

 **Canada's Lifeline:** Our frontline



**We're all in this together
and we have to support
each other.**

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Kerry,
Canadian Blood Services
Donor centre manager, Edmonton, Alta.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, we're bringing you stories of our employees who continue to work on the front lines. Kerry Parsons is the manager of the donor centre in Edmonton, Alta.

I came to Canadian Blood Services after working as a registered nurse in a lot of other settings: rural hospitals, home care, and many years in a hospital burn unit. I transfused a lot of blood products in that time and I saw the benefits for patients, but at the same time, working in a hospital, you kind of take it for granted that blood will be available when you need it. Coming here gave me a new perspective. This is where it really starts, with dedicated donors and staff. I started in the platelet department, and since platelet donors can give quite often, I got to know them and clearly saw that commitment right away.

'I never expected to become a manager'

When I joined ten years ago I never expected to become a manager, but it's amazing how opportunities arise and how you can be brave enough to seize them. The pandemic hit just a couple of months after I took on this role so you could definitely call it baptism by fire. But I'm super proud of the team here (and could not take on this role without their continued support). They are showing up, they are positive, and together with the donors we are doing our part to meet the needs of patients.

Finding ways to support the team is a constant focus for me. One day early in the pandemic I was driving home with the radio on, and the DJ was looking for shout-outs for frontline workers. Normally I would never contact a radio station, but on that evening I thought, I'm going to do this! He was asking for nominations by text so I wrote to nominate my team. They ended up

calling me back to arrange free pizza for the staff from Pizza 73. It was a nice pick-me-up for the staff and a thank you for their hard work.

‘Most everyone has someone they care about who has required blood’

Another thing I’ll remember from this unusual time is a message I received from a family friend. Maddy is a young woman who went through Hodgkin’s lymphoma as a teenager and received a lot of blood products during her treatment. In fact I was visiting her in the hospital one day when she received a red blood cell transfusion. It was amazing to see. Her eyes lit up and it really looked as if life was being infused back into her. This was a few years ago, and I am happy to say that she is now in remission —after receiving a stem cell donation from her older brother — and attending the University of Victoria.

Fast forward to this March, and I was speaking with Maddy’s mother about the pandemic and how I was trying to support the staff here. Not long after, I received a sweet video from Maddy herself, thanking us for the work we do. I was so moved I decided to show it to the team at our daily huddle. There were some tears, but I would say they were happy tears. We’re all in this together, and we have to support each other and keep our focus on the Maddys. Most everyone has someone they care about who has required blood.. Most everyone has someone they care about who has required blood.

‘A blessing in the midst of chaos’

Outside of work things have been interesting. I have two boys who were in the U.S. going to university so I’m very thankful they’re home and they’re safe. It looks like they’ll be here with me, my husband and daughter for quite some time, and I look at that as a blessing in the midst of chaos. That family time is very precious to me now.

It’s important to look for the positive. I’m seeing that at home, and at work I try to help my staff see it. What we do is such a positive. What we do matters.