



Making A Difference

Larry Markus is saving lives and changing minds

By: Jennifer Layman

Larry Markus is coming up on a pretty big day. Sometime in late 2017 or early 2018, Larry will celebrate a milestone that few people will ever see. And while it will be a significant day for him, it isn't Larry who will benefit. In fact, he will never know who will benefit. And the people who do benefit will never know of Larry's achievement.

That significant day will be the day he has given blood 100 times.

To hear him talk about it, is to have a conversation about something as natural as getting out of bed in the morning. Giving blood is something he has done since 1978, a tradition of sorts he picked up from his mother. A tradition that he kept going because he feels it is something he can do. Larry has an O negative blood type, which makes him a universal donor - anyone can benefit from his blood donation.

"My mom used to do it all the time," he says when asked how he got started giving blood. "I just decided to do it too."

In his lifetime, Larry has been on both sides of blood donation - mostly as a donor, but also as a recipient.

In 1999, Larry suffered a life-threatening accident when an explosion burned a great deal of his upper body, including his face and hands. He was airlifted to an Ottawa

hospital, where he received eight pints of blood to save his life. He had six skin grafts, and he received a stem cell donation from a donated umbilical cord. He knew the woman who made the stem cell donation and even kept in touch with the family. He met the child (now in a local school) and is thankful everyday for the family's donation which saved his

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severely burned hand. He recovered over the next couple of months, and was deemed fully recovered in March 2000.

Soon afterwards, he was back at the blood donor clinic giving blood and being with people who are nervous or new to

giving blood. He chats up the room and stays with people if they need some support. He's also pretty direct at encouraging people to be blood donors (this interviewer included!) and has a good deal of convincing for any barrier you might think you have. Larry has heard all the excuses, and he has an answer for each one!

At one of those days in the clinic, he met Nancy. Little did either one of them know how Larry's blood donor story would take yet another turn.

Nancy Healy is a Service Coordinator for Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley. When her mother was ill, Nancy saw how blood transfusions really helped her mother. Nancy researched the Partners for Life program with Canadian Blood Services, and thought it would be a good initiative for her workplace. The Partners for Life program is Canada-wide and is designed for corporate and community organizations to make a commitment to donate blood as a team. The organization is given a challenge of a certain number of blood donations each year, and employees are encouraged to join the program.

Little did Nancy know what would transpire at the blood donor clinic on her first visit. She saw Larry, and they started talking. You see, Larry is a client of Community Living. A short conversation later, she found out about Larry's

commitment to giving blood, which made her initiative in the workplace even more meaningful. When she brought that news to her Canadian Blood Service coordinator, she found out that Larry couldn't be on their Community Living "team." Clients of Community Living were not allowed to participate as Canadian Blood Services was concerned that individuals with intellectual disabilities may not be able to provide informed consent. Nancy took the situation as a way to make this national organization aware of the people she worked with everyday at Community Living. When the coordinator for Canadian Blood Services asked Nancy to tell her story on why the workplace initiative started, Nancy redirected her.

"You don't want to talk to me," she said emphatically. "You need to meet Larry."

The coordinator agreed and met Larry and learned of his decades of blood donation commitments. At the time, he had just passed the 70 donation mark. Larry was happy to talk about it.

"She walked away pretty impressed," Nancy recalls. "We are always advocating to change minds, but Larry did that for us."

That conversation helped show the coordinator that people with intellectual disabilities need to be dealt with on an individual basis with respect to informed consent as opposed to a blanket statement that individuals with intellectual disabilities were unable to provide consent. That misunderstanding was not uncommon for Nancy in her line of work for Community Living, and she seized the opportunity for a client to advocate for himself, perhaps informing an organization along the way.

For Larry, it was just business as usual. But that conversation left an impression on the Canadian Blood Services coordinator.

In September 2012, Larry was awarded the "Honouring Our Lifeblood" award from Canadian Blood Services. The award is given annually to one volunteer, one peer, one recruiter and one donor. Larry was awarded the donor award for all of Northern and Eastern Ontario, and Nunavut. The story

shared that evening at the banquet was, in part, as follows:

"Larry is a loyal donor who has a first-hand understanding of the importance of giving, he has needed blood products himself. A

Larry's experience of giving blood and his motivational encouragement towards others. "He has continued to motivate both by example and by challenging perceptions regarding the process as well as the ongoing need for donations," she wrote.

She finalized her nomination with the following:

"While Community Living is proud of our partnership with Canadian Blood Services and the opportunity to educate and promote equality and respect, Larry has been the best self-advocate through his own words and actions. We would respectively nominate Mr. Larry Markus for the James Montgomerie Honour Award to celebrate his advocacy, promotion of equality, furthering our partnership and the goals of inclusion and citizenship and helping others in his community."

Larry won that award, for all of Ontario, in 2013.

At the time of this interview, Larry has given blood 89 times. When asked what he would say to someone reading his story who has never given blood, his answer couldn't have been better:

"Just go. You will save someone else's life. You never know when something can happen to you and you will need blood to save your own life."

When you sit across the table from Larry Markus, you suddenly realize there is no good excuse for not being a blood donor. Someone's life depends on it.



Above: Larry at the clinic and talking to a blood donor.

Right: Larry accepting the James Montgomerie award from Community Living Ontario



number of years ago, Larry received platelets after suffering a life threatening accident. His experience compelled him to help others and led him to become an active advocate for blood donation. Primarily, Larry works to promote Canadian Blood Service with clients and staff at Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley. The organization joined the Partners for Life program in 2011. Larry plays an important role in promoting the partnership throughout the community and has been instrumental in reaching out to new donors."

Seeing the impact Larry had with the Canadian Blood Services coordinator, Nancy thought that Larry should also be recognized for his advocacy role. Nancy decided to submit his name for the James Montgomerie Honour Award through Community Living Ontario. The award is given annually to "a person who has an intellectual disability who promotes equality of all citizens."

In her submission, Nancy talked about

Upcoming Blood Donor Clinics
September 27: Garrison Petawawa
November 29: Legion Branch 148
October 25: Germania Club, Pembroke
December 27: Paul J. Yakabuski Centre, Barry's Bay
November 10: Civitan Club, Almonte
 To register your time to donate blood, visit: www.blood.ca