

April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021

ANNUAL REPORT



Executive Director's Report

This has been a good year, not easy, but good. Of the 22 years I have overseen the activities of MCS, there have been many changes. Most of these changes were planned and intentional, but some, especially this year were not. In good years as in difficult years our professional, kind, hardworking and resilient staff have shown their dedication.

Whether in Settlement or Employment Services, we fulfilled our quota of services for our funders, even though we were forced to do so much of it virtually. We have virtual platforms like telephone and the internet to connect with agencies and clients, and we could take precautions and also still meet by appointments.

Our Family Education and Store were more impacted as working here virtually is much harder. This called for innovation and change as outlined in the reports.

Our Radio, on the other hand, in its 18th year of operations took on a whole new significance as a special bridge to clients and the community. Public Health relied on the radio to communicate orally to the Low German population what they did in print to the rest of the community.

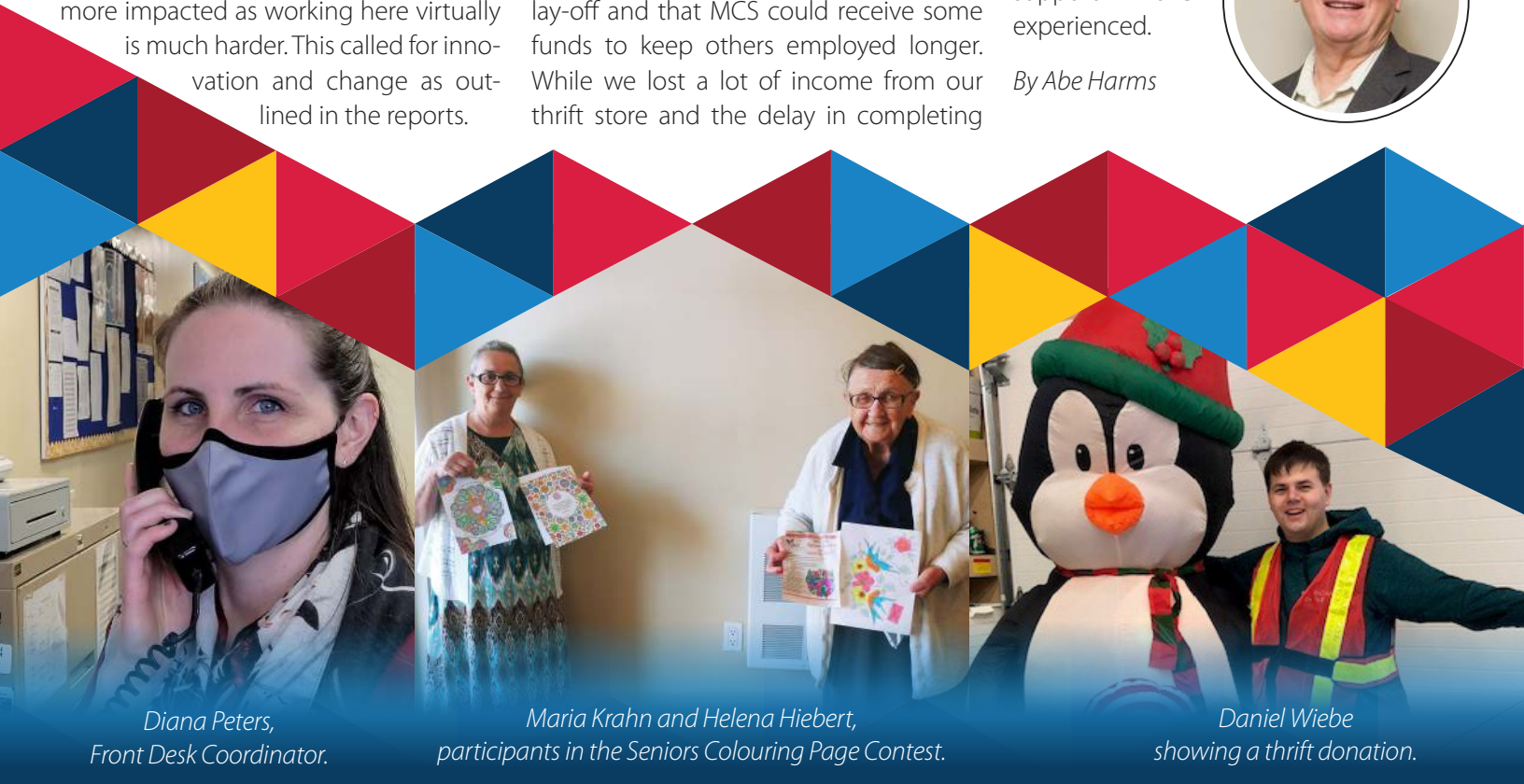
The onboarding of our recently acquired facilities at the Plaza and the 20 Talbot Street renovations are complete, and are now under the capable supervision of John Berg of Radiant Management. Nerds On Site now maintains our computer equipment and the Adam Network is tasked to afford us better cyber security.

It was hard to lay some of the staff off, but we were grateful that they could receive some government assistance during the lay-off and that MCS could receive some funds to keep others employed longer. While we lost a lot of income from our thrift store and the delay in completing

the renovations at 20 Talbot, we got significant help from our governments. While we lost the income from the auction we could not have this last summer, donors were generous in our December giving challenge. While we are still experiencing a cash flow crunch, we have HOPE.

A special thanks to the staff for their dedication and hard work, you have shown your loyalty. The department managers have gone above and beyond any job description and "made a way where there was no way". And as I leave MCS this summer I will continue to root for all of you. I wish Eddy Rempel, as he takes over the Executive Director position in August, all the blessings and support I have experienced.

By Abe Harms



*Diana Peters,
Front Desk Coordinator.*

*Maria Krahn and Helena Hiebert,
participants in the Seniors Colouring Page Contest.*

*Daniel Wiebe
showing a thrift donation.*

AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE REPORT

Settlement Services was an essential service for newcomers in spite of the challenges presented by the ongoing corona virus pandemic. Overall, the number of individuals served was not significantly lower than the previous year. In total, staff connected with 1,422 individuals, or 511 families with the largest number of individuals between the ages of 25 and 44 years of age. Families who had been in Canada 1-3 years accessed services more often than those who were in Canada longer than 4 years.

The number of clients served for the first time was significantly lower. There were 62 new families, compared to the 122 in the previous year, 16 who were in Canada for less than 1 year. The closure of international borders was the main reason for the decline. Border restrictions also impacted the time of year that most families arrived. Historically, more families arrived in Canada during spring. This year more newcomers arrived between September to December inclusively.

There were several contributing factors for the continued large number of clients served. First, the needs of newcomers did not diminish, so many of the supports, referrals and informational sessions continued by telephone or by email to accommodate the restrictions regarding in-person services. Moreover, as other agencies and government organizations moved to remote services, our services were even more important. Clients who would otherwise have independently accessed in-person services struggled with online platforms offered. Unreliable inter-

net connection in rural communities is also a factor for some. The gap between community members who have access to and are able to use online services and those who do not was highlighted.

Identified gaps in the community were affordable housing, availability of family physicians, informal social connections, practical tools or resources for parents of teenagers to improve family relationships, and language classes for men.

Top activities included helping clients access information and services offered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, various health care services, passports information, understanding financial services (i.e. Canada Revenue Agency notices), birth certificates, and Social Insurance Number applications.

The Volunteer Driver Program was especially impacted by the stay-at-home orders. Many medical appointments were cancelled and the participants attended virtual appointments. There were some participants who did not receive optimal care as a result. Virtual conversations with physicians were reported as less helpful than in-person appointments.

There were 8 participants, all living in Aylmer, Malahide or Port Burwell. Three volunteer drivers drove a total of 2,152 kilometres and donated 67 hours of time. Volunteers connected with the participants well and provided additional emotional support and community connections to more isolated participants.

By Helen Bergen, Settlement Manager



Settlement Services had two staff transitions. Diana Peters joined the team in June as the Front Desk Administrator and Volunteer Driver Program Coordinator. Arlie Peters began in October as the Itinerant Settlement Worker, the position vacated by Pete Froese. Mary Froese continued to provide some Itinerant services as well. Sue Thiesen continued in the role of Settlement Worker but worked remotely for many weeks in compliance with the provincial health guidelines.

There was a sharp increase in the number of individuals asking for information and assistance to apply for a Social Insurance Number. Whereas staff assisted 28 individuals in the previous fiscal year, 98 individuals were served during the 2020-21 year. Most of these individuals did not know how to upload documents and submit the forms.

98
Individuals
Served

Most requested assistance were document by Government of Canada, health care, birth certificates, and Social Insurance Numbers.

1422
Individuals
Served

Thank You To Our Fundors:

- ▶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- ▶ Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- ▶ Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- ▶ Newcomer Settlement Program
- ▶ Public Health Agency of Canada
- ▶ United Way of Elgin Middlesex:
 - Local Love in a Global Crisis Fund
 - Emergency Community Support Fund
- ▶ Kindred Credit Union
- ▶ Faith Communities
- ▶ Individual Donors

THRIFT STORE REPORT

This was a year of adjusting and learning. As health and safety guidelines for COVID-19 came into effect, our new location made it easy to implement the requirements of arrows, plexiglass, and limiting the number of customers in at a time. We reduced store hours and donation days. The store was closed for a total of 3.5 months. We increased our online presence as we took our sales online during the lockdowns.



We sold online on Instagram May 4 – 22, 2020 and on Facebook January 18 - February 12, 2021. Online sales were minimal compared to regular daily in-store sales, but it gave customers an option to shop and support us, for which they expressed their thanks.

The community was respectful in not dropping off their goods during the lockdowns. After both lockdowns, donations came in abundance. The first Saturday we



Staff Marie Dyck, student Sara Zacharias, and volunteer Liz Goldsmith, Mar. 4, 2021.

reopened, we received 18 loads in the first half hour, followed by a line-up of vehicles most of the day.

Our volunteers are resilient! We have had so many changes and they stay with us, adjust practices, and keep coming with a smile. With COVID-19 being airborne, we were no longer able to serve snacks to our volunteers safely; this was a sadly missed part of our volunteer ministry. The safety of our volunteers is a high priority and they graciously understood why we were not able to serve snacks and accepted the take-home goody bags we offered.

We celebrated our "one year in our new store" in November combined with a Christmas Customer Appreciation Sale. The day was a success and we hit a daily sales record of \$2,800.

Despite the restrictions on the number of customers in the store at one time, we did fairly well. In August, with high COVID-19 numbers in our area, sales were lower.

With so many donations and with being closed for several months, we had an overabundance of good items that we could not sell. As always, we recycled as much as possible, diverting 77 tons from

landfill via three recycling companies: Ameritex, MCC RePurpose and CP4CP.

As we adjusted our work practices and attitudes, we are thankful to have been able to be open when we were. With God's continued blessing and protection, community support, and staff and volunteers working together we will continue to serve our community. We know that we are an essential part of our community and look forward to serving it for many years to come.

By Linda Miller, Thrift Store Manager



\$299,958
Annual Sales



9,123.25
Volunteer Hours



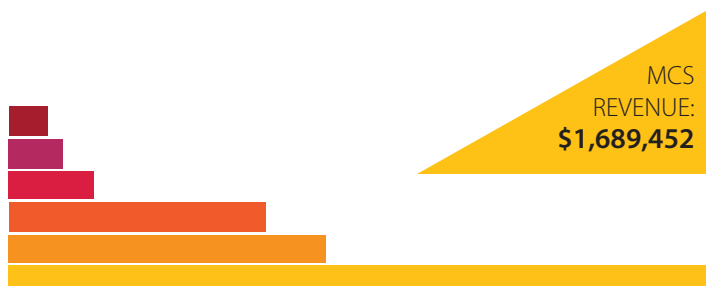
**69 Adult +
15 Student**
Volunteers



23,055
Total Customers

Revenue

Grants	\$814,417
Sales (Radio and Thrift Store Sales)	\$369,853
Other (includes fees, donations and rent)	\$298,329
COVID-19 Government Assistance	\$98,483
Harvest Bowl Project	\$62,460
Fundraising	\$45,910



Expenses

Forwarded	\$0
Travel (includes Volunteer Driver Program / FESPA)	\$8,958
Occupancy (includes rents and insurance)	\$21,161
Harvest Bowl	\$43,325
Loan Interest	\$100,000
Wages	\$800,325
Program Resources	\$908,241



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

MCS had **35** staff in total this last year which includes nine seasonal staff and one summer student.

“May you live in interesting times... We have a unique opportunity.” *Trevor Squires*

In a regularly scheduled program year, the Family Education and Support Project Aylmer offers:

- ▶ **FESPA School:** 20 weeks of English as a Second Language and life skills education for moms and a preschool readiness program for children 0-6 years
- ▶ **Mom & Baby:** year-round teaching and support for pre and post natal babies and their mothers
- ▶ **Family Support:** year-round assistance with appointments for registered participants



MCS Staff Diana Peters recording children's stories for FESPA children to listen to via the radio since we couldn't have in-person FESPA school during the lockdown, Jan. 2021.

As this was not a normal year, many changes were made to adapt to a pandemic. While all of the mandates and goals of the program remained the same, many of the supports were reduced, modified or cancelled this past year.

In our FESPA School we were able to offer ten weeks of in-person classes. Class sizes were reduced to a maximum of eleven women, eight preschoolers and six babies daily. Each woman with her children was able to attend classes one day a week, three hours per day. These cohorts remained the same each week. Staff ensured that all students were screened and the facility was cleaned daily.

During the winter lockdown, some staff were laid off, others worked reduced hours preparing food and activity kits for families. One staff member narrated a short children's story weekly, which aired on our radio, De Brigj.

Within Mom & Baby, group sessions were cancelled all year, with the exception of one social activity at Christmas time. The Outreach Worker continued with home visits when safely able to do so, at other times she offered 'visits' via phone only. Due to the excellent relationships developed with the midwives and the local hospital staff, the Outreach Worker



was able to provide support to mothers at the births, when needed.

The Outreach Worker also created a short radio series titled "Building Healthy Families" which aired on the radio during March.

The Family Support program experienced many changes as well. Appointments were all cancelled, changed to phone calls only and when deemed essential, monitored very closely to reduce time in the office. Again, previously established and trusted relationships with service providers enabled us to continue helping families with various appointments and needs.

There is concern about the long term impact that all these changes will have for the participants and the program. However, there is hope. Our goal is to see the opportunities and actively work towards rebuilding and new growth.

By Netti Wall, FESPA Manager

FESPA School Stats:



Women in attendance



Children ages 0-6 years

Mom & Baby Stats:



in Grocery Cards Distributed



Home Visits or Phone Calls 'in lieu of'



Award goes to a mom expecting her 15th child!



Family Support Stats:



Appointments Assisted At



Women



First Time Moms



Second Time Returning Moms



Babies Born



EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

It is hard to believe that another year has gone by! At the end of last fiscal year, we had just entered the first of several province-wide lock downs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and begun a new journey: working from home and serving clients in new and innovative ways. This continued throughout this fiscal year and we are still working from home.

MCS continues to partner with Fanshawe Career & Employment and Academic Upgrading, the YWCA, Ontario Works, and Service Canada to provide services as Aylmer Community Services (ACS). In August 2020, ACS moved to our new location in downtown Aylmer, and while we could not celebrate with an open house to welcome the community to our new space, staff began working from the new location when lockdowns lifted. During the year, staff had to be flexible, but we have completed the move as planned and continue to provide excellent services.

MCS, along with all the partners at ACS, transitioned all Employment Services staff to working from their homes, then to the office and then working from home again. Staff were provided with the tools, technology and training to ensure everyone was able to provide satisfactory services to the community. Our computers are connected to our office network which allows us to access what we need. Staff became available by phone, text, email and other electronic formats such as Zoom, and Skype. Working in electronic formats included increased interactions for all of our vari-

ous media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram. We also began doing video presentations for employment services and posting them online.

We assisted individuals in the community who were laid off because of COVID-19 with applications to financial aid programs that were implemented by the federal government to provide assistance to affected individuals.

We continued to provide extensive employment services using virtual options. We continued to display jobs postings in the window to ensure job seekers are still able to physically view them. This has generated positive interest, not only in the job postings themselves, but also lets the community know about our new location.

“Essential” employers had difficulties finding employees. This worker shortage can be attributed to the nature of their “essential” business, expansions, and that many job-seekers are afraid to come into an unknown workspace for fear of contracting COVID-19. The families or foreign workers that the farm/business counts on to return annually were unable to travel due to COVID.

Employers who needed workers connected with us online and over the phone and we continued to post their vacancies.

MCS met or exceeded all the provincial targets in ALL areas measured by the funder.

*By Susan Loewen,
Employment Services Manager*



2,233



Served by MCS Staff



159

New Jobs Posted



139

Employers Served

576

Facebook
Followers



430

Instagram
Followers

38% of all persons connecting with Aylmer Community Services were assisted by MCS Employment staff members.

Board of Directors

- Jacob Berg, *Chair*
- Jake Penner, *Vice Chair*
- Sueann Wiebe, *Secretary*
- Anna Unger, *Treasurer*
- Isaak Peters
- John Wall
- Cornelius Knelsen
- Jake Bergen
- Sara Wiebe

MCS was able to host a mini Ten Thousand Villages Sale in November.



Employment Services Staff Mary Giesbrecht holding a Peace by Chocolate Hey Buddy chocolate bar.



MCS continued to support this project. It now has its own Board of Directors.



Apart from producing radio programs and on-air hosting, the RADIO does a lot of translating and produces voice tracks and videos.

This year we translated and recorded four audios for the Grand Valley Midwives for use on their website.

We also produced 10 podcasts, which can be found on our website, with 10 school officials from across Ontario.

mcsn.org/programs/de-brigj/

CHPD 105.9 FM

This was definitely an interesting year of changes and Covid-19 pandemic challenges. The Radio, being deemed an essential service under the shutdown provisions, was able to continue to operate. Due to the restrictions, I was expecting a decline in advertising, but the slight drop over the year was marginal.

Although the year was filled with constant changes and uncertainty there were also some positive aspects to this pandemic. Funds became available through various sources to help agencies connect with the public in numerous ways. Radio is a really good way to connect with people and, hence, was the recipient of some of these funds. This made it possible for us to purchase two computers, a broadcasting program, some headphones, a mixer, and a phone

interface. The phone interface allows for good quality telephone interviews. The old equipment did not have the quality and versatility we needed during the shutdowns and restrictions.

At the end of June, Daniel Wiebe resigned and we downsized the staff allotment at this time. This required more automation and re-assignment of staff duties. When Susie Peters, host of the morning spot, went on maternity leave September 30th, this vacancy was filled by Maria Friesen. Susie continued with her other tasks until November.

To automate the radio more we changed broadcasting software (RadioBoss), and Fernando Rempel from Nerds On Site set up task automation. Twenty-five broadcasting segments now load automatical-

ly and no longer require staff to manually input them. This created some much needed relief for staff.

The Radio continues to work closely with other agencies and businesses to bring information to our listeners. One such business is Kindred Credit Union who this year developed 23 short 2-3 minute financial segments. These were translated and recorded for airing.

Currently the Radio team consists of Nellie Neufeld, Maria Friesen, Susie Peters, Helen Bergen, and Abe Wall, plus 10 volunteers. The paid staff complement is 1.85 full time equivalency.

By Abe Wall, Radio Manager



MCS 2020-2021 HIGHLIGHTS

In the spring, MCS received special funding through United Way, Local Love in a Global Pandemic, to re-hire Marie Dyck, Aylmer Thrift Store staff, to work from home during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Marie's new role was connecting with seniors by calling them, sending out greeting cards, and organizing a co-

louring contest. The project was a great success. Local businesses donated great prizes and seniors enjoyed this colouring contest. Seniors and their families were overjoyed to be remembered during these difficult times by these simple yet precious interactions.



Marie Dyck calling seniors during the Spring lockdown to connect and encourage them.



MCS hired RMG to maintain all buildings as volunteers could not keep up with the extensive needs of our expanded properties.



Grateful to Nick Neufeld for his support with the electronic recycling.

MCS expanded its online presence to keep pace with all the changes that the pandemic made necessary. This included easier access for those of low English and low computer literacy skills to receive services. Thanks to a grant, from the United Way Elgin Middlesex Emergency Community Relief Fund and the Government of Canada, that made this much needed gateway possible.