



# Annual General Report

*April 1st 2016 - March 31st 2017*



## *Executive Director's Report* Abe Harms



## *40 years of welcoming newcomers to Canada*



### *MCS Staff*

It was March 15, 1977 when MCCO hired the first person in East Elgin to help newcomers with their documentation needs. This small interim beginning has grown into what is now MCS. From a focus on helping with legal status, MCS is now a multi-service agency that addresses complex needs of newcomers in a rural setting, and as the reports show, it has been a full year again.

For this 40th anniversary we completed a short history of MCS that tells the story of the transition from an MCC office to the current MCS. This short document builds on the earlier more extensive and well documented work that Bill Janzen wrote in 1997. It becomes very clear that what has driven this work over the years is cooperation and generosity.

The transition from MCC to MCS in Aylmer will likely never be complete and perhaps it is for the better. We want to keep a good relationship between the two agencies as we also assist each other in the achievement of our goals. It is not unusual for a caller to ask: "Is this at MCC?," even after clearly identifying that the caller has reached Mennonite Community Services. Some think that MCC changed its name and others just get mixed up in the alphabet soup.

MCS is now in its 9th year of "independence" and in many ways it has been the hardest yet, especially financially. A whole organization had to be built, and

as we grow, more and more regulations come into play. Most of our funding has not increased much over the years, but costs, like minimum wage, have more than doubled. Last year MCS had to postpone the forwarding of store profits to MCCO, to the next fiscal year. MCS was not able to come up with enough cash to forward twice in one year. MCS is grateful to MCCO for the ability to forgo this forwarding for this year. So we were able to end the year in the black.

The number of newcomers coming to Canada remains high and the need for services has not abated. In Deut. 5:11 we read "There will always be some ... who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them." A great many of our clients are by no means poor, but they all have needs that demand our generosity.

Generosity is also what we have seen in our volunteers at the store, at the annual auction, the banquet, the motorcycle fundraising ride and those working at our programs. We see it in our Board members, our community, our staff members and our faith communities.

[1] Build Up One Another; "The Work of MCCO with the Mennonites from Mexico in Ontario 1977-1997". This 70 page booklet has been digitized and is now available in pdf format.

## FAMILY EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT OF AYLMEER *Netti Wall*

The Family Education and Support Project of Aylmer (FESPA) has operated out of the Aylmer Evangelical Missionary Church (AEMC) since the 1990's, and for this year we had to change. This, along with some staff changes made it a challenging year, yet we continued to provide:

- School – 21 weeks of ESL and life skills classes to moms and pre-school readiness program for their preschool children
- Mom & Baby – support for at risk pre and postnatal moms
- Family Support – medical appointment support for participants in these programs

In June 2016 the AEMC made some renovations to their building that made it necessary to find another facility. A rental agreement was made with the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in Mount Salem to use those facilities. In September the task began of moving our program for the first time in over 18 years! Two weeks after moving in, the 23rd year of FESPA School began.

As expected, there were some 'bumps' on the road to adjustment and the first few weeks of school proved to be quite challenging for staff, students and children alike. At times it became a choice to remain positive and to find solutions rather than faults. As the weeks went by it became noticeably calmer, everyone began to settle in and children began to skip down the hall to their new classroom.

Staffing changes this year included the medical leave, then resignation, of Sara Dyck, our Outreach Worker. We were grateful that Marie Dyck agreed to temporarily return to that position. In January, Maria Friesen, our Family Support Worker, shifted into the role of Outreach Worker. A few weeks later Tina Wiebe was hired as the new Family Support Worker. Both positions are considered 'part-time', but Maria and Tina have been kept quite busy since starting their new positions!

The FESPA School program saw a high number of young moms this year. Both the 3 Day and 1 Day Programs had a full baby room all year. Most years the young moms have a poor attendance record or leave the program mid-year, but that was not the case this year.

The Mom & Baby program experienced a high number of moms entering the program shortly after arriving in Canada. Several of these moms did not qualify for OHIP, so our first choice was to refer them to midwifery care. When that was not an option we refer them to doctors who also love to provide exceptional care to newcomers.

While there have been numerous changes over the past year, our commitment to provide help and support to newcomer families remains the same. We are blessed to journey with them as they adapt, learn, grow and become contributing members in our community.

This year, as we celebrate 40 years of MCS, we are grateful for God's faithfulness; life will continually change, but God remains constant.



*Baby room staff with a full room!*



*Mom and Baby support Team*

### FESPA Statistics:

- 29 women, 27 preschoolers, 10 babies in the 3 Day Program
- 27 women, 17 preschoolers, 10 babies in the 1 Day Program
- 245 home visits, 21 Group Sessions, 9 births attended by the Outreach Worker
- Family Support Workers attended to 410 medical appointments

## RADIO DE BRIGJ CHPD *Abe Wall*

### DE BRIGJ 105.9 “Integration and Inclusion through Information and Education.”

De Brigj is now in its 14th year on air and it is as relevant today as it was when it first started. Those who rely on De Brigj are the elderly, stay at home moms and newcomer families who have arrived in the last five years.

De Brigj had an exhilarating year. There were many new challenges and opportunities. Staff was reduced as a result of Susie Peters going on maternity leave. Susie had been volunteering at the radio as host and also helped with program production. A new software program is now used to broadcast while on air. In an effort to open communication and receive feedback from our listeners, a new phone line was added.

In an effort to build relationships and hopefully raise some funds De Brigj organized two events: a series of 4 concerts and a bus trip. We had aired a program called Gib Niemals Auf! It

is the life story of John Hiebert. It was decided that a concert would be organized and invite John Hiebert as keynote speaker and a musical group to fill out

the evening. 3molPlaut from Manitoba was invited as the musical group and the event was held at four locations over one week. The events were well received by our listeners. In fact, the event in the Aylmer area was sold out and we had to turn some people away due to limited seating. In November staff organized a bus trip to the CN Tower. It was again an opportunity for our listeners to interact with each other and MCS staff.

CD sales showed a substantial increase this past year and

the new packaging and branding are a definite improvement.

De Brigj continues to make every effort in program development to meet the interests and needs of its audience. It has quality evangelical messages, health and wellness programming, international and local news, and a variety of music for its listening audience's pleasure. This past January we also started airing monthly financial segments. They deal with a variety of money related topics and is sponsored by the Kindred Credit Union.

Another significant change is starting on April 3rd 2017. We will be on air from 7 am to 12 pm and from 5 pm to 8 pm. This means we will be on air 8 hours a day, an increase of two hours. Just a couple of years ago, it was only on air 4 hours a day. The extended hours will consist of playing mostly music for our listener's pleasure, thereby incurring little to no extra cost.

Segments of De Brigj's programming is heard on radio in at least 6 countries and all content is being livestreamed. We continue to make every effort in program development to meet the interests and needs of its audience.



3 mol Plaut concert with John Hiebert

Interview with Karen Vecchio



## MOTORCYCLE RIDE *Trudy Wiebe*

The MCS Charity Motorcycle Ride scheduled its third annual run this year. Last year it took place on Saturday, June 18, with 58 motorcycles, and 2 vans accompanying the bikes. It was a beautiful day and although, we were caught in a few showers throughout the ride it did not dampen the spirits of the riders. It is interesting how a person can feel the temperature change when on a bike. Different elevations, when in shade, when riding close to a body of water all contribute to cooler temperatures. So when the sun is shining, if you are in a car, you may have the A/C on, but when you are on a motorbike you are more likely to feel a chill.

After the tour, everyone and their families along with supporters were invited to a BBQ sponsored by Voth Sales and

Service at their site outside of Courtland where we enjoyed food and fellowship with new friends made. There is this feeling of comradery between riders, it seems like you become instant friends when you share the bond of being a “rider”.



MCS Fund Raiser

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES *Susan Loewen*

MCS continues to partner with Fanshawe College and the YWCA at Aylmer Community Services (ACS) to provide an extensive range of services at 25 Centre Street, Aylmer. Employment and job searching, career exploration (for youth and adults), referrals to other agencies, literacy, upgrading, connections to Ontario Works and assistance with Employment Insurance are some of the services we offer. Ontario Works case workers are now on location 5 days a week (up from 3 days last year) and Service Canada twice a month. These partnerships are extremely beneficial in serving and addressing the complex needs of our clients.

This past year, an average of 650 people per month accessed our centre and used our services, with some months it being even busier! Over 50% of all people coming in were of Low German background.

Of the clients that counsellors actively met with for job search/employment/career/literacy related issues, at least 55% of these were Low German as well. An increased level of literacy, math, and computer literacy are needed to find long term sustainable employment, and many clients are exploring the option of upgrading their skills and literacy.

Many employers are looking for employees and are having difficulty finding workers to fill empty positions. One reason for this is that even though clients are eager to work, many do not have the skills the employers need. For example, we have requests from employers that workers need to have basic math and literacy skills and be able to read a tape measure. These are the challenges we face when trying to help the client as well as the employer.

Our funder underwent a name change and is now called the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD). The annual target for the MCS employment services is set by our funder and we have consistently met and exceeded all our targets. MCS is now being rated an "A" Service Provider by the MAESD with increased requirements. We helped more than 100 people find a job

or go back to school, helped with many resumes and other employment related services.

We are constantly striving to let our community know where we are and what we can help with. We increased the number of Job Fairs, Apprenticeship information sessions, promotion on the Low German radio and the Home and Recreation Show. All of our services can be done in Low German if needed to ensure everyone is served.

We continue to see Low German people who become employment services clients and are working with a counselor on a continual basis to assist in employment related issues. They find that one-on-one discussions and meetings are very beneficial. It is encouraging that they feel that they can trust us to treat them with respect and understanding as each client has unique needs. They continue to return for service, even from distant areas such as Simcoe, Langton or even Leamington.

We have repeatedly been told that we provide friendly, respectful and efficient service and that we are a "safe place". People feel welcomed and cared for in our positive environment.



## FINANCE REPORT *Anna Bergen*

From a budget of \$35,000 over 18 months beginning in 1977, when this office first opened, to a budget of just over a million dollars it is clear that MCS is still meeting needs in the community.

Right from the start funds for our work came from government sources and donations which continues to be the case. The first budget started with a \$20,000 contribution from MCC Canada and MCC Ontario and \$15,000 from the Attorney General's office. This year our income consisted of approximately half in government funds with the rest coming from sales, donations, and sponsorships. One of the biggest challenges this year for me was seeing our bank

account dipping into the line of credit regularly to make payments possible because government funds were coming in after spending had happened.

Ending the year with a net income instead of a loss is very encouraging and we will continue to look for ways to support our existing programs as we go into the next year.

Audited financial statements are available.

## AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE *Helen Bergen*

MCS has been serving newcomers for 40 years and while much has changed new families continue to arrive every year. In 2016 we completed 88 initial family intake assessments, of which 46 had been in Canada for less than 1 year.

People often wonder about what type of person accesses our services. Of the total number of families new this year, most were young families coming to Canada because the employment opportunities in their country of origin are limited. These young couples are quick to learn, willing to work hard and usually find work within a couple of weeks of arriving in Canada.

The majority of our clients come in person for one-on-one services. And the most often asked questions are about obtaining or maintaining important status documents like Permanent Residence and Citizenship. Health care, income and finance round out the top areas of concern.

We also offered 10 group sessions providing relevant information on topics such as name changes, Child Care Benefits, introduction to e-mails, immigration and community services and health care.

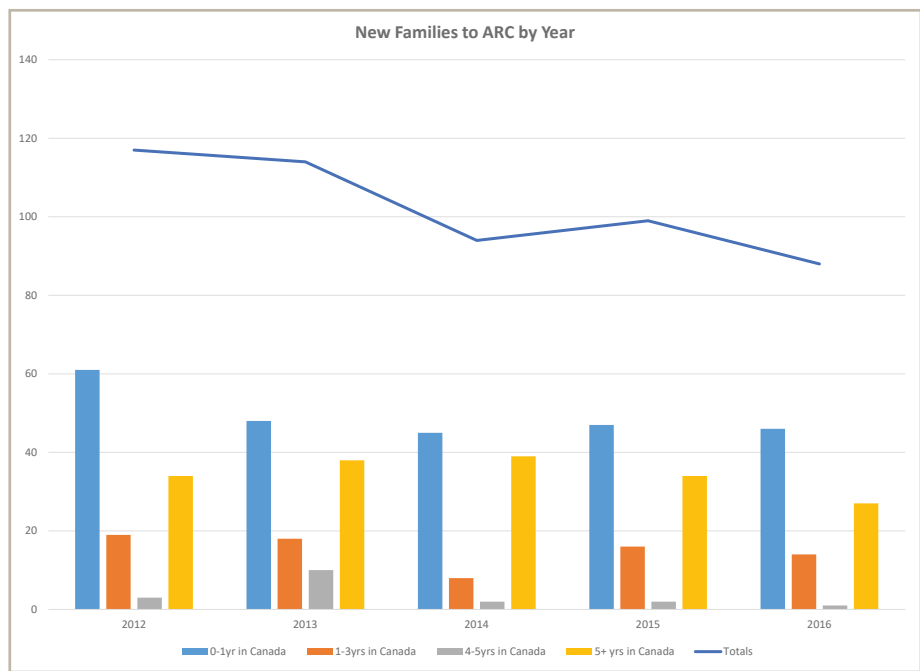
Entry Visa requirements for Mexicans entering Canada was lifted in December of 2016. This resulted in more families asking questions about applying for Canadian Citizenship by descent. Many are hoping that their ties through their Canadian grandparents will give them opportunity to remain in Canada permanently. These questions are especially difficult if there is not a direct claim to Citizenship.

The Itinerant Settlement worker was able to accompany families to the immigration office or offer settlement services off site to those who need it. Funding for this program is limited to Permanent Residents

who are not yet citizens.

Aside from the Newcomer Settlement services offered at the Aylmer Resource Centre, we also have a Volunteer Driver Program. Volunteers in this program can transport and interpret at important appointments if needed. There are also English speaking clients who have transportation needs who are helped by this volunteer program. This past year, our 9 volunteer drivers and/or interpreters logged 360 hours with 146 individual clients, and together they travelled 12,349 kilometers. All these clients are residents from either Aylmer, Malahide or Bayham. We are very grateful to the volunteers who spend time and energy into this program and help newcomers access services in the community. Without their generosity this program could not function.

We are so grateful for the willing and capable staff that work together to welcome and help newcomers in the area.



## HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT *Anna Bergen*

Forty years ago MCS started with one part time staff member, a budget of \$35,000 over 18 months and lots of community vision for helping the Mennonite Newcomers.

Since beginning this work in 1977 the community has been continually blessed with people who strive to help other newcomers after them. Staff has grown from one to a group of nineteen permanent staff, nine seasonal staff and a summer student. Programs continue to grow and staff continue to provide expert services to the families in need. During this last year we experienced a big staff turnover with four new staff joining our team. In addition to that we continue to rely on many volunteers to help with the various needs that staff

can't meet. If we had only paid staff our programs would not be able to meet as many needs in our community as we do in partnership with community volunteers.

I have been continually reminded this year of the advice the Apostle Paul gave to people at Colosse "let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense."

MCS continues to have a dedicated group of staff who work steadily to help the many families who come to us for help.

## MENNONITE COMMUNITY STORE *Linda Miller*

The Aylmer Mennonite Community Store, or the Mennonite Store as it is often known, is a vital part of the services offered by MCS. It is a social enterprise, but it is much more, it is a service to the community. It is a place where people can drop off their gently used items, a place where people can volunteer their talents and time in community, a place to buy affordable necessities of life and where friendships are made. Staff, volunteers, customers and donors often know each other and have become friends. It has become a place where friends meet up and enjoy an afternoon of shopping, where students complete their forty community service hours and community members donate and are greeted by the first name. We are part of an amazing entity that benefits the local and global community

An aim at the store is to increase its income every year. In spite of the fact that we have not been able to increase our retail space, the gross income this year was just over \$243,000. Efforts that contributed to this increase are better display units, more training of staff and volunteers as well as adding an extra sale day, now open 6 days a week. The store is now open on Mondays and in 10 months added \$28,000 to the total. The positive changes in the store have elicited many compliments from our customers.

Our donations of resale items have doubled in the past

few years, so we have had to re-organize our processing room and add some shelving. We strive for a safe work environment where our volunteers and staff are well trained, and our work spaces are safe.

The store's success is due to a very supportive community, wonderful staff and amazing volunteers. We have experienced many blessings this past year and we are making preparations to celebrate 35 years this coming fall, even as MCS celebrates its 40th this year.



## FUND RAISING EVENTS



*The Winning Pie from the Rhubarb Pie contest last year was auctioned off for \$400!*

*Thank you very much for the volunteer committees that plan the annual auction, the banquet and the motorcycle ride. All contribute significantly to MCS in so many ways. A big thanks also to the hundreds of volunteers that work so faithfully to make these events a success.*



*Rachel Wolf enjoying a delicious apple fritter; a favourite treat at the auction!*