

Volunteer's Experiences with Nature at "The Riverwood Conservancy"

A story of Robin Halley Gilin and the volunteers at the Riverwood Conservancy



Riverwood is a unique place in the heart of Mississauga, where history, nature and art blend together to create a peaceful and memorable outdoor experience. This 150 acre park, located in the centre of the city reflects the natural, agricultural and cultural history of Mississauga. The park has over 475 native species of plants and animals that can be experienced by visitors. Robin Haley Gillin, volunteer coordinator at the Riverwood Conservancy, told us about some of the experiences that volunteers in the park shared with her.

Robin stated that volunteers in the park decide to share their time and work for many reasons, some of which are:

- *To reconnect with nature:* many volunteers express that even though they live and work in an urban setting, they desire and need to spend time in a natural setting;
- *To heal:* some volunteers suffer from social anxiety, and working in nature, with limited interaction with other people helps them overcome this. Others have experienced injuries, and the peacefulness that nature offers helps them in their recovering process.
- *To socialize:* volunteers have expressed their desire to socialize with other like-minded people who also enjoy working in nature.

These reasons were expressed by volunteers working in the garden, in the trails (by removing invasive species or planting native ones), bird feeding, or other tasks that are done in the outdoors of the park. A volunteer said, *"I've always thought Mississauga should have more conservation/green space and Riverwood has been like an oasis here. The experiences of gardening and bird feeding have been totally different and interesting for me and I have enjoyed getting to know the other volunteers"*. Another volunteer, who is an immigrant to Canada, said, *"I recommend immigrants to be familiar with The Riverwood Conservancy as a place where they can take their first picture about nature in Canada, make friends and serve the community that they choose to continue their lives in"*.



Robin Haley Gillin, emphasises about the positive experiences that people suffering from stress, anxiety and other similar disorders get from working in this natural setting by stating that these people tend to become long term volunteers in the park and constantly express how they thoroughly enjoy the experience.