



International  
Women's Day

#AccelerateAction  
#IWD2025

## Celebrating International Women's Day 2025

A call to action for accelerating women's equality

### Reflections from women of Holland Bloorview

We asked some of the incredible women in our organization to share what International Women's Day means to them, how Holland Bloorview supports women, and who has inspired them along their journeys:

#### **Joanne Maxwell, vice president of experience, transformation, and social accountability (ETSA)**

At Holland Bloorview, advancing gender equality is not just a goal—it's a call to action," says **Joanne Maxwell**, vice president of experience, transformation, and social accountability (ETSA). "International Women's Day recognizes women of all identities, including those from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as women with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ women, and women from different age groups. Together, we are committed to fostering an inclusive environment where women can lead, innovate, and inspire. Today, we honor all the women at Holland Bloorview and beyond, celebrating their impact and reaffirming our pledge to drive change, amplify voices, and build a future of true equity.



**Salina Eldon, project manager - ECHO Autism Ontario, autism services & psychopharmacology**

Having immigrated from a country where women continue to have fewer rights than men, International Women's Day holds a special place in my heart. As a youth I thought this would change when I grew older! But it is now more important than ever to magnify the voices of women in our society. I'd like to see Holland Bloorview continue to allow space for women's voices to be heard. And that means all women of all backgrounds! We need to be listened to, and we need to continue to ensure that action is taken to address the inequities in our workplace and in our society as a whole.



Without sounding too cliché, my role model truly was my mother. Her love, strength and unwavering commitment to ensuring the continuing education of both me and my sister, despite huge obstacles, was truly inspiring.

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**Samantha Alfaro, funding assistant, family support fund & youth leader**

International Women's Day means taking the time to celebrate all of the achievements of women. In all of my experiences at Holland Bloorview, I've seen women in different positions which is a positive thing for people and women to see.



Many of my role models and people I surround myself with are women. Watching and being around many women has shown me the different roles that women can have in every day life. It has shown me that women are capable of achieving goals and being in spaces and positions of power. Having multiple role models who were women has helped be more comfortable and confident to assert myself and voice my thoughts and opinions in all aspects of my life.

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**Angie Sweeney, manager administrative services, people and culture.**

International Women's Day serves as a global platform to highlight the progress made toward gender equality. This day also raises awareness about the ongoing challenges women face worldwide. Even though women have come so far, their rights are still in jeopardy, being questioned or non-existent in some countries. Women are still one of the most marginalized groups worldwide, and this makes me sad and if I'm being honest, angry. Holland Bloorview does a great job of highlighting women's achievements.



When I was a kid, I wanted to grow up to be Mary Tyler Moore (actress). I loved that she was independent, had strong friendships with women and the best apartment ever. Now I look to women like Michelle Obama for inspiration. She is an excellent example of strength and compassion.

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**Melissa Edwards, senior manager, philanthropy & gratitude, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation**

For me, International Women's Day is a crucial opportunity to recognize the strength and resilience of all women, especially those navigating the complexities of raising or supporting children with disabilities. It's a day to celebrate the incredible advocacy and unwavering love these women demonstrate. I'd love to see Holland Bloorview continue to prioritize programs and services that directly support mothers and female caregivers of children and youth with disabilities



It's a day to celebrate the incredible advocacy and unwavering love these women demonstrate. It's also a time to acknowledge the unique challenges they face and to reinforce our commitment to building more inclusive and supportive communities for them and their families. At Holland Bloorview, this day reminds us of the importance of supporting the women who are so vital to creating a good life for the children we serve.

I find role models in the mothers and caregivers I see at Holland Bloorview every day. Their dedication to their children, their tireless advocacy, and their ability to find strength

in the face of adversity are truly inspiring. They demonstrate incredible resilience and teach us all about the power of love and perseverance. They are my role models because they show me the true meaning of strength and how to never give up on what matters most, and that is their children and family.

I'd love to see Holland Bloorview Foundation continue to prioritize programs and services that directly support mothers and female caregivers of children and youth with disabilities. This could include increasing access to respite care, mental health resources, and funding through the donor-funded family support fund. Creating platforms for these women to share their experiences and advocate for their needs would also be incredibly valuable. Recognizing and celebrating their contributions to the Holland Bloorview community is also essential. By providing resources and support that alleviate the unique burdens these women carry, we can empower them to thrive and ultimately improve the lives of their children.

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### **Zainab Motala, family leader**

International Women's Day is a time to celebrate women's resilience and achievements while recognizing the barriers that still exist. It's especially meaningful to me because I defended my PhD at the University of Toronto on International Women's Day, making it a reminder of perseverance and possibility. As a Canadian born in Cambridge, Ontario, I've seen family members who immigrated here face language and opportunity barriers, and I know firsthand the impact of education and support. For me, this day represents the belief that, as Holland Bloorview says, ***the world is full of possibilities***, especially for mothers and caregivers raising children with visible and invisible disabilities.



Dr. Jane Goodall has always been an inspiration to me for her groundbreaking research and commitment to making a difference. My love for animals drew me to her work, but I admire how she challenged norms with perseverance and compassion. I connect deeply with her ability to push boundaries and create meaningful change. I hope to do the same by sharing my experiences—letting my hindsight be someone else's foresight—so others, especially young people facing barriers, can see what's possible.

I'd love to see the organization continue to amplify diverse voices. I admire how this organization provides real support through mentorship, inclusive hiring, and policies that

recognize the challenges faced by working mothers, particularly those raising children with disabilities. Thank you for your commitment to ensuring all women have the opportunity to thrive.

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**Elizabeth Gordon, clinical application specialist, clinical application services**

International Women’s Day is a day for men and women, and boys and girls, to recognize and celebrate the unique value of women in every sphere. It’s also a day where women, because of our shared experiences as women, intentionally uplift each other by celebrating our sisters’ accomplishments and contributions.



Three of my role models are my mom and my pastors. My mom, because as a woman, wife, and mother, she exemplifies qualities and characteristics that I aspire to including courage, selfless love, sacrificial giving and mental fortitude. My pastors (a husband-and-wife team) role model candor with a loving embrace and are highly skilled, effective and caring leaders.

Holland Bloorview is doing some things well to celebrate and support women. Further steps could include addressing safety concerns that some women encounter e.g., pregnant women can park on-site instead of off-site, pregnant women can get first choice on allocated parking spots in close proximity. Holland Bloorview can also readily provide the opportunity for all staff to share their ideas. This can easily be done over a relatively short period of time, using an unmanned station, inexpensive supplies, and some fun incentives.

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**Louise Rudden, nurse practitioner, specialized orthopedic developmental rehabilitation program**

International Women’s Day signifies an amazing opportunity to celebrate all women who have made a huge impact in their lives/careers to support other women. I would love to see Holland Bloorview support girls and women of all backgrounds, genders and ethnicity in achieving their goals.



My role model is one of my former bosses who has always supported me with all the little things and bigger things you come across while working in a big organization. She always takes the



time to listen with respect and support with kindness and without judgement. I realized she was different to any other female figure or role model in my life from the moment I met her and I feel so lucky to know her everyday.

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### **Dr. Alysha Ladha, developmental pediatrician**

For me, International Women's Day is a chance to reflect on the opportunities available to women and all the amazing things that we have done with them. It is a day to think about the power of women individually and when we come together. A time to celebrate the unique perspectives that our lived experience brings to everything we do and also a time to consider that in many ways there is still work to be done broadly towards gender equity.



I think we do a lot of good work here at Holland Bloorview and have built a strong foundation of support for women and by women. To me, supporting and celebrating women involves the steps that we at Holland Bloorview take day-to-day - shedding light on the voices, goals and achievements of women in our community. It also involves being an ally, and speaking up when there is injustice, in a way that is guided by and respectful of the person involved. I would like to see ongoing upliftment of women's voices at all levels of the organization, lending their diverse perspectives to shape this organization's long-term goals.

I feel fortunate to have many role models - in my personal life, in the various communities that I am a part of, and professionally here at Holland Bloorview and at other organizations. The two women who have been the most enduring role models in my life I would say are my mom and my aunt. Both left their families, the homes they knew, and a familiar life, for Canada and the UK respectively to pursue educational and career opportunities. They worked hard to balance careers where they excelled with time spent supporting family members and even have time for their other interests. Both my mom and my aunt have had times of adversity, and I hope to one day be able to face challenges with the same kind of strength and grace.

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## **Moira Pena, team lead, autism projects & programs**

International Women's Day is a time to reflect on the progress women have made while recognizing the challenges that remain. For me, as an immigrant to Canada, it also represents resilience—the determination to move forward despite uncertainty, to navigate new spaces, and to redefine belonging.



Over the years, my role models have evolved. I've always admired the extraordinary female leaders, researchers, and clinicians I've had the privilege to learn from and collaborate with—and there is no shortage of them at Holland Bloorview! Their intellect, presentation and leadership skills have inspired me greatly.

More recently, I find myself in awe of mothers of autistic children. In my many years of practice as an occupational therapist, I now realize that some of my greatest lessons have come from the relationships I have built with them. They have taught me to embrace the complexity of being human, to find hope even when navigating significant challenges, and to notice—and celebrate!—the moments of joy that exist alongside sorrow.

I believe Holland Bloorview is already a role model in recognizing the contributions of women at every level of the organization. Personally, I have always felt supported in pursuing my dreams, most recently with the creation of [Holland Bloorview's OT Autism Hub](#). This initiative aims to equip occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants with the knowledge and skills needed to better serve autistic children, youth, and their families. Continuing to create spaces where staff—regardless of their background and position in the organization—are heard and valued will only strengthen this role modeling.