

 **Canada's Lifeline:** Our frontline



**It's really rewarding to be able to help.**

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**Tanya,**  
Canadian Blood Services  
Apheresis clerk, Halifax, N.S.



*During the COVID-19 pandemic, we're bringing you stories of our employees who continue to work on the front lines. Tanya Gray is an apheresis clerk in Halifax, N.S.*

I actually joined Canadian Blood Services after winning a draw! I had donated blood for the first time at an event at the YMCA, where I was employed. I remember feeling a bit nervous about donating so it was good to be able to do it at work. Staff at the event held a draw for donors that day and I won a little radio. When I went to the donor centre to collect it, one of the employees gave me a tour as well as her card. Not long after that I ended up e-mailing her about an employment opportunity and the rest is history.

I've been here for 15 years now. As an apheresis clerk I work with platelet and plasma donors. Some of them have been coming in for years. I can think of one who's been donating weekly since before I started. He shows me videos of his grandchildren, and at Christmas he brings in a box of his homemade wine for the staff. I'm a people person so I really enjoy interacting with the donors.

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**'Our donors are usually ecstatic when they're a match'**

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If a donor cancels, or it turns out they're not eligible to donate when they come in for their appointment, I pick up the phone to try to find a replacement. It might take several calls but it's very seldom that I can't find someone. It helps to know the donors because I can guess who might be available and how long it might take them to get here. Sometimes I can bring in a donor within 15 minutes.

It's also my job to call donors to help patients who need a very specific match. We receive a list of donors who are matches based on our records, as well as the list of "markers", which are the special characteristics of the platelets required. Then it's up to me to assess that information and bring in a suitable donor. Is it difficult to get people to come in? No, never. Our donors are usually ecstatic when they're a match. Knowing their donation is going to help a specific patient makes them very willing.

Sometimes we need to work quickly, such as when a patient's original donor can't donate as scheduled. It could be a local patient who needs help, or someone in another part of the country. The call will go out for assistance to find a replacement right away. Or at other times I'll get a message saying that a particular patient isn't doing well and could I bring in a matching donor this week or even today. It's really rewarding to be able to help in those situations.

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## 'COVID-19 has hit very close to home'

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What's changed during the pandemic? Well, it is quite exhausting to wear a mask for the full day. But it's actually even easier than usual to bring in donors, because people are reachable and a lot of them have more flexibility in their schedules.

COVID-19 has hit very close to home for me, however. I have a cousin in her 40s in Ottawa who is recovering from it, after being in an induced coma in hospital. And my grandmother and great aunt live in a long-term care facility which has had an outbreak. Fortunately, my grandmother had no symptoms even though she tested positive and her sister tested negative.

I de-stress with hobbies. I've taken up gardening again, and sketching. My grandmother taught me how to knit dishcloths, so I've been doing that too, even though my daughter says knitting is for old people!