

# A World-Expanding LEAP

By Gibo Shim, 2017

Welcome Home interns agree that the internship is full of growth, learning, and development, both personally and professionally. From taking on new tasks to facilitating various events, the wide variety of responsibilities equip you with new experiences. It is a year of exploration and learning highlighted by many meaningful relationships.

One of the biggest gifts of the internship is the people that you meet. Throughout the year, there are opportunities to connect **locally**, **nationally**, and **internationally**.



## **Local**

First of all, there is the small and mighty staff team of Welcome Home. The small team atmosphere allows for meaningful discussions and opportunities to contribute ideas of significant impact. Although small in number, the staff team's experience and knowledge is well recognized in the community. Organizations in Waterloo Region work closely together rather than duplicating services. Through working with these organizations, I have come to appreciate the successful collaboration displayed.

Another important network for Welcome Home is its network of community partners and volunteers. The community members that engage with Welcome Home bring a wide range of knowledge, hobbies, and interests. From volunteers that can help with bike maintenance to gardening, the people in the community are a tremendous gift to Welcome Home. And as people move out after their time at Welcome Home, the community continues to be there.

## **National**

Welcome Home's network extends beyond Waterloo Region to the national level. There are valuable opportunities to connect with organizations across Ontario and Canada. Each organization brings different stories of challenges and success. Often times, there is an organization from a different area of Ontario or Canada that can share their helpful strategies. After attending these meetings, I come away with new insight and a better understanding of what is happening beyond our immediate neighbourhood.

One of the big gatherings is the National Consultation organized by the Canadian Council for Refugees. This is a tremendous opportunity to learn from all sectors about the work they're doing with refugees across Canada and a chance to reconnect with familiar faces while establishing new connections.

## **International**

When I first arrived at Welcome Home, I was greeted by a young man who had moved in a couple hours before me. With the Welcome Centre under construction and having no internet, we spent that first evening getting to know each other. Our conversation continued on well past midnight. For the next couple weeks, we continued to spend a lot of time together as we eagerly awaited the arrival of more people. With a language barrier and no access to Google Translate, our conversations included a lot of drawing and

actions, and at times, we examined pizza flyers to look for more conversation topics. This was the beginning of our time together at Welcome Home.

As people moved in, the young man was right beside me in welcoming our new friends. The welcoming party continued to grow as more people moved in. As the days go by, the sense of community at Welcome Home continues to also grow. The young man has been extremely helpful to everyone in so many ways. This past week, we have been helping this young man prepare to move out. As I reflect on our time together, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to become friends with this young man. This is just one of the many friendships that began at Welcome Home.

While we come from different cultures and speak different languages, we live relatively similar lives in different parts of the world. At Welcome Home, I learn about other cultures and pick up some basic words and phrases in other languages. I also learn about situations around the world that I was previously unaware of. Although some of these situations are forgotten or ignored in Canada, it is of utmost importance to those who were in these situations or continue to have family living there.

### **Average Day at Welcome Home**

Living on site means that the people you live with become an important part of your day to day schedule. When starting out, I was curious about what an average day looked like, yet there were no clear answers. Now I understand why. From generous neighbours randomly dropping by with donations, to residents notifying you that they are moving out in a couple hours, each day is unpredictable and full of surprises.

Although going from the routine of university to the unpredictability of Welcome Home took some time, it is exciting to discover what each day has in store for all of us. In the midst of unpredictability, relationships continue to develop and doors begin to open through these everyday interactions. The opportunity to live together and share each day is a wonderful privilege.

The Welcome Home internship opens doors to many possibilities. Welcome Home achieves this through the relationships it has built over the years at the local and national level. The network continues to grow as we welcome friends from around the world. Throughout the year, one comes to realize the amazing resource that each of us can be to others by sharing of ourselves. As a recent university graduate, Welcome Home looked like an incredible first step. Looking back, it would be more fitting to describe it as **a giant leap full of growth, learning, and friends.**