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## uOttawa alumnus Keenan Wellar’s organization helps people with intellectual disabilities live, work and play

Posted on Tuesday January 24th, 2012 by [Lara Wellman](#), under: [alumni](#), [anciens](#), [Article](#), [volunteering](#).



From left to right: uOttawa alumnus Keenan Wellar, founder and director of LiveWorkPlay; Ryan Nevitt, employee at The Works (placed by LiveWorkPlay); and Grant Webb, owner of The Works in Barrhaven.

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### uOttawa alumnus Keenan Wellar’s organization helps people with intellectual disabilities live, work and play

When you walk into a room, your brain quickly analyses the situation, picking up on cues from other people to help you figure out many complex social variables—and you probably don’t even realize this is happening! To varying degrees, people with intellectual disabilities have trouble performing this sort of social analysis; as a result, they may find new experiences and changes not only uncomfortable but also overwhelming or downright frightening.

Keenan Wellar wanted to make a difference, so in 1995, he and wife Julie Kingstone established [LiveWorkPlay](#), a charitable organization committed to “helping our community welcome people with intellectual disabilities to live, work and play as valued citizens.”

Their employment-support initiative helps members find real jobs. “Employment makes a huge difference in their lives, and not only financially,” says Wellar. “Self-esteem skyrockets when individuals who want to work have an answer to the ‘What do you do?’ question, because they can reply with ‘I work at *business x*’ instead of an answer like ‘I go to my program.’”

Wellar and LiveWorkPlay have a lot of connections to uOttawa. Wellar is a two-time alumnus of the University, with a BA in history and a BEd from the teacher education program. Five of the eleven staff members at LiveWorkPlay are uOttawa alumni, and the organization currently has more than twenty-five uOttawa student volunteers.

In addition to offering employment support, LiveWorkPlay helps people with intellectual disabilities live as included citizens of the community. They match members with local volunteers who help them overcome barriers to cultural and recreational activities. A call for a volunteer with a description as specific as “seeking sculpting enthusiast in Kanata area to attend class on Tuesday evenings” is common. The goal is to match two people in the community so they can develop a relationship based on a shared interest, to the benefit of both participants.

“Without volunteers, we couldn’t be nearly as effective in carrying out our mission,” says Wellar. “We no longer require our members to come to us for sheltered programs featuring activities that may or may not actually interest them. Not surprisingly, research clearly shows that supporting people while they learn in real situations carries forward better in life than what goes on in fabricated settings. This has certainly been our experience.”

LiveWorkPlay has been a leader in the use of social media for spreading their message. They use Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn to teach people about their organization and market their events, and also to recruit and connect with more than 120 area volunteers.

If you’re interested in getting involved, you can browse through a list of volunteer opportunities on the Volunteer Ottawa website.

For more information on LiveWorkPlay, check out the following links:

Website: [www.liveworkplay.ca](http://www.liveworkplay.ca)

Twitter: [@socialkeenan](https://twitter.com/socialkeenan) for Keenan and [@liveworkplay](https://twitter.com/liveworkplay) for LiveWorkPlay

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