

Cheryl ZANDBERGEN

COMMUNITY CHAMPION | MOTHER
NATURE LOVER | LEADER

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS is a citizen recognition campaign. Citizens of Maple Ridge were encouraged to nominate their exceptional neighbours this past summer according to five categories: artists, athletes, volunteers, storytellers and barrier breakers. Cheryl is the third of the nominees to be featured.

Thank you, Cheryl, for sharing your story with Maple Ridge. Learn more at mapleridge.ca/2016.

“By allowing yourself to be vulnerable you will open yourself up to a world of support and joy.”



walks past a puddle and her face lights up when you mention that Christmas is coming up because she loves pulling on a costume and collecting toys for the MRPM Christmas Hamper.

Lastly, my husband is my rock. He's the one who pitches in extra around the house and at work so that I am able to do the things that I do. I am forever grateful that he supports my passions as though they were his own. Without him, none of these things would be possible.

TELL US ABOUT WORMS & WEE ONES.

I created a free, volunteer-based outdoor play group called Worms & Wee Ones in January of 2014 when my oldest daughter was two years old. As she became mobile, I realized that I wanted to share my passion for the outdoors with her. I was nervous to hike with a small child on my own and I really I wanted her to be able to play in our natural spaces with other children her age. I didn't want her (or the other children) to be toted around without being able to watch a slug cross our path or touch the rough bark on a cedar tree or jump in the puddles. I didn't know many families in town at that point and it became lonely mothering on my own at home each day. I sought real-life connections with like-minded people.

When I put the word out on my Facebook page it slowly gained traction. My daughter and I attended many soggy meet-ups alone but always promised that we would be there – rain or shine. Within a few months we had a solid group of "regulars" and then over the next six months or so we grew to be a recognized name among families in Maple Ridge. New families were joining at each for our weekly meetings, which was very exciting. Our current membership sits at over 1,000 families!

Over the years we have visited oodles of trails and parks, jumped in countless puddles, made hundreds of new friends and created a community of eco-loving families. The bonds we have forged with people in nature cannot be rivaled. There is something indescribably special about spending time with others in nature.

WHAT DOES "COMMUNITY" MEAN TO YOU?

A community is a group of people who celebrate each other's successes, grieve each other's losses and lessen each other's burdens together. All members of a community feel valued and loved.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN MAPLE RIDGE?

My husband and I moved to Maple Ridge in March of 2011 (8 years ago).

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY?

My girls are one of the biggest reasons that I am active in our community. I want them to grow up in a place where they feel loved and supported long after I am gone. I want them to know that they can be the change that they want to see in their world and I want them to follow their passions as I have. The best way to do that is by example.

Kayla is 6 years old. She has a beautiful soul. She's always cared deeply for other people, whether they are family or someone she has newly met. She loves to spend time in nature, whether it is swimming at Whonnock Lake or hiking in Golden Ears Provincial Park. And her love for those places runs deep. She regularly brings a bucket and tongs on walks so that she can clean up litter and leave the spaces that she visits better than she found them.

Sienna is 3 years old. She moves at a much slower pace than her older sister. She's the one to point out a full moon in the sky or gorgeous flowers alongside a trail. She never

WHAT IS ONE WORD YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE YOUR MOM?



"LOVE."

-Kayla (age 7)

"MOMMA LOVE."

-Sienna (age 4)

YOU MORE RECENTLY ALSO BEGAN A MOTHER'S MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUP – CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE GROUP?

I started a Mother's Mental Health Support Group after suffering from postpartum depression and anxiety, following my second daughter's birth. Motherhood can be excruciatingly lonely, exhausting and guilt-ridden. For an entire year I pulled away from my social life, I struggled to find purpose in each day and I beat myself up for "allowing" such a downward spiral. I had very few people who I felt comfortable enough to talk to about the thoughts I was experiencing and even when I knew people would listen I felt like I was burdening them with my negativity.

As I received the help that I needed from doctors, therapists, and family I began to realize that although I had always been an advocate for ending the stigma surrounding mental health issues I wasn't in fact talking about my own. I decided to publically, and fully announce what I had been, and was still, struggling through. I had absolutely no idea the outpouring of love and the personal stories that would follow. Mothers who I didn't even know wrote thanking me for sharing my story, which was, apparently, extremely similar to their own. I immediately bonded with each of them. When the messages kept coming I knew what I experienced extended way beyond myself. I had tapped into a community of people, mothers, who were silently suffering and I wanted to bring them together.

Thus, a safe, and secret online space was born where mothers from all walks of life could gather. The group now has over 325 members, most of which are local. We have a rule that absolutely nothing we speak of leaves the group and our members have always honoured, respected and appreciated that rule. Sometimes we offer each other

Get Involved

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT GROUP
Email | cheryl@momsgonewild.ca

WORMS & WEE ONES
Email | wormsandweeones@gmail.com

MOMS GONE WILD
Facebook | [@momsgonewildcanada](https://www.facebook.com/momsgonewildcanada)
Instagram | [@momsgonewild](https://www.instagram.com/momsgonewild)

NOT FOR PROFIT SUPPORTERS OF WORMS & WEE ONES
Alouette River Management Society | WildSafeBC |
Ridge Meadows Recycling Society | KEEPS

guidance but mostly we just share and acknowledge our struggles and triumphs. The greatest gift the group has given us is knowing that we are never alone. Even during our darkest days we are loved.

IF YOU COULD GIVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE TO PARENTS IN MAPLE RIDGE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Whether it be through a volunteer organization, a social group or at school pick-up - put yourself out there and meet new people!! I know it's awkward but by allowing yourself to be vulnerable, you will open yourself up to a world of support and joy.

