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This past summer, the Onward strategic initiatives team spoke with different groups about some of the words we use as an organization. As a content writer and editor, I (Victoria) was excited to talk with the people these questions impact the most.

I've been part of a focus group on diversity before. I remember having a hard time answering some of the questions. Because of my experience, I added questions that were easy to talk about, like "What do you like to do?" and "What's something you're good at?" The idea was to help break the ice and keep conversations flowing.

It worked! When we asked people what they *can* and *like to* do they were excited to tell us about themselves. Our gifts and interests give meaning to who we are. Everybody has gifts to share! This is worth celebrating.

Our new organizational theme for 2024 is "**Celebrate grace and gifts.**" *Grace* and *gifts* come from our new name (Karis), and this theme reinforces our "graduated" core value of *celebrating gifts*. While the Onward team was brainstorming our theme with different groups, we heard lots of stories about how people felt honoured and included when their gifts were shared with others. Brad, a self-advocate on the Our Voices Matter Council, recently started DJing events. He let us know how happy it makes him when people say they enjoyed his set.

Celebrate
Grace and **Gifts**

Grace might be harder to picture than celebrating or sharing gifts. By definition, grace can mean a divinely given talent or blessing, closely related to gifts! It can mean a short prayer, like grace before meals, and as a verb it can honour someone's presence: "she graced the office."

God's grace has profound significance in the Christian tradition, but grace can also describe the moment your co-worker finishes the laundry rather than getting upset at you for leaving it in the washing machine. It can describe redemption – it can also describe the sight of a beautiful sunset. This year, we celebrate every moment of grace and every gift shared with one another – from gifts of creativity to the gift of a smile or someone's presence.

“Celebrate grace and gifts” is rooted in our values and who we are as an organization. We believe that each person is loved by God and created in His image. We believe God gives meaningful skills, abilities, and talents to everybody – including the ability to bring joy and laughter into a room, or to experience moments of connection; moments of grace.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (*James 1:17, ESV*)

Our theme Bible verse reminds us that the gifts we have are from God, who does not change despite the difficulties we might face or the changes we might go through. We want to celebrate the grace that we receive from those around us and the grace we give to others. We want to celebrate the gifts of others, and the gifts we ourselves have received.

Take some time to reflect on what the theme means to you. As we journey together through the year, let’s find every opportunity to celebrate grace and gifts!

Making the Connection

- How would you respond if someone asked what you do well? What do you enjoy doing?
- What do you think of when you hear the phrase, “Celebrate grace and gifts”? How can it help shape the work we do in 2024?