

Annual General Report

April 1st 2017-March 31st 2018



MCS Staff

Row 1 right to left - Abe Harms, Abe Wall, Agatha Giesbrecht, Anna Bergen, Janet Krahn, Lili Dyck, Sue Thiessen, Susan Loewen **Row 2** - Dwayne Froese, Anna Heide, Hein Rempel, Helen Bergen, Tina Wiebe, Andrea Dyck, Susie Redecop, Trudy Wiebe **Row 3** - Linda Miller, Lisa Klassen, Maria Dyck, Maria Friesen, Mary Peters, Netti Wall, Abe Peters, Stefanie Heide

Board of Directors

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Executive Director's Report - Abe Harms

2017 has been a year of celebrating the 40 Years of Settlement Service milestone. In the last 26 years, we have helped 2,715 families new to Canada in their quest to make Canada their home. We have also helped most of the same families in our other programs of Employment Services, Family Education & Support, radio and our thrift store. Newcomers keep coming; in 2017, we had 99 new families receive assistance through our offices.

The government recognizes that more and more newcomers to Canada choose to move into the rural settings and for the first time this last year conducted a national conference on small centres and how to attract and retain newcomers. There is the realization that needs in the small centres and rural areas are different from those in big cities. The next funding cycle will consider these findings.

Proverbs 31:8 says, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." We try to speak for those that encounter barriers and cannot speak for themselves, such as language barriers and the inability to navigate the system. We also try to help people be-

come independent, and then recruit them to help us help others. We really appreciate all of our volunteers.

During the last year, the Board initiated a review of the strategic plan for MCS as everything is always changing. As food security becomes more of an issue, there is more discussion about gleaning and dehydrating fruits and vegetables. Our facilities for our other programs are becoming an increasing issue, as we need more room. The store has especially necessitated that the Board strike a feasibility study committee on more space.

Along with growth come other growing pains, namely growth in infrastructure and fundraising, as well as adequate succession planning.

The Low German language is experiencing a renaissance in the Mennonite world as more written materials become available, but also in the service sector who is hiring more and more Low German speaking staff and others who are trying to learn the language. It is good to see the safety net for newcomers spread wider and become bigger.

Aylmer Resource Centre - Helen Bergen

The Newcomer Settlement Program once again welcomed families to Canada by providing orientation and referral services, guidance so families can access services and adjust to life in Ontario.

It is not uncommon for newcomers to access services at the Aylmer Resource Centre within days of arriving in Ontario. Most often, well established relatives inform their newcomer family members of our services. The vast majority of the newcomers heard about our services from family or friends. Of the 83 newcomer families new to the Resource Centre in the 2017-18 fiscal year, 46 accessed services within the first year of the original entry date of arriving in Canada, 14 within 1-3 years of arriving and 23 after 4 years of the original entry. By far the majority of clients preferred in-person visits in comparison to those contacting us by telephone or internet based mediums.

The top countries of origin were Mexico, Bolivia, USA and Belize with a slightly higher number of females than males during this fiscal year. Inquiries regarding government benefits for families and finances were at the top of the list of reasons why clients visited. Concerns about maintaining valid documentation and provincial status documents such as birth and marriage were next on the list of most common inquiries and access to health care the third highest concern.

The Volunteer Driver Program offered interpretation and/or transportation services to individuals in the community. We served 35 unique clients including newcomers but more often individuals on social assistance.

Living in a small community has many benefits but specialist appointments and many other community services are located in larger urban centres making it difficult for individuals on fixed incomes. Many participants of this program expressed their gratitude for the volunteers who helped them. The 9 program volunteers spent 425.8 hours on the road covering a total of 15,337 kilometres.

Staff at the Aylmer Resource Centre underwent some transitions. Liliana Dyck held the front desk administrative position from March until December while Andrea Dyck took a maternity leave, returning in February 2018. Mary Peters reduced her hours to 3 days per week but also stepping in to cover the front desk on numerous occasions. Sue Thiesen, who was hired in February of 2017, was responsible for the Volunteer Driver Program as well as serving settlement clients. Stefanie Heide and Trudy Wiebe contribute to the Thursday night scheduling, receiving clients and providing information and referral. Overall, a lot of focus was put on training staff in new roles. Throughout the year one or more of the staff attended 7 different networking and/or training opportunities on top of the internal monthly meetings that include job specific training.

The funders for the Newcomer Settlement Program and the Volunteer Program include Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Ministry of Citizenship, United Way, fees for service (i.e. photocopies) and general donations.

Volunteer Driver Program Statistics:

- 9 volunteers drove a total of 15,336.6 km throughout the year
- 425.8 volunteer hours spent on this program

NSP & IRCC eligible clients served 2017-2018

Immigrant Status	# of Unique Clients Served
Permanent Residents	
Family Class Immigrants	227
Economic Class Immigrants	2
Convention Refugees	6
Other Immigrants	49
Refugee Claimants	1
Canadian Citizens (by descent)	604
Temporary Foreign Workers	2
Other (Resumption, Open Work Permit)	198

Radio De Brigj CHPD - Abe Wall

The year is 2003 and it is mid-August when for the first time people in Elgin County tune their radios to the first Low German radio transmitter. In August of this year the radio will have been on air for 15 years. It was started with the intent to inform, educate and include the Low German speaking population in this area in the community. As newcomers to this country, language is a huge barrier in accessing information and services.

The radio has been instrumental over the years in supplying these needed services to its listening audience. Many that listened faithfully 15 years ago no longer need it, but other newcomers do. About 100 new families come to this area every year.

The radio has evolved as service agencies are now turning to radio staff for help. They are now asking to be informed, educated and included in order to better understand and to better service this group of people. Over the years, the radio transmitter has become a vital part of the community. It has a respectable working relationship with health professionals, police departments, fire departments, schools, and (dare I say it) politicians. These professionals seek out the radio to bring their message to our listening audience. The business sector has also come to respect and acknowledge that the radio is an excellent source for meeting their advertising needs, be it help wanted or to announce their goods. Advertising is continuing to increase each year as more businesses are using the radio to promote their services.

A major achievement for the radio this year was the increase in on air hours. On December 18, 2017 the radio went on air 24 hours a day seven days a week. This was made possible, without additional manpower, through computer automation. Much of the time is filled with music, but there is also church content, news, interviews, weather, stories and advertising. We have also begun to air several local church services on Sunday afternoon.

Staff at the radio currently consists of 4 part-time (Maria Dyck, Hein Rempel, Helen Bergen & Abe Wall) & 1 full-time (Dwayne Froese) employees. We also have 6 volunteers that help produce programs. A notable change that will challenge the radio in the coming year is that Hein Rempel is retiring in May 2018. Hein has been a voice on the radio since it was started 15 years ago and is an ambassador for the radio within the community. He will definitely be missed and leave a void, but we greatly appreciate his years of service.

Currently we produce eleven programs at the radio. These programs include current news, financial education, children's program, family life skills, health education and other topics of interest. We are blessed that we have volunteers helping to produce many of our programs.

A lot of our programming is specifically for children and women. We air six children's programs and four women's programs. A men's program has long been considered but still hasn't materialized.



Hein and Anna Rempel at their retirement party.

In order to be more effective in our advertising, we have specific time spots for advertising. These spots are at 7:15 am, 5:45 pm & 7:45 pm. As our licencing only allows us to advertise six minutes an hour. We are currently almost at capacity during the evening spots and will soon need to find another time spot.

De Brigj 105.9 "Integration and inclusion through information and education."

Employment Services - Susan Loewen

MCS continues to work with its partners (Fanshawe College Career & Employment Services/YWCA) to provide an extensive range of services at 25 Centre Street, Aylmer. Employment, job searching, career exploration, youth employment programs, referrals to other agencies, literacy, upgrading, apprenticeships, connections to Ontario Works and assistance with Employment Insurance are some of the main services we offer. There are, however, other things that we do, such as assisting with WSIB documentation and Ministry of Labour information and paperwork.

2017-2018 was a very busy year, and we especially noticed an increase in employer postings. We have many employers who are looking for workers and sometimes it is a challenge to match them with a suitable candidate. There is a shortage of skilled workers as well as general labourers. In the past year, we matched many employers with clients and had to request more "in-year funding" for the Employment Services program to support this. We completed 2 apprenticeships which is a great thing for both employer and client!

ACS was bustling with people of all ages and backgrounds accessing our services. At any given

month in the year, at least 50% of our employers and/or clients are of Low German background. At least 55% of these LG clients actively meet with counselors for job search/employment/career/literacy related issues. Literacy and upgrading programs continue to be a need for our clients and we constantly promote these services in the community. An increased level of literacy, math, and computer literacy is needed to find long term sustainable employment and thus provide a more skilled workforce.

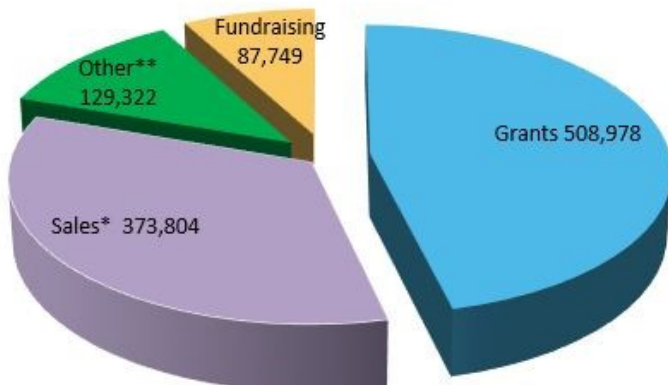
We are constantly striving to let our community know where we are and what we can help them with. With this in mind, we had our very first "Employer Breakfast Event" that was very well received. We will also be implementing a new youth program (Employing Young Talent Initiative) that begins April 2018. All of our services can be done in Low German if needed, which is very important to many in the community that we serve.

One other very positive event that occurred this past year was that Stefanie Heide returned to work with MCS after her year-long leave serving with MCC in Cambodia. We are more than thrilled to have her back with us as she is a very positive and uplifting presence in our office.

Finance Report - Anna Bergen

Throughout 2017-2018 fiscal year MCS employed 34 staff, although not all at the same time. Six of the staff members were employed full-time.

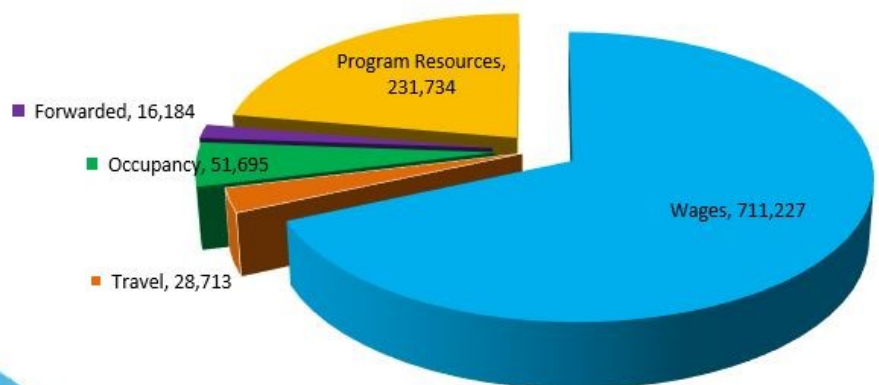
Sources of Income



*Sales includes Store, Radio & Post

**Other includes fees, donations, rent, reimbursement for travel

Expenses



Wages is our biggest expense as staff are the source of resource

Seasonal Staff Throughout the Year

MCS seasonal staff included: Anne Banman, Mary Bontrager, Tina Dyck, Marie Dyck, Susie Reimer, Esther Sawatzky, Suzy Smith, Mary Wall, Susan Wall & Tina Wiebe

Family Education Support Project - Aylmer - Netti Wall

Family Education Support Project – Aylmer (FESPA) consists of three distinct yet interconnected programs; the FESPA School, Mom and Baby and Family Support.

The FESPA School offered programming for 21 weeks, beginning mid-October and ending in April. English as a Second Language (ESL) and life skills classes were offered for newcomer women. Childminding and a preschool readiness program were provided for their children ages 0-6. FESPA School recently completed its' second year in the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church and its' 24th year of programing overall. While there were a number of anticipated and unanticipated challenges, the year included many positives.

It is difficult to track the number of women and children who have benefitted from the program through the years, but each year there are comments from the participants on what FESPA means to them and it is gratifying to hear that the program has been a significant and positive part of their lives.

One person who has greatly impacted students is ESL teacher Joyce Jeffreys. Joyce has been a constant

at FESPA for many years and is an incredible teacher and mentor. It was with some tears, that we said our farewells to Joyce at our year-end celebrations in April. Joyce has decided to embrace retirement and pursue other adventures in the coming season. She will be greatly missed, but we wish her well.



Mom & Baby Program

Our Mom & Baby program provided care to expecting and new moms. Moms in the program received home visits, referrals to medical services, assistance with appointments and births, group teaching sessions, grocery cards and above all, support. The dedicated work of Maria Friesen was much appreciated as she walked alongside each of these young moms and their families.

Our Family Support Program provided assistance to women, children and families registered in either the FESPA School or the Mom and Baby program. The type of assistance needed differed for each family, but the most common need was for help navigating medical appointments. Our Family Support Worker booked appointments, reminded women of appointments and provided transportation and interpretation at the appointments. She also intentionally developed relationships and provided care and support as needed. Tina Wiebe, and more recently Anna Heide, served in this capacity during the past year.

FESPA Statistics:

- 2 administrative staff (FESPA Office)
- 6 childcare staff, 2 kitchen staff, 1 bus driver
- 2 ESL teachers (English as a Second Language)
- 1 Outreach Worker (Mom & Baby)
- 1 Family Support Worker (Medical Appointments)
- 28 students, 23 preschoolers, 11 babies (3 Day Program)
- 19 students, 15 preschoolers, 13 babies (1 Day Program)
- 311 home visits, 19 Group Sessions, 20 births (Outreach Worker)
- 546 - \$10.00 food cards handed out (Mom & Baby)
- 393 medical appointments (Family Support)



Left: Students participating in the You're the Chef program. This program came with some funding from the Health Unit and allowed students to learn about, plan, prepare and sample healthier snacks and meals.

Right: Trudy Wiebe, Anita Harms, Joyce Jeffreys & Netti Wall at Retirement Celebration Coffee



Mennonite Community Store - Linda Miller

In the world of thrift, some things always remain the same. It's like a routine, people donate, donations get sorted, cleaned, priced and put out for sale, a customer comes and buys the nice items, and sometimes donates other items back. Then suddenly, you get a surprise. We were overwhelmed. Donations this last year more than doubled. The Goodwill's donation center closed, but that alone did not account for the big increase in donations. It is so nice to see that the community sees this as their thrift store.

How is success measured? In retail it is often measured in sales volume. We keep breaking sales records and enjoy it immensely. Every year we strive to achieve higher sales.

Yet, in our store, service is of equal value. We have formed a network of friendship among volunteers and staff. There are relationships being built with customers and donors. We are greeted by name

and greet our customers by name. They become a part of our lives and we become a part of theirs. We have the opportunity to help out newcomer families with basic household items, helping them to start their life in their new country. The store is a meeting place for friends who arrange to meet up and then enjoy a time of shopping. People use the store as a walk through from the parking lot, not intending to buy anything, but they often do. We are the place where people choose to donate their goods because we are both local and a not-for-profit where their donations help others. This makes them partners in service.

We feel supported by our community. An example of support is that two local businesses donated to the store this past year: Durkee's donated new clothing and Elgin New and Used donated furniture. We are blessed to be an integral part of such a wonderful growing community.

Thrift Store Statistics:

Highest weekly sales just over \$7,100.00
Record monthly sales November \$30,683.00
Record annual Customers was 40,930
Annual Sales \$280,174.00
Total Christmas Sales \$7,929.00
9' Christmas tree sold for \$200.00
More than 12,500 volunteer hours
Retail Sq ft 2,645 and we could use much more, 3x's more!



Linda Miller, manager of the store

Fundraising Events

Thank you very much for the volunteer committees that plan the annual auction, the banquet and the motorcycle ride. A big thanks also to the hundreds of volunteers that work so faithfully to make these events a success!



Some delicious treats among many from the annual auction!

This hand-made patriotic quilt was auctioned off for \$500!

