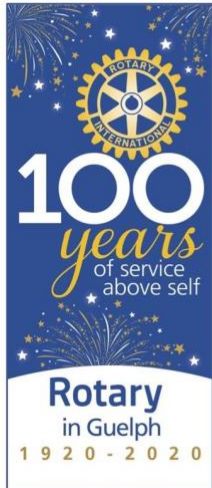


Rotary and KidsAbility



Our Shared History in Guelph

In 2020, the Rotary Club of Guelph celebrated 100 years of delivering “Service Above Self”. The club’s centennial history revealed an important role that Rotary played in the formation of today’s KidsAbility in Guelph.



and



- The Rotary Club of Guelph was chartered in February 1920.
- By 1923, one of the club’s top projects was co-operating with the Ontario Society for Crippled Children. Rotary members and their wives (known as Rotary Anns at the time) helped with both fundraising and practical support.
- Assistance to families and children took many forms. Sometimes it was transportation to and from hospitals and clinics. Sometimes it was the purchase of special equipment such as braces, shoes, glasses, wheelchairs, etc., all paid for out of Rotary’s Crippled Children funds.
- From 1940, the club even began helping local medical authorities to conduct surveys in Guelph Wellington to identify children with disabilities, so that no worthy case was overlooked.
- In later years, Rotary also made it possible for children to attend the Summer camps of the Ontario Society for Crippled Children.
- In 1955, marking the 50th anniversary of Rotary International, the Rotary Club of Guelph officially opened the Rotary Children’s Centre in Guelph which the club had built on Beechwood Avenue. The “Beechwood Centre”

as it became known was a clinic serving local children who were physically and/or mentally challenged.

- In the early 1960s, Elizabeth (Betty) Raffan saw a need in the community for respite care for the parents of severely disabled pre-school children. Together with many dedicated volunteers, fellow mothers and Rotary Anns, she was able to develop programs to assist these children, many of whom flourished.
- The Rotary Club of Guelph was a huge champion of Betty's initiative and hard work and in 1968 refurbished the facility on Beechwood to have a dedicated space to support the care of these children.
- Over time, the Ontario Ministry of Health and other agencies provided increased support for children with disabilities, eventually taking over from the Beechwood Centre.
- In 1991, the work done by the Rotary Club of Guelph to support children with special needs was taken over by KidsAbility. Rotary still admires how the modern name "KidsAbility" focuses on children's potential rather than their disabilities.
- The aging Beechwood Centre was subsequently sold, and the proceeds supported many other Rotary projects.
- Since KidsAbility began, Rotary Clubs in the area have continued to provide both encouragement and financial support, continuing many decades of Rotary's care and compassion for children and their families.