



Impact Story: Jesse

Employee Success & Board Representation

My name is Jesse Jansen. I am Autistic & ADHD. I am a proud and loving father; Alongside my partner Joanne, we are raising a 13 year old young man. His name is Noah. I help take care of many animals in my home, although they often take care of me. In addition to my roles as a director and volunteer at G4G, I am a youth Jiu-Jitsu coach for Steel City MMA. A few of my passions include Jiu-Jitsu, reading, guitars and gardening. By day, I work as an Air Navigations Services Electronics Technologist for NAV Canada.

Jesse's journey to Grocer 4 Good

In late 2020 a very influential friend of mine lost his life. His name is Brendon. He was a brilliant young Autistic man. About a year afterwards, I was diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. After I was diagnosed I kept wishing I could speak with him to ask him the many, many questions I had. His mother was able to help me. **That interaction inspired me to search for a way I could help the local Autism community. I wanted to do something more than blindly throwing money at a charity.** Through various degrees of privilege, opportunity, hard work, and two amazing mothers, I have come to realize how incredibly fortunate I am in comparison to the lives of many other Autistic people. Time is finite and precious and volunteering my time feels like the best way for me to give back. I was connected to G4G through Autism Ontario after searching for local Autism Charities.

My first volunteer shift was in early 2022. I was incredibly anxious. That was when I first met Lisa. That was when my anxiety lessened. In addition to the various tasks and functions related to the day to day operations of the grocery store, I learned more about this amazing community. Lisa was able to connect me with many more resources that I was unaware of. Both Lisa and Julia introduced me to the staff at SOYA. **Each of the staff and board members at G4G showcase an unimpeded willingness and drive to help people who are struggling with various aspects of life. That is why I want to keep working with G4G.**

G4G as a catalyst for positive change

G4G has greatly impacted my life and the lives of my immediate family. From helping me learn more about my various diagnoses to providing support throughout my partner's battle with cancer, **G4G has always been there.**

G4G in its entirety has helped and continues to help me overcome many difficulties I experience. I have significant difficulty interacting within a social environment. I can be quite introverted most of the time. These challenges tend to exacerbate other challenges I have with various forms of mental illness. **The nature of my role as a volunteer, and the tasks required within that role, provide me with a "live exercise" to practice social interactions.** G4G has helped me become a more confident person. I am able to practice methods of eye contact, speech, and positive thought patterns within a supportive environment. And it is not just the staff and board that help me with these difficulties. The customers and community have been incredibly welcoming and accepting.

Tell us about the people G4G serves and why it's so important.

I like to differentiate the people G4G serves into two categories. The staff and the customer base.



Staff: G4G serves people just like me. Although some of these people face more barriers than I do. G4G is working to even the playing field, so to speak. **G4G is the coach that nurtures blossoming talent. G4G is taking the image that most humans have of disabled persons, shredding that image, and re-painting a masterpiece.** G4G is helping to show the public that there is a future for everyone, no matter your configuration.

Customer base: G4G serves people like me. People like my uncle Jamie, people suffering from the grips of addiction. People who are so disadvantaged that they are taking care of several minor aged siblings when they themselves are a minor. **G4G serves the pensioner that is struggling to eat on a fixed income. G4G serves the desperate, those of us at the bottom. Those of us dealing with a series of uncontrollable circumstances. Those of us born into poverty.** G4G serves the retired school teachers wanting to make a change. G4G serves the people who have fled war torn countries in search of a future. G4G serves your neighbour, brother, sister, mother, father. G4G serves all.

The importance of supporting both of these groups cannot be overstated. We are failing society as a whole by shaming those of us with employment barriers. We are failing humanity by turning away those in need.

G4G fills a massive crater, not simply a gap, within not only Sault Ste. Marie, but also, Canada. Just have a look yourself, go and find a parent of an Autistic child and ask them about their plans for adulthood. Go to your local library and examine the resources available, you'll be hard pressed to find material available for adults on the spectrum. You will find a significant amount of material directed towards young children, particularly young boys. With that said, of the resources that are available, they are very helpful. G4G is a beacon, a guiding light providing hope for parents and their children both. G4G has been there for groups of chronically underemployed persons when our countries leaders have not. In an era where everything comes from far away, G4G is bringing us back to a connected community. Providing that small town hospitality within a larger city.

Connection, community and quality of life

G4G gives me feelings of satisfaction, relief, and compassion. I feel excited, hopeful and proud whenever I get to work with G4G. In general, G4G evokes feelings of love, joy, and surprise. The most rewarding part about G4G is observing the growth of our staff and community. **My favourite thing about working with G4G is the people. I have surprised myself with my own answer to this question as I generally and historically have not enjoyed interacting with people. From the regular customers, to someone needing to warm up a little, to someone looking for resources, to young people just starting to figure themselves out, to the staff and board.** G4G is one of those oddities. One of those rare places where a collection of amazing people intersect. Without G4G, it is likely that I would be stuck in a dark place. I found G4G at the perfect time, and I had G4G as a cornerstone during one of the most challenging periods of my life. Being a part of the G4G team is incredibly rewarding. **The store itself provides immediate feedback in regards to resources spent - people helped. It can be a challenge to find places to fit in, but not here. The G4G team is a safe space.**

On an individualized scale, I have seen G4G save the lives of a few people. I've been at the store and have offered a place of warmth to a customer clothed in nothing but a blanket in the middle of winter.

Throughout my time spent with G4G I have been fortunate to have met many incredible people. I've connected with people through shared experiences of hardship and mental illness. I've met people that think in a similar manner as I do. **I've gone from strangers to friends while restocking shelves. I have learned the histories of people struggling with addiction and depression while hand delivering groceries.** I know people's favorite musicians, films, foods, and



video games. Their childrens names and passions. Above all, I have beautiful relationships with people that are overcoming the exact same difficulties that I experience.

G4G makes Sault Ste. Marie a better place through its proven ability to develop and nurture employable skills. G4G is helping to remove the stigma of downtown Gore Street G4G is reminding the community of how beautiful this area and its inhabitants are.

What advice would you give to people who want to work or volunteer with G4G?

If you are passionate about helping others and wish to experience humanity in its entirety, G4G is the place to visit. Perhaps you're a parent and you are sick of seeing young adults abandoned as soon as they are 18. G4G can help. **One of the most painful stigmas with Autism, ADHD and other spicy brain configurations is that they are considered a child's condition. As an adult on the spectrum, it is incredibly difficult to exist when your struggles are dismissed and infantilised.** G4G is a leader in this area. Maybe you're an adult like me. Maybe you need a safe place to learn real life applicable skills. Maybe you're tired of being treated wrong. G4G will help you. **G4G have helped many young adults gain skills and accomplishments that they otherwise may have never experienced. G4G is helping to remove barriers that many marginalized groups encounter.**