

April 1, 2019 - March 31, 2020

ANNUAL REPORT



Executive Director's Report

This past year was marked by planned changes and expansion, but the progress initiated by MCS came to a totally unexpected end, faced with a pandemic.

MCS has served more people this last year than ever before. All of our programs had been running at full capacity. The Thrift Store experienced enlargement, for Employment Services enlargement is happening and Settlement Services is waiting. In September when our bid to buy 300 Talbot Street West became a reality, it quickly became apparent that the space available to us at the new facility would only allow growth for the thrift store.

After a quick study we realized MCS would be better equipped by keeping the properties at 16 and 20 Talbot Street and offering small units to other tenants at 300 Talbot Street West. Although this would be harder in the short term it would be easier in the long term. The space formerly used by the community thrift store is now being renovated to house an expanded Aylmer Community Services. This is where we do our employment services together with Fanshawe College and the YWCA. Our settlement services offices will stay where they are. This arrangement will also allow the GED program that Fanshawe offers as well as Ontario Works to be in our facility, close to our settlement program.

Before the year ended it was clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would change the world as we knew it. Normal would no longer be normal and service would need to be done differently. The store was closed before the year was up and the radio has taken on a much bigger and vital function in our community. South-west Public Health recently completed a study on the Low German speaking communities and how to serve them better. MCS was part of the advisory committee and it was determined that Public Health would make more use of our radio. As the pandemic forced the closure of most face-to-face services, the radio took on a new vitality, not only in Elgin County but also in neighbouring counties.

People continue to be generous with their time and resources and God is constant with his promises. Every flower that blooms and every season of the year are gifts of God he has promised. *Gen. 8:22* We are optimistic about next year.



16 Talbot Street East, Aylmer, ON N5H 1H4
519.765.3020 • mcon.org

Find us on:  

[@mennonitecommunityservices](https://www.instagram.com/mennonitecommunityservices)

THRIFT STORE REPORT

The Aylmer Thrift Store, formerly the Aylmer Mennonite Community Store, had a monumental year! Being in the community for 37 years, we are known as a trustworthy place for donating items and shopping for affordable used goods. Because of a generous community, we had outgrown our location at 20 Talbot Street East. We needed much more room, and at 300 Talbot St W we have more than three times as much.

Store staff and volunteers helped fund-raise by hosting a yard sale and a furniture sale. From their hard work, these two events raised \$2,459.00.

September 28th started a two-month physical journey to opening the new

Aylmer Thrift Store. This effort involved many meetings and decisions, renovations, new staff, new volunteers, teamwork, and community support. Blessings from the hard work were felt when we opened. After being closed for 9 business days, a line-up was waiting to get in on the morning of November 28th. Customers expressed awe for the new store and sales during the first week more than made up for the almost 2 weeks of no sales.

The official Grand Opening of the Aylmer Thrift Store took place on February 28th. It was a great day and a big success with about 100 people attending the opening ceremony. Celebrations continued throughout the day.

It was a busy year with activity and community events. In June, we hosted 46 Grade 4 and 5 students from Davenport Public School with a scavenger hunt to learn about the mission of the store and how we recycle, reuse, and repurpose. In July, we participated in the town's Sidewalk Sale. In September, we displayed quilts and demonstrated quilting at Culture Days at the Aylmer Library. In February, the library invited us to do a Fashion Show, which was an excellent opportunity to display the quality of clothing we sell. In February, we also hosted the Aylmer Chamber of Commerce Business After 5 in our new location.

This new and bigger location has also brought some challenges and new ways

of doing things. Volunteers found the change hard as there were suddenly department leaders in charge of various parts of the store. Staff had to rely on one another as no one person knew everything that goes on in such a big place. The volume of throughput is so much larger. We are still in the learning phase. We were very fortunate to have a summer student from June to August. Two new staff were hired in the fall to help with receiving and processing at the new location.

March brought new challenges with the store closing due to COVID-19. This has initiated changes on how we will work in the future, but I am positive that as a community we will get through this and come out stronger.

Thanks to all who prayed for the new store to happen. Thanks, and credit goes to God for his provision and leading us in this journey. Thanks to the Board of Directors, a wonderful staff team, the contractors and renovators, the donors, the volunteers and all other participants in this store expansion. Blessings as we go on in faith for better days ahead.

By Linda Miller, Thrift Store Manager



Karen Vecchio, MP Elgin-Middlesex-London, with Board Chair Eddy Rempel and ED Abe Harms



43,042

Total Customers



\$383,917

Annual Sales



17,447

Volunteer Hours



100+

Volunteers of All Ages



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

AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE

The Aylmer Resource Centre had a full year again, serving clients through the Volunteer Driver Program, Visitation/Itinerant, and the Newcomer Settlement Program.

The Volunteer Driver program helped 16 individuals access health care services. All but two lived in Eastern Elgin County. We were blessed to have 5 volunteers who drove 11,523 km and dedicated 294 hours of their time. The main challenge in this program was finding stable volunteers able to commit the time.

Participants were very grateful for the support. Aside from transporting and/or interpreting, volunteers also provided encouragement to participants. One participant, on a fixed income and unable to drive herself, expressed her gratitude saying she "did not know how [she] would have done it since there is no car or bus to take her to St. Thomas or London". Her friends and family work during the day and are unable to take her to all of the medical appointments. She averaged between 2-3 appointments per month.

Newcomer Settlement Program staff provided support through orientation and

information sessions to newcomers. Of the total 122 new families, 54 had been in Canada for less than a year and 38 were families who had been in Canada between one and three years when they accessed newcomer services for the first time.

In-person services remained the preferred method of contact for newcomers with 92% of all services offered onsite and in person. The number of contacts by email increased sharply over the last two years, however telephone calls still outnumbered email enquiries. Accessing services independently and online continued to be a challenge for many.

The top three topics covered in orientation sessions pertained to maintaining legal status in Canada. For example, newcomers sought clarity on the requirements to apply for Canadian Citizenship and understanding correspondence sent by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Direct referrals to community services, enquiries about health services and family benefits ranked next highest in the top fifteen activities.

Throughout the year Settlement staff offered 10 group sessions on a variety

of topics including information on temporary workers, Will and Estate planning, Personal Support Worker training, requirements to apply for Citizenship, health and an orientation to downtown Aylmer.

In June, Peter and Mary Froese accepted the Itinerant Worker position vacated by Mary Peters. They successfully connected with 22 families to assess whether there were additional unmet needs as well as assisting clients on-site. Settlement staff will be able to follow up on the identified needs. The connection between MCS and the churches was also strengthened as a result of the intentional networking done by the Itinerant Workers.

By Helen Bergen, ARC Manager



1,547
Clients
Accessed
Settlement Services

HOT TOPIC:

Open Work Permit holders vs.
Temporary Foreign Workers

FINANCIAL REPORT

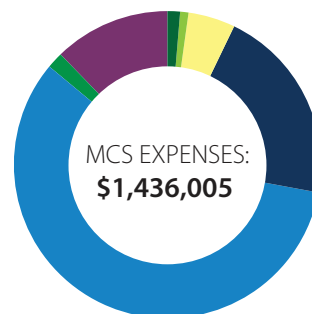
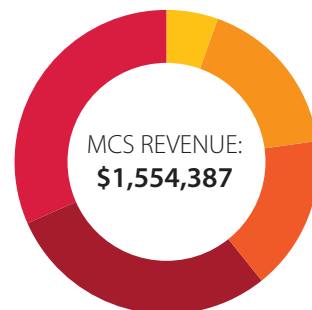
Revenue

Harvest Bowl	\$84,344
Fundraising	\$267,725
Other (includes fees, donations, rent, reimbursement for travel)	\$254,040
Sales (includes Store, Radio and Post)	\$450,055
Grants	\$488,223

Expenses

Forwarded	\$18,988
Travel	\$24,572
Harvest Bowl	\$12,578
Occupancy	\$71,169
Program Resources	\$298,050
Wages	\$834,630
300 Talbot Renovations & Equipment	\$176,018

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



MCS had 37 staff in total this last year which includes nine seasonal staff and two summer students.



FESPA

The Family Education and Support Project Aylmer (FESPA) consists of three programs:

FESPA School:

The three-day a week program, filled to capacity, went well. The one-day a week program had a slow start as the YWCA, a partnering agency, was not able to provide us with a teacher, given their limited funding. This resulted in fewer students, but the program was still worthwhile.

A record number of women took the initiative to call and ask to be registered. All baby room spots were filled within three days and remained full throughout the year. Most of our year was blissfully serene, though we were impacted somewhat by a series of teacher strike days, requiring mothers to be home for their school-age children. Fortunately, our two wonderful volunteers were able to help during those days. The women repeatedly told us that they loved coming to FESPA; they enjoyed the atmosphere, the friendships they built, as well as the confidence and independence they gained through all they were learning in the program.

Our preschool and baby room caregivers enjoyed a wonderful year with the children. We heard numerous reports of the children's determination to come to FESPA and to attend regularly.

All classes came to an abrupt halt in March when physical distancing measures were implemented because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a disappointing end to the program year, especially the cancelation of the closing celebrations.

Mom & Baby:

This program experienced some tragedies this year. Of the 18 babies born, not all were healthy. One family lost their baby at 25 weeks of gestation, and another was born premature and passed away after 10 months. Following these losses, the program experienced a few months of slow down, in both numbers and activities. In January, however, there was an influx of new registrations and by the end of the program year num-


bers had almost doubled. The COVID-19 pandemic changed many things as we were unable to continue with group sessions and in-home visits. Most contact had to be done by phone and teachings conducted via WhatsApp videos.

Family Support Program:

Our Support staff aided families through appointments, reminders, transportation, interpretation, advocacy and support. The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes to this program as all non-essential appointments were cancelled by medical offices. Occasionally they also restricted staff from physically attending appointments. A number of service providers however, recognized the need for our services and made special allowances for staff to continue interpreting. In spite of the challenges, it was a worthwhile year and there were many wonderful moments together.

By Netti Wall, FESPA Manager

FESPA School Stats:

84 Children
21 New Students
34 Returning Students 





Mom & Baby Stats:

 **525** \$10 Food Cards Provided
220 \$25 Food Cards Provided
22 Vitamin Certificates

254 Home Visits
+
10 phone calls 'in place of' 

Family Support Stats:

68 FESPA School Appointments
362 Mom & Baby Appointments

45 Women  **657** Prenatal Contacts Made  **469** Postnatal Contacts Made  **18** Babies Born 

▶ EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

Employment Services at 25 Centre Street had an exceptional year with 9,500 people accessing joint employment services with 4,179 specifically served by MCS staff. Ninety percent had Low German connections.

Improved marketing and our online presence through Instagram and Facebook resulted in more community awareness, which led to increased literacy/upgrading referrals. Employers consistently had high vacancy rates and a shortage of skilled workers. Our program funding helps employers with financial incentives to hire and train new employees.

More clients completed upgrading/training in the last fiscal year and a record number of clients pursued higher education, training and academic upgrading to increase their levels of literacy, math, and computer skills.

Low German job seekers without Social Insurance Number or other documentation to legally work in Canada continue to surface. Together with Settlement staff, we are working to find solutions and resources for employers and clients.

Our funder has undergone another name change; the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities became Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

MCS continues to partner with Fanshawe Career & Employment Services, the YWCA, Ontario Works, and Service Canada to provide extensive services. These partnerships will grow as we relocate to 20 Talbot Street East (previous thrift store). This includes a classroom for Fanshawe's GED program. Plans have been approved, renovations begun and relocation will commence when these are completed. The unprecedented events of COVID-19



resulted in a "State of Emergency" which resulted in the closure of our office to the public on March 17th, 2020. Since then, Employment Services staff have been working from home, assisting clients virtually via phone, email, texting and using online platforms. Because many other businesses were also ordered to close and employees laid off our staff have been very busy assisting clients with applying for government programs.

We continue to provide employment services online and have created virtual options. To ensure job seekers are still able to view job openings, we post them in the window of the new location. This has generated positive interest; not only in the job postings, but it has also informed the public about our new location. Employers who need workers also connect with us online and over the phone so we continue to post their vacancies. We have had to adjust the ways we serve clients but we remain committed to serving our community.

By Susan Loewen, Employment Services Manager

Message from the Board

The life of Mennonite Community Services (MCS) board members continues to be exciting. A year ago, we expected fundraising to purchase a property for an expanded store. This is important to our strategic plan to 1) build organizational capacity, 2) develop necessary programs, and 3) communicate well.

Though it was challenging to dream this expansion into existence in light of our limited resources, we were convinced not acting posed greater risks. Half a million short as the closing approached, our efforts were falling short. Yet God reassured me that He would take care of us.

Sure enough, He intervened in an amazing way! He raised up resources via a group of generous supporters, who loaned us 100% of the purchase price at generous rates. This allowed us to possess 300 Talbot Street West and renovate the old store as the new Employment Services. We envisioned that after 5 years of increased income, MCS could refinance our mortgage, while building up operational reserves and growing the reach of our services.

The need to halt and reduce services, to mitigate the health crisis affected our finances as we cancelled our regular fundraising events and closed the store, and limited our programs. Nevertheless, God is faithful and will see this through.

The board is grateful to the MCS staff, the volunteers, donors of goods and funds, customers and clients. We also recognize the public's contributions through government grants and third-party donations. Thank you to the constituent churches who provide volunteers. We invite you to continue to partner in this ministry. Please continue to pray for the board, staff, and volunteers as they plan and carry out the work of MCS. In the name of Jesus, we clothe the needy and welcome the stranger.

By Eddy Rempel, Board Chair

Board of Directors

Eddy Rempel, *Chair*

Jacob Berg, *Vice Chair*

Andrew Thiessen, *Treasurer*

Jake Bergen

Jacob Penner

Cornelius Knelsen

Sara Wiebe

Corey Klassen

Franz Loewen

John Wall Sr.

CHPD 105.9 FM

De Brigj Radio will be celebrating its 17th birthday in August. Our licence will also be expiring on August 31st, 2020. We have submitted the renewal application and are now waiting for CRTC to give us another seven-year approval.

De Brigj continues to be extremely blessed with the generosity of volunteers willing to produce various programs such as the Mom-to-Mom program. There are six volunteers who collectively produce a weekly program. One moved to Mexico last year but still sends a program every month.

The Words of Truth program produced by Pastor Mark Barret & Pastor David Kelly ended in January 2020. The intent of the program was to reach an English audience that was unchurched in the Tillsonburg area, however after airing a weekly program for over a year they felt that goal was not being met.

The need for a spiritually uplifting men's program has been discussed for years. In November 2019, that goal was accomplished through a new program called 'Romem Desch' (Around the Table). The program style is a round table discussion of current issues or topics. It was through the relentless efforts of Dan Froese that this came into realization.

The program is still very much in its infancy but has already received positive feedback.

Helen Bergen attended the PMK (Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz) in Detmold Germany in September representing De Brigj. The next Medienkonferenz is scheduled for 2021 right here in Ontario and radio staff have already begun preliminary planning.

This was definitely a year of transformation as the radio experienced substantial staff changes. Maria Dyck retired in June



and Dwayne Froese resigned in October. Daniel Wiebe was hired in October to help with the technical aspect of De Brigj and Nellie Neufeld was hired in December as office administrator/radio host. The current staff consists of four part-time: Susie Peters, Helen Bergen, Daniel Wiebe, Abe Wall; and Nellie Neufeld as full time. This gives De Brigj a total staff complement of 2.47 full time equivalency.

By Abe Wall, Radio Manager



MCS 2019-2020 EVENTS



MCS 19th Annual Charity Auction & Food Fest - June 21, 2019



Staff attending the Low German Media Conference in Detmold Germany in September 2019



Harvest Bowl – providing dehydrated vegetables to food banks in Elgin County



Annual MCS Banquet - 130 people, held May 4, 2019 - Great food and a wonderful presentation about intercultural communication



5th Annual Charity Motorcycle Ride June 12, 2019 - 48 bikers



Staff and volunteers working at the Aylmer Fair in August 2019