one that's more popular, or ones that are more unusual? Or harder to fill?

Laura Gervais: Definitely. The info desk is definitely our most popular. It's probably the easiest to learn and do, you actually get a lot of walking in. If you were your fit bit, you usually get your most steps in, in the day. A lot of opportunity to talk to people. As far as unusual, we have a program called 'HERO'. This is a program out of Fargo. We have a volunteer that goes around to different departments, and picks up extra supplies, that can be donate to people in need. Dr. Burger here uses them in Haiti. She boxes them up, and ships them. That's been a really cool program. We've been doing that for the past few months here. We have a library cart, and we have a volunteer that goes around to patients rooms, and offers magazines and books to patients, for their use while they're here. In unusual, we just have a lot of people coming in, and doing one thing. That's their interest. It's just great that people can come in, and call me and say, "I would like to do this." Anyone out there, if you think of something that you would love to help out Lake Region with, just give us a call, and we can definitely use you.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. Volunteers have been great on special projects, like you mentioned. I think of the clinic, when we opened. Just needed all hands on deck to help direct people in this new building, they were just so fantastic to help us out with that project as well.

Laura Gervais: We had a meeting, and I just said, "We're opening this new clinic. A lot of people are going to come in, not know where to go, the new process. Would you be willing to step up and help out?" I had about fifty volunteers just say, "Over and above what I'm already doing, I'm going to offer a few hours here and there." That was just fantastic. They really enjoyed that.

Katie Johnson: That really was an integral part of the successful opening of the clinic as well. What kind of impact do volunteers have, in terms of hours and dollars? Do you track that?

Laura Gervais: We do, and actually the first time I looked at it, it kind of blew me away. Last fiscal year, we had about eleven thousand hours filled by volunteers.

Katie Johnson: Wow.

Laura Gervais: Actually that was a slower year. This year should be a little bit more than that. That still just kind of blew me away. We looked at it, and in terms of dollars, that about one hundred and forty, hundred thousand dollars. Worth of savings. Really, that's about five and a half full time workers, we are filling with volunteers. You really seem the impact when you look at those numbers. It's just amazing.

Katie Johnson: That is really impressive, and when you think about the kinds of things they do, those are extra things that really mean a lot, to the people that we serve. That we maybe couldn't provide otherwise. When you think about your role, as volunteer coordinator, do you have some really memorable moments that stand out in your mind?

Laura Gervais: Definitely. Being a coordinator, you're being the one scheduling and making sure shifts are filled. It can be interesting and difficult at times. One memorable experience that I had, I had a volunteer call in sick, and he was actually going to be out for about a month. Was just an extended illness. I came to work on Monday, and that was the first message on my machine. The next message, and actually the next two were volunteers who had heard that he was sick, I think in church. Had called and said, "I heard he's going to be out. I know he's here weekly, I will fill his shifts." They just knew the impact that he had, and that it was important that that shift was filled each week. They just stepped up and helped out. It really made me proud to be here.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. We've been talking about the regular volunteer, regular I don't know if that's the right word. The adult volunteer program, but we have a junior volunteer program as well, that I understand is going to be changing a little bit. Can you give us an insight into what that's going to look like going forward?

Laura Gervais: Yeah Katie, there's some big changes this year. This year we're going to be focusing on weekly service projects, and partnering with the community garden. Students can come and learn more about the garden. Jason Bergstrand is the garden manager out there, and he is just so on fire about teaching them skills out there. They can do projects, such as building sheds and pavers, retaining walls. There's just a lot to learn out there. Also we're going to be partnering with Mill Street. We're looking at just serving the residence out there, and brightening their day. If anyone's interested, you can give me a call for more information. My number is two one eight, seven three six, eight four nine eight.

Katie Johnson: What a great way for youth to get exposed to a lot of different opportunities, to not only volunteer their time, but build their own skills. Add some great things to their resume in the process. You mentioned that you were a junior volunteer, did that have anything to do with you ending up in this role? What compelled you to this position?

Laura Gervais: Definitely. My background is education. When we moved to Fergus Falls, we moved here back in March. I was looking at what I wanted to do, and when I saw this opening, I just thought that it was perfect. I feel like I'm helping people learn their life skills. My background is in family consumer science, so with volunteering you do learn life skills. Working with great people, has just been really fulfilling. My experience as a junior volunteer, it was a great experience. I actually have a picture in my office, of me volunteering with my friends, back in the day. It just kind of helps remind me of why we're here. It's just a great place to be.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. That's a great story Laura. Anything else you'd like to add, as we wrap up our national volunteer week segment on Apple a day?

Laura Gervais: Sure, I'll just give a little info on the community garden. The community garden is about one and a half acres, located by Apple bees, here in Fergus. Last year in two thousand fifteen, produced almost eight thousand pounds of food. We donate this food to WIC and the food shelf. It's just a great way for people to get involved. We love people and groups, youth groups, churches, businesses, have come out to help. That's just a great experience for a lot of people. You don't need any experience at all. Jason Bergstrand the manager out there, really emphasizes that. Anyone with any skill can find something to do, if that be cutting ribbon for plants, or doing raised beds. There's so many different things going out there, that anyone could help out.

Katie Johnson: Nothing more rewarding than knowing that you're helping to provide health food, to families that need it. Laura, thanks so much for the work you do. In coordinating our volunteers, making sure the program runs smoothly, and is a positive experience for everyone. This is national volunteer week, we tip out hats off to you, as the coordinator. To all of the wonderful volunteers who make a difference here at Lake Region Healthcare, every single day. Thanks for joining me today.

Laura Gervais: Thanks Katie, have a great day.

Katie Johnson: Laura Gervais, volunteer and student coordinator at Lake Region Healthcare, my guest today on Apple a day. Laura and I both remind you that there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.