



**Executive Director's Report**

By Abe Harms



For the last four years, the focus at MCS has been on building capacity and structure. Renovations were made, the service structure was reworked, a Human Resources department and pay scale was developed, staff were redesignated, and credibility with funders was established.

This last year the concentration was on communication, policy development, implementation of the strategic plan and getting the MCS name out into the community. A newsletter was developed and is now being circulated weekly in order for staff in the various departments to be more aware of each other and keep the Board in the im-

mediate. Dr. Cummings from the University of Guelph was engaged to do an Impact study on MCS. This study shows the strengths and weaknesses of MCS and should help in further development and the procurement for more funding. The new website [www.mcson.org](http://www.mcson.org) is now live and many people use it. The radio is also benefiting from this as people listen in various parts of the world via live streaming.

In June the Settlement Stories Quilt Trail was officially opened. The purpose of this project is to engage the community at large as well as give back to the community. It has been greatly successful. Not only has MCS

received many compliments and brought people in, other businesses are also requesting to be included in the Trail.

It has been a very busy year in all our programs where more people made use of our services, especially settlement and employment. The partnership between the radio and library received a provincial award this year.

This coming year, MCS will be looking at new ways of communicating with the churches and the community at large. Special efforts will be made to procure more funding, not only for current programs but also to build up reserves.

**MCS Mission Statement:**

“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 responding to the needs of all.”

**MCS Board of Directors 2011-2012**

Representative Church	Position
Abe Harder ----- EMMC	Chair
Henry Friesen ----- SMC	Director
Cornelius Knelsen --- RFM	Director
Frank Martens ----- OCC	Director
John Unger ----- SMC	Secretary
George Giesbrecht --- OCC	Director
John Wall ----- EMMC	Director
Lily Hiebert Rempel - MCCO	Representative
Margie Sawatzky ---- EMC	Director
Abe Harms -----	Executive Director
Peter Wiens ----- RFM	Vice-Chair
Tina Giesbrecht ----- EMC	Director
Trudy Hiebert -----	Treasurer

## De Brigj Report By Abe Harms, Executive Director

**De Brigj began live-streaming on the World Wide Web in May. People from around the world can now listen to live broadcasting on the internet. This opens the door to many exciting opportunities and much potential.**

Overall, De Brigj ran well throughout the year and was without any major issues. We consistently heard from listeners how much they appreciate the radio. Here are some highlights of the year.

De Brigj began live-streaming on the World Wide Web in May. Those who move away from the Aylmer area can now continue to listen to De Brigj on the internet, and people from around the world can listen to live broadcasting on the De Brigj. This opens the door to many opportunities and much potential.

'Waut Passieet', a program that is developed by MCS radio staff, has a distribution list of 73; it is picked up by 7 different radio stations in 5 countries for replay.

De Brigj had 100 sponsors and advertisers and 300 one-time ads in 2011/12. De Brigj has over 600 Low German songs in its database.

We received more positive feedback on the extended Spanish programming in the summer time. It is appreciated by Spanish-speaking listeners. Some radio equipment is becoming outdated and will need to be replaced soon.

Helen Bergen and Maria Dyck attended the Low German Networking



*Above: Hein Rempel prepares for daily radio programming. He is the voice of the Daily Bible Reading.*

meetings in Winnipeg in June. They had a productive time of connecting, learning, sharing and professional development.

In the year coming up, we hope to send some staff members of De Brigj to the Low German Media Congress in Paraguay.

## Human Resources & Finance Report By Anna Bergen, Finance & HR Manager

This fiscal year brought more changes in the finances and human resources department. This was my first year as HR Coordinator and Finance Manager/Bookkeeper. Many of the changes were the result of the strategic planning with our consultant. All job descriptions were reviewed, updated and changed to align with the new structure. Managers were put in place with some new responsibilities added to each manager to reduce the load of the Executive Director and to strengthen each department team. Policies and procedures were also reviewed, updated and new ones created. We completed our first

staff handbook and began work on a volunteer handbook. Staff took in various training throughout the year as funding and opportunities allowed.

In the finance department many in-house changes were made to enhance the reporting demands and to assist managers in keeping track of allotted and budgeted funding for their programs. This year was also our first full year as a charitable organization. Receipts for a total of \$18,516 were issued.

All donations are highly valued by MCS and enhance existing programs. As always, staff did the

best they could with the resources available to them. They looked for new ways to increase funds or cut programming to accommodate financial boundaries. A full audited financial Report is available.

Funding in the form of grants, donations, and sales for programs this year included the following:

CAPC (Community Action Program for Children)

CIC (Citizenship Immigration Canada)

CPNP (Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program)

MCYS (Ministry of Community and Youth Services)

MSCU (Mennonite Savings & Credit Union)

MTCU (Ministry of Training Colleges & Universities)

NSP (New Comer Settlement Program)

Ontario Trillium Foundation

United Way Elgin

Church and Individual Donors

Radio Ads and Sponsorships

Relief Auction

Store Sales

# MCS Impact Assessment Report

Submitted by Donna Lunn, Consultant

MCS has been serving the Low-German community in Elgin County for over 13 years, but the link between the community and MCC (MCS organizational parent) spans several decades. Despite the many years of community service, there is very little knowledge that speaks to the impact this organization's work has had in the region and even beyond national borders.

The University of Guelph was commissioned to do a study on the statistics of usage and need for MCS programs, not only for the Mennonite community, but also for the wider communities. MCS received funds

from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to perform this study.

Research was conducted through literature and interviews with focus groups, Board members, clients, and other agencies in the community. The results were favorable for the organization and included some recommendations for the future.

Some highlights and recommendations include:

- ~The MCS presence in the region fulfills a unique niche.
- ~The Board of Directors functions well because of strong faith ties and

mutual feelings.

~Clients and other community agencies hold MCS in very high esteem.

~Christian faith and values are core to the organization.

~Ongoing financial challenges should continue to be addressed as service requests increase.

The Study helps in filling a recognized void of the need to increase the visibility of MCS and its good works in this community and beyond.

The MCS Board and staff will present these findings to many groups including municipal councils, member churches, and community agencies.

## Settlement Stories Quilt Trail

Submitted by Donna Lunn, Consultant

We're getting a lot of questions in the office these days: "Do you have more brochures about the Quilt Trail?" "They are pretty, but what are they for?" "Can our business put up a quilt block?"

The idea for the Settlement Stories Quilt Trail arose out of the desire of the MCS Board to increase awareness of Low German culture as well as to help local businesses. This project was funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and honours the MCS culture and its place in Elgin Coun-

ty. It includes settlement stories which help shape our community.

The Quilt Trail is designed to attract folks to visit by offering an opportunity to take a themed excursion to the East Elgin region. It encourages economic development as the quilt blocks are erected at sites or buildings which depict an aspect of the settlement history of the area. Sites which permitted the public to 'experience' the location were chosen to be part of the Trail, including museums, provincial parks, busi-

nesses such as The Woodpecker and Pinecroft, and environmental locations such as Aylmer Wildlife Sanctuary.

The quilt block is symbolic of the site. A story of the business, its significance to the history of settlement in the area, and the reason for choosing that quilt block are included on an interactive website. A shorter version is printed in a beautiful brochure that is available at MCS, museums and at the sites. With the MCS logo on each sign along the Trail, community aware-



ness of MCS and what it offers will increase. Celebrate our diverse cultures throughout the Municipality of Bayham, Township of Malahide and the Town of Aylmer by touring the Settlement Stories Quilt Trail.

## MCS Auction 2012



Left: A group of ladies from the Sommerfeld Church serve up a tasty pancake breakfast. Middle: This beautiful dining set sold for \$1200. Right: The child's version drew a price of \$485.

The 2012 auction was well-attended and successful. This year, the food booths brought in a total of \$13,053.14. The most popular booths were the Fish Fry, Pancakes, and tacos. In addition, auctioned items brought in \$16,078.05.



# CLIENT SERVICES REPORT

By Anni Bird, Manager of Client Services

## Settlement Work

The Aylmer Resource Centre assists many classes of newcomers in a given year. This year, forty-four new families came to MCS for settlement services. Most of these are of an oral culture and many are not literate in any language. Upon entering Canada many clients seek to attain Canadian Citizenship by way of Sponsorship through family class, such as descent of a Canadian parent or Permanent Resident status.

Settlement Workers are fluent in both Low German and English and are trained, and have experience, in the functions of the Newcomer Settlement Program. Achieving a successful adaptation to their new

country and community varies from newcomer to newcomer. Housing, employment, schooling, health related concerns, obtaining provincial identification, educational and other support services are trepidations newcomers face. Settlement Workers help newcomers adjust to their new surroundings by connecting them with resources and information, thus allowing them to make the best informed decisions pertaining to their settlement concerns. MCS works collectively with a number of outside agencies to facilitate services for those clients whose first language is not English.

## Volunteer Driver Program

The Volunteer Driver Program is used extensively and is viewed as a highly valuable and reputable service by other agencies in Elgin County.

The volunteers who serve with the Volunteer Driver Program are mostly "former clients" who donate their time to taking new-

comers to various appointments. Eleven volunteer drivers and 2 Itinerant Settlement Workers drove a total of 32, 868 kilometers this past year, averaging about 30 rides per month. From Aylmer, a ride to Tillsonburg costs approximately \$25, and to London is about \$40.

## Itinerant Settlement/Visitation Program

Families must adapt at a rapid pace when arriving in Canada for the first time. Their malleability skills are put to the test. Many find this transition period a huge challenge and often struggle to meet the demands of everyday living. Two worlds collide in very practical ways for most families and many feel very alone and isolated. It is a challenge to make peace with the decision they've made to leave behind a familiar, albeit unstable, future to relocate to the land of

"milk and honey". To bridge these gaps, families are referred to our Itinerant Settlement Workers. They meet with families, often in their own homes, accompany them to their appointments and assess their needs and concerns. This conveys to new families a sense of belonging and validation. Sustained support is provided to the families and they may be referred to outside agencies, support systems or organizations which address specific needs.

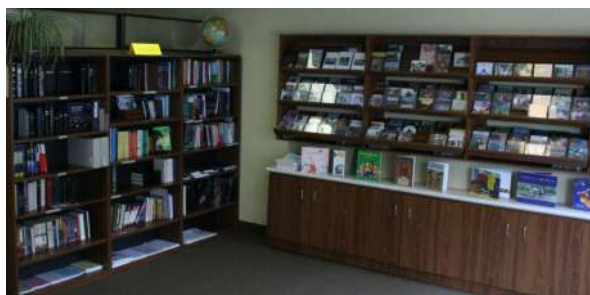
## Reception Area

The reception area of the MCS office has undergone significant changes this year. Clients are now greeted within moments of walking through the door. The majority of clients have their questions answered or are able to meet with a worker with little or no waiting time. There are also busier days when clients experi-

ence some wait-time (Tuesdays and rainy days).

The Post bookstore is also busy with steady sales of books, cd's, newspapers, and other resources. This year, local and public school libraries have been ordering items for their shelves.

*Below: MCS's newly-arranged reception area.*



*Herman Wall (left) frequently drops in to the Resource Centre to visit with Outreach Worker, Cornelius Reimer (right).*



*From left to right: Johan Peters, Peter Wall & Sarah Peters enjoy unexpected blessings of friendship while driving to numerous medical appointments.*

Peter started driving for us on July 23; by the end of August he volunteered almost 60 hours of his time.

During this time, Johan, Sarah and Peter have developed a close friendship. They joke and laugh a lot, but also share a mutual respect and admiration. Peter says, "They are good people. I miss them when I don't see them for a few days."

"We appreciate Peter very much," says Sarah, "and MCS, too."

Johan's health has improved since he began his treatments. Without the help of MCS and the volunteer drivers, says Johan, they would have given up.

### **Dialysis Patient Looks to Volunteer Driver Program**

The last few years have been difficult for Johan and Sarah Peters. Three years ago, Johan suffered a heart attack; his recovery was slow and complicated, and required daily care from Sarah to help him regain his health. Then, in May of this year, Johan was hospitalized for five weeks. It was during this time that he began receiving dialysis three times a week. Upon his release, Johan and Sarah started making the long drive from their Port Burwell home to University Hospital in north London three times each week to continue

the treatments.

Initially, the Peters' adult children were able to drive their parents, but when their summer jobs began they were no longer able to. Friends and relatives helped out for a little while, but then someone told them about MCS's volunteer driver program.

Due to the Peters' extensive needs for rides and the time consuming nature of Johan's appointments, MCS client services staff quickly recognized the need for a special kind of volunteer. One morning, Client Services manager, Anni Bird, suggested Peter Wall might be willing and a good fit for the job. That day, before she had a chance to call him, Peter walked through the door.

The Volunteer Driver Program normally assists families and individuals on an interim basis. Families are always encouraged to look to their regular systems of support for help, such as family, friends, and church, and to MCS as the exception. The Peters' situation was unique due to the extenuating circumstances they found themselves in, and that their own resources had been exhausted. At MCS, a collaborative effort was made and special funding was received to assist the family.

### **Aylmer Community Mennonite Store** By Linda Miller, Store Manager

The Aylmer Mennonite Community Store was blessed with generous donations from Aylmer and the surrounding community. Some donations were of greater value, and were kept for the Silent Auction. Sales from the Silent Auction were over \$7000 in 2011/12, considerably higher than last year.

Many customers were from the greater surrounding area such as London, Tillsonburg, Simcoe and even farther away. Customers appreciated our low prices in comparison to other thrift stores, and they liked that the store was clean and organized.

In the summer, we saw many tourists who came from afar and also from within a few hours driving distance. We also saw many migrant and seasonal workers who came to shop

Customers became more aware that we take special orders for quilts that are handmade by our volunteers. These orders increased our sales this last year.

We are thankful for our faithful, committed volunteers who came on a daily and weekly basis to help clean, sort, and price items for sale. We would not have been able to operate the store without the support of the church community, donors, volunteers, and MCS staff.



*Our volunteers do an amazing job. They make tied comforters, quilts, jean blankets, tied crazy quilts, wall hangings and table runners. One volunteer makes handbags.*

### FESPA School

During the 2011-2012, FESPA held 22 weeks of classes from October to April. We succeeded in reaching out to newcomer women and their pre-schoolers. Forty-nine women and sixty-two children, ages 0 – 6, participated. The ESL teachers and staff and volunteers from the Baby Room, Preschool Room, Kitchen, and Transportation expressed joy and success in their various

departments.

This year we had seven individuals who volunteered approximately 693 hours of their time to our FESPA School Program. The majority of these hours were given by a volunteer ESL teacher in the 3-Day program.

Throughout the 2011-2012 year, the FESPA staff participated in various ongoing training sessions to continue to enhance their skills.



### Mam&Bebi

The Mam&Bebi Program successfully completed its ninth year with 37 women participating. Marie made 349 home visits and hosted nineteen group sessions. The \$10 food cards continued to be a big attraction in easing the financial stress that many of the families experience. In total, 870 food cards were handed out this year. Marie attended eleven births as interpreter and doula.

### Family Support

The Family Support Program provided assistance to women and their families registered in the FESPA School and/or the Mam&Bebi Program. This year Nettie assisted with transportation and/or interpretation at 270 appointments. The women expressed gratitude for the excellent assistance they received.

## Employment Services Located at Aylmer Community Services 25 Centre Street

By Susan Loewen, Employment Services Worker

The total number of people accessing our centre from Sept 2011 to Aug 31, 2012 was 15 986; about 50% were of Low German background. They came for a variety of services relating to employment. Thirty-two percent of the people the counsellor worked with (for job search strategies such as creating resumes, cover letters and marketing to local employers) were LG; this is a slight increase from last year. Also noticeably increased were those who are exploring options of returning to school or upgrading as it is becoming apparent to our community that an increased level of skills training and literacy is a key element in finding long term, secure employment.

The goal set out by the funder, MTCU, is 75 closed "Service Units" per year. We are currently on target and continue to look at ways to achieve this. Things such as an increase in the number of Job Fairs, Apprenticeship Info sessions, and more advertising on the Low German radio station are new and exciting ways in which we are promoting our services and letting our community know where they can find help. We provide many services; ie, job searches, all of which are offered in Low German. This is very important to the people we serve.

### Facts & Trends

320 resumes prepared for LG clients in 2011/12

20 clients participated in educational and/or workplace upgrading and training.

Employer Services & Work Placements: We assist clients facing barriers (eg. language) or lack experience with the help of a Job Developer. Clients are marketed/promoted to employers for placements where they receive on-the-job training. In many

cases, the client is hired when the placement is over. We also have wage subsidy programs for employers who hire our clients.

There is a definite increase in LG people becoming clients and working with a counsellor on a continuous basis.

There is also a large increase in the number of LG people having resumes done, showing that they are understanding the value in having a resume for job seeking.