

April 1, 2018 - March 31, 2019 ANNUAL REPORT



Executive Director's Report

It has been another year of faithfully linking resources with needs, and the needs were vast and varied.

When staff checked statistics for this last year they noticed a significant increase in new newcomer family arrivals and it became clearer why the work seemed so unrelenting. 127 first time families came in for service last year, which is a 40% increase from the average of the previous 4 years.

We have also seen a new trend among our newcomers. Families with teenagers was so prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s is less common. What we tend to see now is many young families and newly married couples. These new families need the same type of help that most of us needed 40 or so years ago! Perhaps they need it more than we did as things have become less personal and more technical. Immigration officials are much less available than they used to be.

People need our Employment Program to help them find work. They need our Settlement Program to ascertain their legal status, assistance to apply for OHIP cards, Social Insurance Numbers, and Child Tax Benefits among many other documents. The women need our Family Education and Support Program (FESPA) and our prenatal program so they can access classes to

learn English and life skills that are needed to make Canada their new home. FESPA is uniquely tailored for Mennonite moms so they can bring along their preschool children to attend the school readiness program.

Newcomers need our ethnic radio in the first few years as a window to the world. Many would otherwise not be able to access news and information they need. The thrift store continues to be a great place to shop, to volunteer, to feel included in a caring community, to build friendships and interact with the wider community.

All our programs are growing and needing more space; it is especially evident in our thrift store. Our thrift store had record sales again this last year. The Board struck a Building Feasibility committee to look into our needs and signed an agreement to purchase the 300 Talbot Street East property.

We regularly hear and see the positive results through our programs. Children are more ready and confident to begin school; women share of how

they have gained confidence to speak for themselves at medical appointments and in their interactions with the school of their children. Men quickly gain respect from their employers and many become entrepreneurs after a few years.

It is together we are able to form an inspiring and growing community.

Abe Harms, Executive Director



127
First time families came in for services last year.



Newcomer Settlement Services and Volunteer Driver Program



The Newcomer Settlement Services program exceeded targets this past fiscal year. The three Settlement staff at the Aylmer Resource Centre welcomed 127 new families to Ontario in the 2018-19 fiscal year, meaning that they accessed settlement services at MCS for the first time. The majority of the newcomers settling in this area are of the Low German Mennonite background. Staff met with families and individuals moving into Elgin County but also into Perth, Norfolk and Essex Counties and a few from the Niagara area. Of the total new families, 60 arrived in Canada for the very first time within the last year and 35 having arrived within the last 3 years. The remaining 32 had been in Canada previously. Some may have visited with family and after a few trips decided to stay in Canada while others are seasonally travelling back and forth.

Mexico is consistently the most common country of origin although the region of Mexico from where immigrants come varies somewhat from year to year. More newcomers emigrated from Durango, Campeche and Zacatecas, this past year than from other Mexican States. Aside from Mexico, newcomers also emigrated from Bolivia, United States of America and Belize.



Bolivian newcomers tend to settle more quickly and are generally more successful at language acquisition. Anecdotal evidence explains the difference in that they have fewer opportunities to travel for extended periods of time. The cost of flying to South America with a larger family exceeds the cost of travelling by private vehicle to Mexico for instance. Therefore the Bolivian families expend more energy into making social connections over the winter months and

as a result also become more firmly established than Mexican newcomers who have more opportunities to travel back and forth. Of the newcomers who most recently lived in the United States, almost all have previously lived in Mexico and could therefore be included in the Mexican group.

Demographically, 25% of all of the individuals we served were between the ages of 20 to 29, typically young married couples. Another 20% were between the ages of 30 to 39. These age categories are consistent with the reasons reported for immigrating. Specifically, employment opportunities and family connections were the main reasons for immigrating. Young adults have difficulty earning a decent wage in Latin America and securing affordable housing. This category of people also explains in part the number of families who have previously been in Canada and only accessed Settlement services this year. The young adults have often been to Canada for a temporary stay during their teen years. After their marriage the difficulty in securing employment and independent housing in Latin America draws them to Canada.

Although most clients prefer one-on-one sessions with a Settlement worker, we offered 10 group information sessions, partnering with FESPA and HWC Insurance for a few. Varying levels of the degree of integration and English fluency makes group sessions difficult. Topics included: rights and responsibilities of Citizenship, insurance, organizing documents, civic and income tax information.

The other program located at the Aylmer Resource Centre is the Volunteer Driver program. The 9 volunteer drivers donated 555 hours of their time and drove 33 individuals 19,857 km to various medical and social service appointments. There were times when no volunteer was available. The volunteer drivers also provided a lot of social supports simply by encouraging the participants and visiting with them during the drive and in waiting rooms.

Helen Bergen, Settlement Manager

Number of new families served in the month of June:



Art Exhibit

We hosted our first ever Aylmer Art Exhibit in October at the Old Town Hall Theatre. Elgin County residents were invited to submit original artwork. Over 50 art pieces from 28 artists were showcased, including textiles, photography, woodworking, and more. Funding was provided by a 2018 Community Grant from Kindred Credit Union. The vision behind this free community event was to encourage appreciation of artistic talents in our community with the intention of facilitating a safe and inviting opportunity for artistic talents within the Low German-speaking community to be shared. The Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives collaborated with us to display the submissions; this was a positive partnership. This event was well-received by the community.



THRIFT STORE

The thrift store surpassed expectations with record sales totalling \$311,443 as a result of the strong community support. We received more donations and we had more shoppers than ever before. We know that customers choose to shop at our store because we are a not-for-profit, our prices are reasonable, and they want to support their local community.

We have many faithful customers whom we know by name but we also saw many new faces this year. "Thriftling" is a common hobby for many and we know there are many people who like to take day trips when the weather is nice. We advertised in the Daytripper Magazine to bring more awareness to our store. This magazine is distributed across Southwestern Ontario and draws people from further away. This has been effective and we are advertising with them again.

For our thrift store to be successful we need quality donations, lots of customers,

and many volunteers. We had approximately 80 individuals who contributed more than 13,000 volunteer hours. To give staff and volunteers the opportunity to compare, appreciate, and dream about how we can improve our store we toured the MCC rePurpose Centre and MCC Thrift & Gift Shop on September 26. We sent 48,478 pounds of excess items to this rePurpose Centre.

Three months of every year is dedicated to Christmas and this year was no exception. We began selling Christmas decorations on September 24th. The store turned into a Christmas wonderland, with red and green everywhere!

Because of the continued growth we purchased a cargo van in August to transport electronic and textile recycling. In October we purchased a storage unit for additional overflow, especially during the Christmas season. MCC and Envirotex Recycling Inc regularly picked up excess textiles and household items.



We are pleased to know that people thoroughly enjoy shopping at the store. We often overhear customers answer their phone and say, "I am at my favourite store" or an older volunteer telling us that their grandchildren want to go to "grandma's store." These comments are heartwarming.

Linda Miller, Thrift Store Manager



42,377
Total Customers



\$311,443
Total Sales



\$9,575.57
Total Christmas Sales



13,000
Volunteer Hours

FINANCIAL REPORT

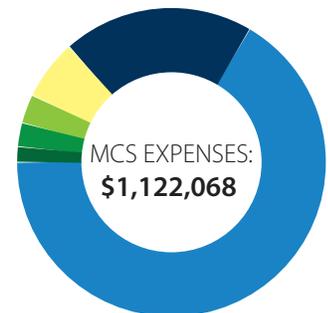
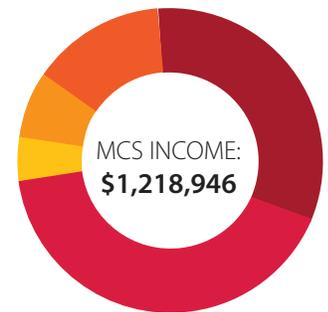
Income

Harvest Bowl	\$50,000
Fundraising	\$83,461
Other (includes fees, donations, rent, reimbursement for travel)	\$175,551
Sales (includes Store, Radio and Post)	\$404,088
Grants	\$505,846

Expenses

Forwarded	\$20,212
Travel	\$26,778
Harvest Bowl	\$33,683
Occupancy	\$70,842
Program Resources	\$222,275
Wages	\$748,278

Charts are based on approximate numbers for further details see audited financial statements.



MCS had 34 staff in total this last year which includes nine seasonal staff for the FESPA program.

FESPA

Happy 25th Anniversary to FESPA! The 2018-2019 school season marked 25 years of FESPA programming and it was a great opportunity to celebrate the on-going work being done for newcomers to Canada.

The Family Education and Support Project of Aylmer consists of:

- ▶ **FESPA School:** 21 weeks of adult life skills and English as a Second Language education and a preschool readiness program for children age 0-6
- ▶ **Mom & Baby:** year-round teaching and support for pre and post natal women and their babies
- ▶ **Family Support:** year-round assistance primarily with medical appointments for registered participants



FESPA School faced a hurdle this year as both of the instructors from last year retired and new staff was needed. Our partners, the TVDSB and the YWCA, struggled to provide teachers. Consequently, we had only one teacher and two part-time volunteers for the first seven weeks of classes. This proved very difficult, particularly for the new instructor as it placed the teaching responsibility onto one person. Fortunately, by December a second teacher was hired. While this meant more class adjustments, it was wonderful to have two teaching staff again.

Our preschool and baby rooms enjoyed a great year of seeing children learn and grow. The children's initial weeks at FESPA are often somewhat tearful as they leave their moms for the first time. However, within a few weeks we heard the patter of little feet as they came running down the hall ahead of their moms into their classroom. Our childcare staff did a wonderful job of caring for each child and it showed by the way the children blossomed under their care.

It was a year of significant hardships in our Mom & Baby and Family Support



Programs. Four deaths connected to the program occurred in the space of ten months: two late term babies, one young father and an expecting mom. The causes of these deaths were varied, but all were heartbreaking and traumatic. In addition to these deaths there were also a few high-risk pregnancies with one mom delivering her baby at just 25 weeks gestation. This baby remains in a fight for his life and with ongoing setbacks he continues to be medically fragile.

Staff provided many hours of support for each of these young families and it is in these times that the need for our programs becomes evident. Many expressed how much the help was appreciated and how they benefited through the teaching and the support. Knowing the difference these programs make provides encouragement to continue in spite of the challenges.

Netti Wall, FESPA Manager

FESPA School Stats:



Family Support Stats:



Mom & Baby Stats:



Harvest Bowl Local Pilot Project

Harvest Bowl was a pilot project during the summer that gleaned vegetables from local farmers. Vegetables were dehydrated and packaged into soup mixes by volunteers and then donated to our local food banks. The project was very successful and we hope the program will continue and become self-sustaining.



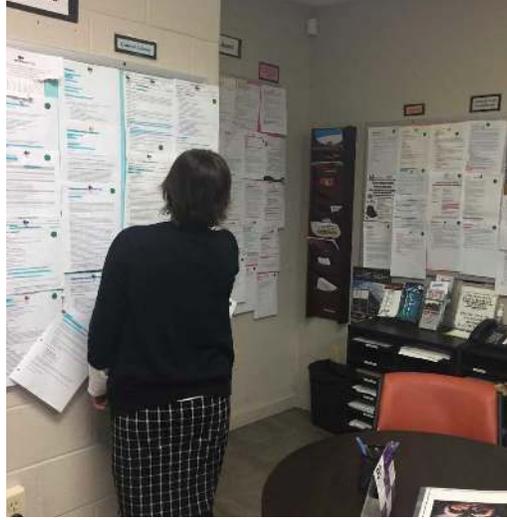
EMPLOYMENT REPORT

2018-2019 was a very busy year again with 8,398 people accessing Aylmer Community Services. People of all ages and backgrounds use our services and 85% of these individuals have a connection to the Low German community. They can access free services in our reception area and the majority actively meet with counselors for assistance with job search, employment/career assessment, resumes and literacy/upgrading referrals. Literacy and upgrading programs continue to be needed because a higher level of literacy, math, and computer skills are requested by many employers.

Employers continue to have high vacancies for their businesses and farms and are looking for reliable and dependable workers. This is challenging as there is a shortage of skilled workers and general labourers. Our program funding offers employers financial incentives to hire and train new employees to help address this need and we easily met our spending targets.



MCS also had two youth-specific programs last fiscal year; one for youth with no work experience (Youth Job Link) and the Employing Young Talent Incentive program. Both of these programs classify "youth" as being between the ages of 15 and 29. Both of these programs posed unique challenges in this rural agricultural



area where youth gain work experience at a young age and where many jobs are seasonal. These programs were both discontinued as of March 31st.

Another trend we encountered was a higher percentage of Low German job seekers looking for work who did not have the necessary Social Insurance Number or other documentation to legally work in Canada. This presents a challenge as they need to provide for their families but are not legally entitled to work in Canada.

MCS continues to partner with Fanshawe College Career and Employment Services and YWCA to provide an extensive range of services at 25 Centre Street including employment and career services, referrals to other agencies, literacy, upgrading, apprenticeships, connections to Ontario Works and assistance with Employment Insurance. Ontario Works is on location 5 days a week, Service Canada twice a month, and LEADS Employment Services meets with clients in our facility. These partnerships are extremely advantageous for this community in addressing the complex needs of clients.

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9

Susan Loewen, Employment Services Manager

Message from the Board

Jesus called his church to follow his example in teaching and living his truths. In Matthew 25 he explains what it looks like practically to follow him - feed the hungry, visit the sick and imprisoned, and welcome the stranger. In the 1970s, Mennonite Community Services (MCS) was launched to carry out part of the grand vision. That vision continues to drive the activities of staff and volunteers as we seek to make a greater difference in our community. In the last year we have experienced record volume of service in all our programs. Along with government funding, the thrift store has been the key funder of our programs. It has succeeded beyond our projections through the efforts of staff, volunteers, shoppers, and donors.

Every 3 years the Board develops a new strategic plan to focus our efforts in the short-term. Last fall we committed to ensuring that 1) the organization is run well, 2) the programs are targeted on the needs and 3) we communicate well with each other, our constituents, supporters, and funders. The pursuit of another property that will facilitate continued growth of MCS in our key goals is a direct outcome of this plan.

As a Board we wish to thank the many efforts of donors, supporters, volunteers, staff, and funders for the past success and vision for the future. Many of us were strangers in this country once, so now we can welcome others.

Eddy Rempel, on behalf of the Board of Directors

Board of Directors

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Thank You To Our Funders

- ▶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- ▶ Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- ▶ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- ▶ Newcomer Settlement Program
- ▶ Public Health Agency of Canada
- ▶ United Way of Elgin Middlesex
- ▶ Kindred Credit Union
- ▶ Faith Communities
- ▶ Individual Donors

The radio is celebrating over 15 years on the air. It seems that there have been more changes in the last three years than in the first twelve years. In September of 2016 a new software program was implemented to replace the one that had been used since the radio started in 2003. The new software (RadioDJ) was not only more user friendly but it came filled with many powerful features. These features through automation allowed for an increase in on-air hours. In April 2017 we began airing eight hours a day, six days a week. Then in December 2017 we started airing 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This was made possible through automation. Staff time decreased because Hein Rempel retired and Maria Dyck reduced her time to one day a week. Susie Peters, who had volunteered at the radio previously, joined the radio staff for a couple hours a week.

We currently produce 13 programs here at De Brigj with the help of some very talented and generous volunteers. To comply with CRTC we aim to have at least 88% content in German, the remaining on-air time can be English programming. In September 2018 we started airing Words of Truth, produced locally, and in October

we started airing Adventures in Odyssey produced by Focus on the Family. We have received a good response for both programs.

The radio program continues to have growth in sales. Advertising sales were

Radio staff helped to facilitate three concerts this past year. Two of the concerts were in Aylmer and one was in the Leamington area. These concerts were well attended. Two of the concerts were organized as a fundraiser for several agencies, including our local food bank.

De Brigj continues to gain recognition and respect in the community. For example, a talent booking agency from London had De Brigj air promotions for two major events: the High Valley Concert and the Terry Clarke concert.

Schools, service agencies, and the health unit also continue to utilize the radio as a means of getting their message out.

up 18% from the previous year although sponsorship sales experienced a slight decline. The receipted donations unfortunately suffered a substantial decline, while the un-receipted donations showed only a marginal decline from the previous year. Overall the total income for the last fiscal year was up 2% from the previous year while the expenses dropped 17%. Looking ahead the radio will continue to explore opportunities in automation as a means to cut costs while not sacrificing quality of programming or service.

There are many opportunities to expand the radio into other areas. The Kitchener, Leamington and Niagara regions would very much appreciate a German radio station in their areas. Currently they can live stream via our website, however there are many who cannot access our radio via the internet but would be able to tune in via radio.

Currently the radio staff consist of one full time and four part-time staff. I see De Brigj as an integral part of this community; one that will not only continue, but excel in the coming years.

Abe Wall, Radio Manager



The 4th Annual Charity Motorcycle Ride in support of MCS was a great success! This 250 km ride was held Saturday, June 16, 2018 with a total of 45 riders and an additional 9 passengers. The group enjoyed the scenic route from Aylmer to Port Burwell, Port Rowan, by-passing Turkey Point, and Port Dover to Cayuga along the Lakefront Trails through beautiful cottage country.

