



Annual Report 2013-2014

Six years have passed since Mennonite Community Services took on all the services from MCC and combined them with the services it already had. For the first few years it was busy establishing a niche in Elgin and this last year it was expanding again.

The Settlement Stories Quilt Trail was well accepted in the community and gave MCS some more visibility. This last year it began expanding to the Buy Local Buy Fresh trail and is still working on a third trail, namely artisan. A dedicated radio manager came on board again, some renovations were done and a new program on radio, targeted to youth and those that are alone during the day, was begun. With this in mind, the broadcast time on the radio was increased by 10 hours a week. The employment services program also doubled this last year.



MCS is likely best known for its citizenship and documentation work, as that started in 1977 and the rest came later. But it does more than that. People become citizens, and MCS helps them build capacity to become contributing members of the community. Yes, MCS does settlement services, but it also strives to help people connect to other people, agencies and faith communities so that they can become full participating members of society.

MCS and the community are blessed by a wonderful partnership of churches, agencies (both government and community), funders and donors. The

question is still out there: "Is it only for Mennonites" or "is it only by Mennonites"? The answer to both is "no, MCS is open to all". *"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born." Lev.19:34* A wonderful staff who have a real love for the community and the people they work with makes this possible. To find out about the full year of exciting activities, read these reports.

Abe Harms,
Executive Director



Employment Services

We provide employment support services in both English and Low German to Aylmer and the surrounding community. The program advocates for those seeking employment and/or re-training, and assist people in overcoming barriers in this pursuit. We help all age groups and cultural backgrounds to



*Photo: Susan Loewen & Stefanie Heide
"Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success"*

Assisting People to Overcome Barriers

achieve their goals. We serve clients who are seeking to return to work or school, filing for EI claims, meeting employers, getting a placement, or just updating a resume. Job seekers and employers alike are accessing our services from as far away as Leamington and Kitchener. Clients return again and again for a variety of services and know that they will be looked after.

- ◆ **Resume Development:** This last year we did 400 resumes along with cover letters for our Low German (LG) clients, a 9% increase from last year. We are also seeing an increase in assistance with completing online job applications.
- ◆ **Educational upgrading and skills training:** There are 17 clients that have gone or are currently in educational upgrading or training, a slight drop from previous years. This is mainly due

to the lack of financial means and incentives.

- ◆ **Employer Services and Work Place-ments:** We promote or market our clients who might have employment barriers or lack experience. In many cases the client gets hired after a short placement, and the relationship continues to grow confidence in the client. We can give incentives to employers that hire our clients, and extra subsidies for hiring a youth (15-19). Currently we have 11 such placements.

2013-2014 Highlights:

Job Fairs: MCS continues to participate in job fairs and other employment events.

- ◆ Annual Home and Garden Show for the first year.
- ◆ Open House for the public in December, 52 visitors attended where we gave away prizes and information.

Youth Employment Fund (YEF): This is a very successful program and the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has increased our funding to help 10 youth find work.

Program Size: As of April 1, 2014, our Employment Services doubled in program size.

Ontario Works Pilot Project: MCS with Aylmer Community Services is excited to participate in a pilot project run by Ontario

Works (OW), whereby OW intake appointments are scheduled in the Aylmer office.

Challenges:

- ◆ We continue to face the challenge of serving clients without a high school diploma, which is recognized by employers and colleges.
- ◆ Lack of transportation to job opportunities outside of Aylmer.

Did You Know?

Our Employment workers provide support to, and cultivate relationships with employers to promote clients and the use of our services. This program also fosters positive relationships with other agencies and service providers in Elgin County to ensure that the client(s) get the best possible service.



Did you know:

25 volunteer cashiers collectively worked approximately 2,140 hours at the store till

We had 35,690 customers shop at our store last year



Aylmer Mennonite Community Store

A Place where community happens

The Aylmer Mennonite Community Store is physically a part of the Aylmer community but it is much more than that. We don't just claim to be a community store we are very much a community. Our customers are from Aylmer and surrounding area and they are from different walks of life and cultures. We are a store that strives to serve the local towns people, immigrants, tourists and avid thrift shoppers. We offer gently used items at affordable prices.

There is an atmosphere of family amongst our volunteers. It is inspiring to see our volunteers, who are from different cultural backgrounds, come together with the common goal of volunteering at the store.

Following are quotes from volunteers about why they volunteer at our store:

- “I like the fellowship.” Elsie
- “I like the fellowship and it's a time out of the house” Maria
- “I enjoy helping because of the need and enjoy the fellowship.” Anna
- “I like to volunteer to help people who are not as fortunate as we are. I enjoy the fel-

lowship and time spent at the store.” Helena

2013-2014 Highlights:

Tax Free: This was our first full fiscal year where we don't need to charge HST. We and our customers are very happy about this change.

Terrace Lodge Thrift Sale: July 16th we set up a sale at Terrace Lodge to provide a shopping opportunity to the residents that do not regularly venture out. With the help of three volunteers and two Terrace Lodge staff we helped the residents with their shopping needs.

Aylmer Fair. August 8-10, we had a quilt and blanket display at the fair. This was an opportunity to show our community the customized picnic blankets, comforters, and quilts we make and sell. It was a nice way to network with other women who share similar talents and interests and display the talents of our dedicated sewing volunteers.

Donations:

We received a large donation of mattresses from the Police College in December. It is nice to know that the larger community supports us with their donations.

We received a constant supply



of donations even after another donation center opened in Aylmer. We are very thankful for all donors.

Looking ahead:

We are creatively working to improve our processing procedures. We will strive to make our sorting process more efficient and fun. We continue to work at maintaining a safe working environment for all volunteers.

We are looking ahead to another prosperous year.

Photo Top Left: Terrace Lodge resident Margret Willis displaying the items she purchased at the Thrift Sale. Photo Bottom Left: Susie Friesen running the cash register, one of our many dedicated volunteers



Integration & Inclusion through Information & Education

Last year marked the 10th anniversary since the radio went on the air and is as significant today as it was 10 years ago. We continue to connect with people that would otherwise not have access to the variety of information that the radio provides. It's also an essential instrument that is utilized by many local agencies like the health department, police department, schools and local government.

Challenges:

We had some equipment complications this summer and have since purchased new equipment. Equipment at the radio still needs an upgrade, however, the budget won't allow it at this time.

Our budget had only a small shortfall at the end of the fiscal year. However, that was due to the infusion of \$43,000 from a special NSP innovation grant. The finances continue to be a main focus, additional advertising, sponsorship and fundraising will need to be implemented to meet budget in the next year.

2013-2014 Highlights:

The radio continues to grow as more programs are being produced by radio staff. There are also some very talented volunteers that help produce some of the programming. We hired a youth facilitator to produce a local youth program which has generated a lot of positive results. It's on a trial basis but hopefully we will find the funding to continue with the program. It is currently being funded in part by a generous local business and in part through the NSP Innovation grant.

The radio now operates six hours a day, Monday through Friday and three hours on Saturday without any added costs. This was made possible through the dedicated and caring staff at the radio, willing to go that extra mile.

There is still plenty of room to expand, improve and develop the programming and the radio overall. We have the time and energy to make this a possibility but the funds continue to be a challenge. We have full confidence that in time those needs will be met.

Did you Know?

The programs Kjinjastund, Tues em Heim, Waut Passiet, and our new program Youth Matters are available as podcasts at www.mcson.org.

You can also tune in on our live programming on the MCS website.

Impact Story

"About a year and a half ago, at the age of 21, I heard an ad on the radio station regarding a need for volunteers to go down to New York (NY) to help rebuild homes damaged by Hurricane Sandy. My reaction was "I could go down to NY." I had decided a while earlier to quit my job and was trying to figure out what to do next. I made the phone call and I went down to Staten Island in April 2013 with some of my youth group to volunteer with Mennonite Disaster Service. When I went home at the end of the week, I knew I had to go back for longer. Long story short, since then, I have spent 20 weeks serving in Staten Island, over five different terms, most of that time I was the Office Manager. It all started with an ad on De Brigj radio about an organization I hadn't heard of before."



This is just one story of the many listeners that have been impacted by the radio, it shows what it can and does bring our community.

Photo left to right: Henry Zacharias from the singing group The Zacharias, Jake Wall and Helen Bergen, employees at the radio.

Settlement Services

“Providing settlement support to Newcomers through capacity development networking, and advocacy with community agencies and service providers”

Life as a newcomer

When arriving in Canada newcomers face many types of barriers, the most common ones are: maintaining their legal status, language barrier, suitable housing, and employment. Many of the families often express a sense of bewilderment at the requirements to “settle” in Canada. Settlement workers guide newcomers to determine what their current settlement needs are and how to implement that plan. This gives the clients reassurance that they have looked after their settlement journey and helps to alleviate some of the migration pressure.

2013-2014 Highlights:

- ◆ Settlement Workers helped 36 clients obtain Canadian Citizenship; 30 clients received their Permanent Resident Cards
- ◆ About 80 new families to Canada (includes families new to ARC programs)
- ◆ Settlement Workers were involved in the organizing and the leading of 11 information and group sessions
- ◆ 67 newborns were registered through our office; most using the Online Birth Registration application process
- ◆ Over 1,500 contacts were made for or with clients through the Aylmer Resource Centre; 103 via email; 1,412 on site visits; more than 500 phone calls
- ◆ In the itinerant and visitation program 241 clients were served, 51 first time clients
- ◆ Itinerant Workers drove over 13,000km; clocked over 890 hours
- ◆ 12 volunteers supported the Volunteer Driver program, took clients to 266 appointments, clocked 856 hours and drove over 20,600km

Trends:

- ◆ Families where one spouse came into Canada as a child and the other spouse just newly arrived in Canada

- ◆ Legislation changes have become pull factors for young families; children born outside Canada after April 17, 2009 are not Canadian Citizens, this leads many young families to come to Canada to have their babies
- ◆ Many stable and long-term residents seeking assistance with the completion of application forms, such as passports
- ◆ Many families providing/claiming home-schooling without registering with the board thus requiring alternate residency proof for government benefit programs
- ◆ Newcomers becoming aware of the importance placed on education and work experience to gain better paying jobs
- ◆ New citizenship policies have revised language requirements for citizenship grants. This creates a real difficulty for most of our clients as they do not have a strong educational background

Newcomer Strengths:

Although the needs of newcomers are often outlined, it is equally important to mention the assets newcomers have to draw from when settling in Canada. Many families are aware of our presence in the community and the services we provide prior to coming in. Newcomers show a level of confidence that we can help when they see that other newcomers were successful in receiving settlement services through our office. Most clients have a good work-ethic and a positive attitude. This is how they successfully provide for their families, even if it means long days and lower wages. Many have a desire to be or to become upstanding citizens in their new communities. They exhibit a spirit of humility and good character.

Experiences and Needs of Newcomers:

Culture shock

- ◆ Information overload
- ◆ Over stimulation of new environment
- ◆ Things are expensive
- ◆ Desire to stay connected to extended family

Language

- ◆ Limited or no English skills
- ◆ Confused about cultural idioms/euphemisms
- ◆ Prior education knowledge in Canada

Heath

- ◆ Eligibility or providing proper documentation
- ◆ Medical appointment transportation

Employment & Housing

- ◆ Limited skills
- ◆ Housing for larger families

Citizenship & Immigration

- ◆ Required immigration documentation
- ◆ Interpretation & transportation

Community Challenge:

We can walk with newcomers in the settlement process by:

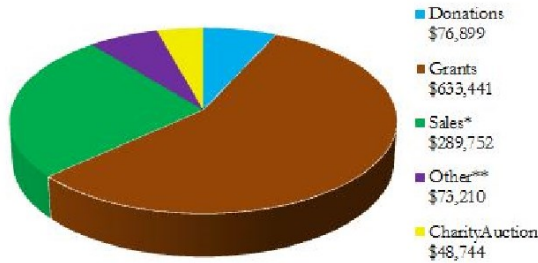
- ◆ showing support and empathy to newcomers
- ◆ Referring to community and internal programs such as ESL and FESPA classes
- ◆ see the faith communities as a foundation in the midst the transition
- ◆ volunteer in your community through outreach and support programs
- ◆ foster family values
- ◆ foster and promote a culture of education and growth opportunities



Photo: Margaret Reimer (Itinerant Worker) with one of our clients children

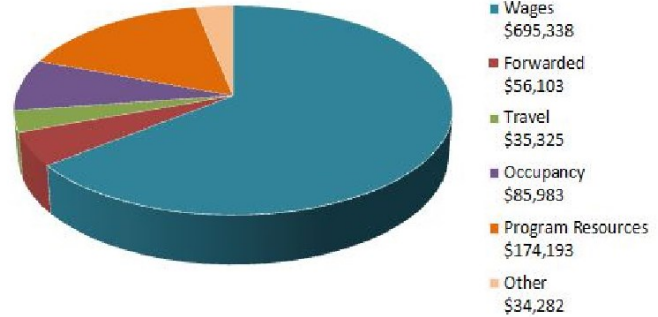
MCS Financial Report, 2013-2014

Sources of Income



*Sales includes Store, Radio & Post
 **Other includes fees, rent, reimbursement for travel

Expenses



FESPA

FESPA continues to provide three programs mainly for Low German speaking newcomer women and preschoolers in the Aylmer area. Our goal is to inform, teach and assist women and preschoolers who are at risk in their adaptation to Canada.

2013-2014 Highlights:

- ◆ Anita Harms retired June 30, 2014 after 15 years as FESPA Manager
- ◆ Netti Wall was hired as FESPA Manager beginning September 1, 2014
- ◆ Trudy Wiebe was hired as Assistant FESPA Manager beginning September 1, 2014
- ◆ Tiena Bartsch resigned as the Family Support Worker

- ◆ Margaretha Harder was hired as the new Family Support Worker
- ◆ 31 women and 35 children attended our FESPA School 3-Day Program
- ◆ 22 women and 20 children attended our FESPA School 1-Day Program
- ◆ 42 women participated in the Mam&Bebi Program
- ◆ 19 babies were born, 11 boys and 8 girls
- ◆ 447 home/hospital visits were made by Marie Dyck
- ◆ 601 - \$10.00 food cards were handed out to expecting and new moms
- ◆ 360 appointments were attended to by the Family Support Workers



Photo: Anita Harms and Netti Wall at Anita's retirement party. Celebrating Anita's years of service as FESPA manager and passing her role onto Netti.

Quote from a student:

"I think it is very important that we as mothers know how to read and write, so we can read to our children and help them to do homework. Going to school helps me to understand how important it is for our children to go to school."



Photo Left: As Part of a study, one of the 3 day Program classes stitched a nine piece rain forest Quilt, raising funds and donating towards a save the rainforest organization. L-R, Back row Margaret Berg, Elisabeth Bueckert, Maria Doerksen, Susana Klassen, Katarina Bueckert, Helena Banman, Trudy Bergen, Elisabeth Bergen. L – R, Front Row: Teacher Tracey Capaldi, Aggie Braun

14th Annual Aylmer Charity Auction

Auction Highlights

Saturday, June 28th marked the 14th Annual Charity Auction. Once again community volunteers dedicated time and effort into making this year's auction a great success

- ◆ The Promotion dinner, hosted by Bradley Street Church of God, was almost sold out, raising \$6,980
- ◆ Total proceeds from the sale \$48,744.
- ◆ Sixteen food booth raised \$17,390
- ◆ \$16,377 was raised from the auctioned items.
- ◆ Approximately 200 volunteers helped with the auction.



Photo top left: David and Nathan Krabn claiming their prize. Photo Bottom Left: Police Chief Andre Reymer and his wife Chris and OPP Inspector Brad Fishleigh and his wife Marsha at the Auction Promotion Dinner. Photo Right: Adam Martens, enjoying watermelon from a participating food booth.

Thank-you!

We have been overjoyed by the support we have received through donations, volunteers and participants. We thank each individual who helped to make this year's Annual Aylmer Charity Auction another great success!

Mennonite Community Services

Thank-you to volunteers

MCS staff thanks all our volunteers who dedicated their time throughout the year to our various programs. Volunteering opportunities like the Thrift store, Radio, FESPA, Aylmer Resource Centre and other community events.

Our Mission

"Providing leadership to empower our communities by advocating and promoting integration and inclusion of our Low German ethnicities, serving the broader community, partnering with other agencies, businesses and churches, and responding to the needs of all."

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Board of Directors 2013-2014

There was a full slate of Directors on the Board, representing the 5 member Mennonite churches: Old Colony, Reinland Fellowship, Sommerfeld, EMC and EMMC.

Directors:

Tina Giesbrecht (Chair), Margie Sawatzky, Peter F. Wiens*, Johny Boldt, Henry Friesen* (Secretary), John Unger, Frank Martens (Vice Chair), Cornelius Thiessen – died in a traffic accident and Jacob Berg took his place, John Wall*, and Abe Harder – resigned mid-year and Pete Hiebert took his place, Trudy Hiebert (Treasurer).

**A special thanks to the three Board members who have served their allowable 6 years.*