

Annual Report 2012-2013



This annual reports attests to the fact that all of our programs have been busy this year and our competent team of staff has done a wonderful job in carrying out the mandate of Mennonite Community Services. This has been a year during which we have been extra busy with funding issues and with implementing changes that were decided on last year.

The communications plan and the Impact Assessment done by the University of Guelph last year is paying dividends. We made presentations on the essence of the Impact Assessment to the municipal councils of Bayham, Malahide and Aylmer and these were very well received. All in all, our presence is seemingly becoming more known in the community. Our Settlement

Stories Quilt Trail has brought people in to our office at 16 Talbot Street and some of the businesses that have our quilts on their premises have experienced a noticeable increase in traffic.

We have continued our efforts to be more visible in the community and it is paying off. Since June we have had a Facebook page and it is bringing results, whether it is for the auction, the store, or employment services. We developed our first newsletter to the churches in the spring. Though it was received well we have had little feedback.

The thrift shop continues to set new records and we are

often reminded that we need more room. The radio station is getting new attention for various reasons. We just completed ten years of broadcasting in August and this is worth celebrating. With new funding and a visionary manager in place, we are looking forward to new innovation in this program.

Finances continue to be a challenge and this is where faith, trust and innovation come into play. The grants we continue to receive attest to the reputation and genuine trust in MCS and for that we are truly thankful. Hard work at the annual auction, a bike-athon, on-line and other donations are gratefully



acknowledged. As we look to the future, the Board has set the terms of reference for a finance team to get ready for larger gifts. We expect continued growth in these areas in the upcoming year.

*Abe Harms,
Executive Director*

De Brigj 105.9 FM

It has been 10 years since our radio began airing programs in August of 2003. During this time it has grown significantly from a one person operation to four part-time staff. At the beginning we broadcasted only



Integration & Inclusion through Information & Education

Monday to Friday at 50 watts. In 2005 we changed over to 250 watts and added Saturday. Our license was due to expire on August 31 of this year; we received a four month administrative license renewal but we anticipate a full seven year license at any time.

We have not had a manager dedicated to overseeing the radio for the last few years, but the radio station has been maintained due to the great quality of staff. With a new manager on board we hope to be more pro-active with our budget and funding. We received some Settlement Innovation funding for the new year and are excited to develop it.

With the Impact Study that the University of Guelph undertook for us we know that

the radio is very much appreciated in the community and is very effective and we have had invitations from the Leamington and Drayton areas to consider setting up a transmission tower there. Live streaming has also been very successful. The radio's world keeps getting bigger.

Three radio staff attended the Low German media conference in Paraguay this last year. Three different businesses undertook to cover the cost of one staff each. The media was extremely beneficial on many levels and we feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in it.

Photo: Radio hosts, Hein Rempel and Maria Dyck, preparing for a day's programming.

Aylmer Resource Centre

ARC: Providing the most current information and referral services to newcomers at different settlement stages; giving the newcomer the ability to make informed decisions about their current settlement needs.

Did you know:

In the 2012-2013 year, MCS Settlement Workers in the ARC (Aylmer Resource Centre) serviced 876 family units; the total number of individuals was 2,264. The average appointment lasted 49.47 minutes.

Volunteer Driver Program drivers made a total of 616 trips and drove a total of 55,798 kms.

In 2012—2013, the ARC collaborated with more than 29 agencies and/or organizations including the St. Thomas—Elgin Local Immigration Partnership, local public and private schools, local financial institutions, ODSP, OW, the Christmas Care Program and Probation Office.

One of the greatest challenges ARC staff face when working with newcomers is ensuring that all clients are informed of their rights, responsibilities, and choices pertaining to their settlement needs.

The ARC promotes informed decision-making by working closely with the Low German Radio station to disseminate information in a timely and accurate fashion. Situations often become unnecessarily complicated when self-appointed representatives and/or for-profit

representatives fail to recognize the unique challenges faced by Low German newcomers such as language and social skills barriers.

In the upcoming year, the ARC will work to strengthen community connections with various social service agencies and groups and with local church leadership.



One of the first stops for many families new to Canada is the Aylmer Resource Centre. Often, they are accompanied or referred by relatives or friends.

A Newcomer's Story

John came to Canada with his wife and child in April 2012 in hopes of a better future for himself and his family. He came to the Aylmer Resource Centre at the beginning of May with questions about how his wife, who was a Canadian citizen, could sponsor him as a Permanent Resident. John's wife was born to Canadian parents living in Mexico but she had also never been to Canada, so she was not familiar with the process of applying either.

We referred John to the designated medical professionals and guided him through the application process of becoming a

Permanent Resident. John is a punctual and conscientious person so it was rewarding to work with him. He was attentive to instructions and followed them meticulously. We encouraged him to become involved in the community while he waited for his Permanent Resident application to process and he eagerly did so.

John did not speak any English at the beginning. In subsequent interactions, though, we noticed that he was beginning to use a few words so we made a point of switching to English whenever we talked. Initially, we had to repeat almost everything in Low German,

but with each passing week, he spoke and understood more.

We began to anticipate John's calls because he always called the same day and at the same time of the week. Occasionally he had questions about a letter he had received from Immigration Canada or when his Visitor status expired and he needed to renew it. When their second child was born, John and his wife were excited but they needed help with registering the baby and applying for a birth certificate. Other times John had questions about health care or work opportunities he was interested in.

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FESPA

FESPA (Family Education Support Project of Aylmer): We seek to inform, teach and assist mainly Low German speaking newcomer women and preschoolers who are at risk in their adaptation to Canada.

2012-2013 Highlights

- One of our ESL teachers, Avril Saunders-Currie, volunteered for the entire 2012-2013 FESPA school year!
- Nettie Peters retired as Family Support worker after twelve years of service. Tiena Bartsch was hired to fill Nettie's role.
- A Cookbook Fundraiser was coordinated to assist in covering a budget shortfall.
- The CAPC/CPNP funding extension application for 2014-2017 was completed.
- 33 women & 40 children registered in the three-day FESPA program.
- 27 women & 35 children registered in one-day FESPA program.
- 41 women participated in the Mam&Bebi program; 22 babies were born during the year; the Mam&Bebi Outreach Worker made 558 home visits and handed out 925 \$10 food cards.
- The Family Support Worker accompanied clients to 287 appointments.

FESPA School: Opportunities for Learning & Growth

This year, one of the classes from the three-day FESPA program visited different sites on the Settlement Stories Quilt Trail as part of their learning experience. Afterwards, each student used a computer and photos taken on the field trips to create a

Looking Ahead: 2013—2014

In the coming year, FESPA will continue to help women and children who are new to Canada by creating an environment within the FESPA school that encourages and supports learning for women and children. FESPA will also provide teaching and care for pre and postnatal mothers through Mam&Bebi and will ensure families receive transportation and interpretation at appointments through the Family Support Program. Another focus in the upcoming year will be the transition of leadership as the current FESPA coordinator will retire at the end of the 2013-2014 school season. Some of the challenges FESPA will work through this year are operating within a limited budget, raising extra funds to cover the budget shortfall, and working with a reduced ESL staff.

Did You Know: At FESPA we are able to invest many hours into the life of each participant in our programs.

PowerPoint presentation for the Celebration Day ceremony held in May. These presentations were very challenging for the women as many of them had never presented to a large group of people before. The ESL instructor said, "Their sense of accomplishment in having achieved this task is palpable."



Photos, top: A Health Unit staff teaches on infant healthy brain development at the FESPA Health Fair in November as Mam&Bebi outreach worker, Marie Dyck, looks on. Bottom: FESPA students received certificates of achievement at the Celebration Day ceremonies.



A Newcomer's Story *cont'd from pg 2*

When he finally received his Work Permit, John connected with one of his many new friends and began working right away.

This past July, John received his Permanent Residency. When we spoke on the telephone about what to expect when he arrived at the Immigration

office, our conversation was entirely in English. It is impressive that after only one and a half years in Canada John is speaking and understanding the language.

John went through a process that is typical for newcomers. He needed some guidance and advice about various

applications and processes He asked many questions about where to find services in Ontario. Over the course of the year, he called less often as he became confident in speaking English and in his own connections.

Welcome to Canada, John!

Employment Services

Located at 25 Centre St, Aylmer

Employment Services: Providing support services in English and Low German to the Aylmer and surrounding communities; serving to advocate for those seeking employment and/or re-training & assisting people in overcoming barriers they face in this pursuit.

*Did You Know:
The Employment Counselor provides support and cultivates relationships with employers to promote clients and use of our services.
This program also fosters positive relationships with other agencies/ service providers in Elgin County to ensure that the client(s) gets the best possible service.
The total number of people accessing our centre from Sept 1 2012 to Aug 30, 2013 was 18 620.
This is a significant increase since last year. About 60 percent of these are of LG background.*

2012—2013 Highlights

Job Fairs: MCS participated in numerous job fairs in 2012-2013. This led to more clients getting jobs. One of note was the Project Ojibwa job fair located in Pt. Burwell where many of our clients obtained employment.

Summer Student: MCS was approved for funding through the Canada Summer Jobs Services to hire a student to assist the Employment Counselor from June to August. This was very beneficial to both the counselor and student. MCS is planning to apply again for the coming year.

Resume Development: 365 resumes were created for LG clients, an average of one resume per day. This is an increase from the last year. There has also been an increase of entire families coming to the centre to get help with resumes and job

search. Another change is that many LG clients are asking for a cover letter to go with their resume.

Educational Upgrading and Skills Training: 22 clients have gone through or are currently in educational upgrading or training. Ongoing support is provided to ensure success.

Employer Services and Work Placements: Employment Services worked together with a job developer to market and promote clients to employers. These were often clients who had barriers or needed to gain some experience through on-the-job training. In many cases, the client was hired after their placement was over and continued to grow both in work experience and confidence in themselves. We also promoted services for employers who hired our clients such as wage

subsidies. Ten past and present clients have been placed with employers.

Challenges

A challenge many of our clients face is the lack of a high school diploma. This is ongoing and we continue to advocate for the importance of creative solutions in helping people overcome this barrier to employment.

Goals for 2013-2014

- Continue to meet the funding targets for all programs including a new program assisting youth (ages 15-29) obtain job skills.
- Increase awareness of our programs to local employers so that they are more knowledgeable of the benefits of working with Aylmer Community Services Centre to meet their employment needs.
- Continue to serve the needs of the community.
- Continue to meet the objectives set out in our business plan.

Support Leads to Success

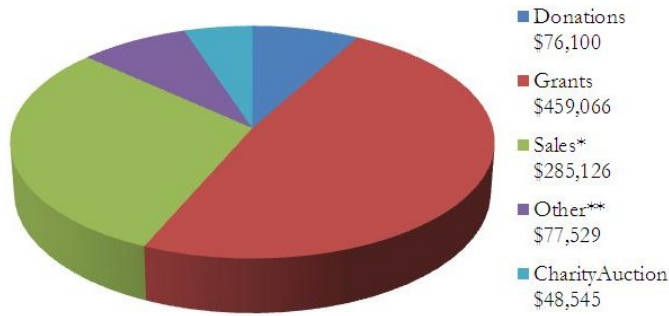
A client came to Aylmer Community Services who was from a culture that is typically self-sustaining. He was in his late 20's and was just learning to navigate what we might call "mainstream society". He was learning how to interact with the local community and culture but there was a lot he needed to learn in order to achieve the independence he desired. Some of the things we worked on before placing him with an employer were presentation and skills sets relating to job searching and creating a resume. The placement was very successful and the client has now obtained full-time employment and is a contributing member of society.

MCS Employment Counselor, Susan Loewen (right), provides ongoing support to job seekers at Aylmer Community Services.



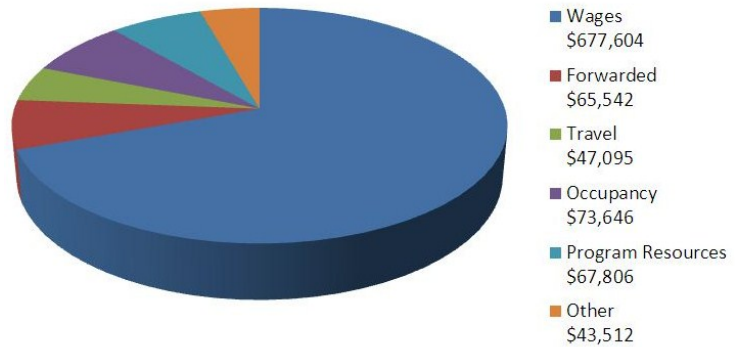
MCS Financial Report, 2012-2013

Sources of Income



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

Sources of Expenses



Aylmer Mennonite Community Store

A Place Where Community Happens...

The thrift store represents much more than the low-priced, quality used items people find on the shelves. It is also about being part of a caring community. A story told by a customer to store manager, Linda Miller, illustrates this aspect of the store. The customer told how she had been waiting in the checkout line with an item she needed for her husband who had recently had surgery. She didn't have the money that day but planned to ask Linda to hold it for her for a few days. Before she had the chance to ask, the customer in line behind her insisted on paying for the item. She refused to give her name or phone number so she could be paid back. The customer was deeply touched by the stranger's kindness.

Did You Know:

The highest bid on a Silent Auction item was \$450! This was for a Gibson Lap Steel Guitar that sold in May.

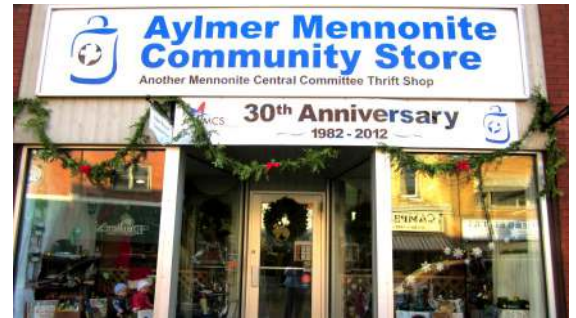
2012-2013 Highlights

- We celebrated our 30th Anniversary in November 2012.
- In June 2013 we became tax-free.
- This year, new sales records were set at more than \$1,600 in one day and more than \$19,000 in one month.
- Both store windows were used for the Silent Auction this year; this created a \$2,500 plus increase in Silent Auction sales from the previous year for a total of over \$9,923.
- The book section was reorganized and moved to the front of the store. We started pricing books individually; sales increased considerably from last year to more than \$9,300.

Looking Ahead

Lack of space is an ongoing challenge and requires a great deal of creativity with displays. In the coming year the clothing department will undergo organizational changes and customers will find items more easily as signs are installed throughout the store.

Photos: A banner (top) and a cake served by staff and volunteers (bottom) to commemorate 30 years of serving the community.



We offer affordable clothing and household items. We serve as a recycler in allowing good, saleable household items to stay out of landfills. We provide a place for volunteers to support their community locally as well as the less fortunate globally.



13th Annual Aylmer Charity Auction & Family Fun Run

Changes Positive for 2013 Auction

- A formal dinner, catered by Mamma G's Catering, was held prior to the Charity Auction. This year, guests purchased tickets to attend. They were addressed by Wendell Graves, CAO of the City of St. Thomas, on the topic of community. Wendell's talk tied in with the planning committee's goals and vision for the year and was well received by all in attendance. All of the operating costs for the auction were covered by the funds raised through the dinner.
- This year's committee focussed on soliciting support from businesses through donations and advertising. A larger speaker system in the arena on auction day helped maintain bidders' attention.
- The auction had a record-breaking income: thanks be to God! This may be due in part to the improving economy, but it is also believed that the extra efforts in advertising helped to broaden people's perspective of MCS.



20102—2013 Auction Highlights

- Total raised: \$48,545.00.
- \$16,386.30 was raised through 15 food booths.
- \$17,881.50 was raised through donated auction items.
- Approximately 200 volunteers helped with the auction.

Photos from top left: Alfredo Marroquin, St. Thomas—Elgin Local Immigration Partnership, served papusas to auction-goer, John Siemens; an auctioneer draws bids from the crowd at MCS' 13th annual auction; a hand-made dining set, one of the many items donated for auction; about 150 volunteers attended an appreciation picnic held at the Old Colony Church Park in Bayham Township.

Mennonite Community Services

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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