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# VOLUNTEERING

## A Traditional Canadian Value

Janet Lautenschlager
VOLUNTARY ACTION DIRECTORATE

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# Foreword

In 1992, volunteering is a way of life for many Canadians. The spirit of volunteerism is rooted in the traditions and values of the pioneers who built this country, and it is inspired by the concept of mutual help and co-operation that lies at the heart of our Native societies.

Although enormous amounts of volunteer time have been devoted to humanitarian causes over the years, history has yet to chronicle these endeavours. This booklet is a first sketch of volunteering in Canada from a historical perspective, drawing together specific examples to illustrate the role of volunteers from earliest times to the present. The volunteer activities highlighted here represent only a small sample of the massive achievements of Canadian volunteers.

The terms "volunteer" and "volunteerism" may never have been used by some of the people whose activities are described. Today, we apply these terms to the community involvement of countless Canadians who have acted of their own choice to meet a need without concern for monetary benefit — people who have translated their sense of civic responsibility into action.

We hope this short history of volunteerism in Canada will help increase public understanding of the size and diversity of voluntary action as a historic force in Canadian society. When added together, the day-to-day efforts of Canadian volunteers over the years have met countless human and social needs and show what can be accomplished through the active involvement of ordinary citizens.

In recognizing the contributions of volunteers from a historical point of view, we hope that modern-day volunteering will become more visible and will achieve its full potential in years to come.

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# 1

# The Volunteer Spirit in Canada
## A deeply rooted tradition

As Canadians, we have a long tradition of voluntary action in pursuit of our social goals. Over the years, volunteering has mobilized enormous energy for the common good. While the direct effects of volunteer work are felt at the individual or community level, the cumulative action of many millions of ordinary citizens from every region of the country has had a profound impact on virtually every aspect of Canadian society — and has, in fact, fostered its growth and development.

Volunteers are ordinary citizens who have chosen to become involved in providing a needed service, solving a problem or advancing a worthy cause. Recognizing a particular need in society, they make the effort to translate ideals into reality without thought of payment.

The traditions upon which Canada was founded and built have influenced the development of our spirit of volunteerism. Beginning with the Native communities and continuing with the European settlers and immigrants from other parts of the world, there has always been a strong emphasis on hard work and self-reliance and on taking responsibility for our own life and actions.

Thinly scattered across a vast land and tested by an often inhospitable climate, Canadians have also been nurtured on an understanding of the benefits of mutual assistance. From the Desjardins credit unions that began in Quebec in 1900 through the diverse farming cooperatives that were established in Western Canada at the beginning of the 20th century to the Antigonish Movement that gave birth to a variety of cooperatives in Atlantic Canada in the 1930s, Canadians have relied on each other for our survival and progress.

There has always been an equally strong tradition in Canada that fostered a sense of responsibility to our neighbours and a concern for all our fellow citizens in need. And, with growing awareness of the impact of chronic poverty, prolonged illness and disabilities, and of the crises that can result from natural disasters and economic events beyond our control,

Canadians have become increasingly sympathetic to the idea that none of us is self-sufficient all of the time.

In our modern society, volunteers supply the human energy that drives many thousands of voluntary organizations and community groups across Canada. Today, some 5.6 million people express their concerns and interests through volunteer work for countless organizations in a wide range of fields. In addition, approximately 13 million Canadians do volunteer work on their own, outside of organized groups.

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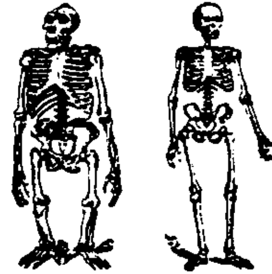

# The Evolution of Our Voluntary Sector

## A distinctly Canadian phenomenon

Most volunteer organizations have been inspired by compassion or a sense of injustice. The past 125 years have seen the birth of countless voluntary organizations in health care, social services, and many other areas, all of which involve volunteers as founders and supporters — both as board members and as front-line volunteers.

While some forms of organized volunteer activity were adapted from European and, later, American and other models, others were "made in Canada" responses to our own particular needs. Yet, as an expression of our own social values, the evolution of volunteerism and the voluntary sector in Canada is unique.

Many of the earliest initiatives in health care and social services in Canada were taken by organizations led by public-spirited citizens. In most of our early communities, it was the voluntary effort of ordinary citizens, often working through their religious or cultural institutions, that led to the establishment of orphanages, hospitals, and homes for the aged, as well as to the creation of health and welfare agencies that worked with families to provide much needed assistance.

As the value of these programs was proven and the financial burden of supporting them became too great for private philanthropy alone, government (at first the municipalities, then the provinces and, later, the federal government) responded to public demand and eventually assumed responsibility for key aspects of the health and welfare system.

Voluntary organizations mirror the times in which they exist, and their role in human services today has expanded and diversified accordingly. Although government at all levels now supports a variety of programs to ensure what is known as the "social welfare safety net", private volunteer organizations remain a vital and highly visible component of the vast network of programs and services on which communities rely.

While volunteers have always played an integral role in social welfare, health care and disaster relief, voluntary activity is not restricted to the field of human services. Through advocacy groups, volunteers have shaped our vision of a more just social order.

They have also been the backbone of our political system. In the modern era, they are actively involved in such areas as sports and recreation, arts and culture, education and training, and environmental protection.

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# Human Services and Our Religious Heritage

Our Canadian tradition of helping neighbours and fellow citizens is based, at least in part, on the concept of loving our neighbours and of the moral virtue of charity. In short, a person blessed by good fortune is regarded as having the responsibility to help those less fortunate. These values are shared by our Native communities, the first Christian settlers and the members of virtually every religion that has come to Canada in later years.

For example, Blacks fleeing to Canada in the mid-19th century turned to established Black congregations for assistance in settling in Canada. In addition to spiritual strength, the early Black churches offered food, clothing, shelter - and security. Fugitive slaves were also assisted by religious groups and coalitions from both Canada and the United States.

Most of the first organized social services in Canada were initiated by the churches. This tradition remained especially strong in Quebec, where the Roman Catholic Church continued to provide a wide range of basic health and social welfare services into the 1960s.

Although many of the programs and services that were originally sponsored by religious organizations are now being supported by public funds, many others continue to flourish. Collectively, these programs play an important role in today's social service structure.

A well known example is the Salvation Army, which runs programs for people in conflict with the law, homeless men and women, unmarried mothers, and alcoholics. These programs have often been the only services of their kind available in parts of the county. Also, almost every Roman Catholic diocese in Canada still has a director of charities with a network of services functioning under this office.

Similarly, Jewish groups, Protestant denominations and many other religious organizations maintain programs offering specific social services. Today, in many Canadian communities, there are still hospitals, children's residences, homes for the aged, and other institutions and services run by religious organizations.

Virtually all organized religious groups have considered it their responsibility to foster and support services for those in need. Guided by the concept of the basic dignity and worth of all individuals, religious organizations have been leaders and pioneers in the area of social welfare and health services in Canada.

Undoubtedly, these religious organizations have also influenced the attitudes of both individuals and society towards social welfare and health care, and have kindled social reform efforts over the years.

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# In Frontier Days

## From good neighbours to the earliest voluntary organizations

In the early days of European settlement in Canada, Native people showed the pioneers how to survive in their harsh new land. They taught them how to forage for food in the forests, to construct shelters, to build and paddles canoes, to travel on snowshoes, and to cure illnesses such as scurvy. They also introduced them to new plants such as corn, pumpkin, squash and beans that soon became the mainstay of their diet.

As the pioneers struggled to adjust to their new way of life, families depended on each other to survive and prosper. People willingly pulled together to help one another in times of need. This spirit of mutual assistance was needed to combat the wilderness and the rigours of the long Canadian winter, as well as to prevent social isolation.

In this tradition of cooperation, farming neighbours frequently combined efforts to accomplish vital work such as clearing land, building houses and barns, harvesting the crops, making quilts and spinning wool for clothing. These "helping" relationships within the settlements also instilled a sense of what we call community. As more and more settlers arrived in a district, the commitment to voluntary cooperation to achieve common goals continued, and volunteer organizations began to form.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, humanitarian developments on the British and French communities in eastern and central Canada were focused around religious institutions and social reform movements in Britain and France. A similar pattern of mutual assistance was to take place when the first homesteaders began opening up the Canadian West in the late 19th century.

Back in 1688 in New France, a crisis was reached in the town of Quebec as the ranks of the destitute were swollen by residents who had lost everything they owned in a major fire a few years earlier. Concerned for their less fortunate neighbours and alarmed at the increasing number of beggars in the streets, public-spirited citizens of Quebec took action to help these individuals.

They established what was probably the first voluntary agency in

Canada. Known as the *Bureau des Pauvres*, this agency was managed by a board of volunteer directors (primarily prosperous merchants), run by volunteers and supported by donations from the community. Money, food and clothes were gathered through collection boxes around the town and door-to-door solicitation each month.

The *Bureau des Pauvres* offered a comprehensive package of relief that was available even to non-residents. Elderly, incapacitated and sick individuals were given food, money and, wherever possible, a place to live. If work could not be found for the unemployed, they were given the tools with which to carry on their trade, along with food, clothes and lodging, until they were back on their feet again. A landmark in the history of Canadian voluntarism, this community organization was in operation until about 1700, by which time religious charities began taking over its responsibilities.

Also in the late 17th century in New France, remarkable examples of charitable institutions were established by religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church in the two major centres.

The *Hôtel Dieu*, founded in Quebec in 1658, rendered essential services to the town and the surrounding district over the next century by providing relief and support to the sick, the injured, and victims of the plague.

A similar institution was created a few years later in Montreal. In 1688, *La Maison de Providence* was established in Montreal to provide residential care and an education for young girls from very poor families and to care for sick and elderly citizens.

As well, the *Hôpital général* in Quebec, modelled on that of Paris, was set up in 1693 to lodge the sick, the aged and the destitute, and to teach trade skills to those in need.

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# From the Eighteenth Century to Confederation

## Responding to growing social needs

During the 18th century (and continuing through the 19th and into the 20th), support for the sick and the poor in Quebec came from private sources. These were primarily charitable organizations associated with the Roman Catholic Church: local parishes, religious orders (for example, the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Providence which were founded in the mid-19th century), and lay groups (for example, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul).

Direct government assistance was virtually non-existent. Modest grants were, however, given to encourage the work of charitable institutions such as hospitals, orphanages and, later, schools for disabled children, hospitals for people with psychiatric disabilities, and homes for the aged.

Throughout Quebec volunteers from religious charities helped the underprivileged in many ways. They delivered food and firewood, ran soup kitchens and depots for clothing, furniture and tools; they visited sick and disabled people in institutions and their homes; they helped the unemployed find jobs.

Volunteers also provided support to penniless widows and orphaned children following deadly epidemics, such as cholera in 1832 and 1849 and typhoid in 1847.

A lay organization of volunteers of the Roman Catholic faith, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was introduced to Canada from France, first in Quebec City in 1846 and then in Montreal in 1848. By 1870 there were Societies throughout Quebec which provided aid to large segments of the population.

The movement soon spread to other parts of Canada. Although usually parish-based, Societies were established to assist all underprivileged citizens regardless of their religious beliefs. Then, as now, volunteers ran clothing depots, helped those in need find employment, provided emotional support to sick or disabled individuals through friendly visits, and offered many other forms of support. As the Society evolved, another important aim

was to advocate for social justice by calling attention to the problems faced by disadvantaged citizens.

In the Maritime Provinces, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick adopted the English *Poor Laws* in the mid-18th century. Dating back to the Elizabethan era, this system mandated government-supported institutions such as public workhouses for impoverished families and orphanages for the care of parentless or abandoned children.

In Ontario, where the Poor Laws were not adopted, the responsibility for relief for sick and destitute citizens remained an essentially private affair until the mid-19th century. The well-being of these individuals depended to a large degree on the goodwill of friends and family, assisted by private charity from the more wealthy citizens. Only very limited and sporadic assistance was provided by the municipalities in times of extreme emergency.

When the first social welfare programs began in Ontario in the latter half of the 19th century, the provincial government began to assume limited responsibility for sick and elderly citizens and for impoverished women with dependent children. Assistance was given only under very strict conditions, however. The only social welfare institutions supported from public funds were orphanages and asylums for individuals with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities.

By the early decades of the 19th century, charitable organizations to aid sick and destitute citizens were springing up in communities throughout Canada. These "benevolent societies" addressed the growing social needs that had been created, in part, by an influx of impoverished immigrants from European countries. Often linked with religious organizations, this form of organized volunteer effort tended to follow contemporary European models of private charity.

For example, the Quebec Friendly Society was established in 1810, followed within a few years by the Ladies' Benevolent Society of Montreal whose primary aim was to help impoverished widows keep their children. In Halifax, the Poor Man's Friend Society was founded in 1820 under the leadership of a group of local businessmen. Volunteers from this society regularly visited citizens who were poverty-stricken, sick or disabled to offer them assistance in the form of cash and, during the winter months, potatoes and firewood.

By the time of Confederation in 1867, the population of the four founding provinces had grown substantially as the result of increased immigration from Europe and an influx of Loyalists of many origins from the American colonies.

Growing urbanization introduced new social problems, and, with chronic poverty on the increase, the conditions of many families were deteriorating. The plight of the underprivileged, particularly children, was attracting increased public attention.

Organized volunteer activity in social welfare areas continued in the new nation much as it had prior to Confederation, and then mushroomed in the final decade of the 19th century.

As settlement moved westward and immigration sources expanded, charitable organizations were established in response to local needs. Many of these aimed at assisting members of specific ethnocultural groups. In Winnipeg, for example, Jewish citizens founded the Hebrew Benevolent Society to provide relief for impoverished settlers, railway fares for needy families seeking re-settlement, and job placements for new immigrants.

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# Early Ethnocultural Organizations
## Helping one another

Although there were a few organizations to serve members of specific ethnocultural groups in the early history of Canada, their numbers began to increase rapidly with the surge in immigration that occurred at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Some ethnocultural groups formed volunteer organizations to help preserve the language and culture of their homeland. For example, before the end of the 19th century, immigrants from Iceland set up a network of libraries and reading clubs. Similarly, a variety of reading clubs were formed by Canadians of Ukrainian descent.

But most of the first organizations formed by specific ethnocultural groups were based on the concept of mutual aid — that is, members help one another according to need. In the New World, many immigrants feared that death among strangers would mean burial without the religious rites they considered essential. They also feared that accident, illness or loss of their job would leave them destitute. (Back home in their countries of origin, the traditional support of the extended family would have been available to help out in times of emergency).

To meet these needs, Canadians of German descent formed the first funeral or burial society in Halifax in 1753. Polish immigrants founded their first mutual aid society in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario in 1872. A variety of mutual aid societies for Italian-Canadians were founded in Montreal and Toronto by the end of the 19th century. The Hungarian Sick-Benefit Society began in 1901 in Lethbridge. Lithuanian mutual aid organizations were formed in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg very early in the 20th century.

However, after the Second World War, with the introduction of government programs that provided certain safeguards in terms of social welfare, these mutual aid organizations tended to wane.

As they became more established, many ethnocultural communities formed organizations to help recent immigrants from their own homelands. Their volunteers provided information on social and legal aspects of life in Canada, as well as translation services. For example, in western Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, homesteaders from Hungarian and

Ukrainian communities became unofficial settling agents, helping newcomers start a new life on the Prairies.

Some groups also formed more broadly-based charities to assist both recent immigrants and other Canadians of their same background. For example, Jewish groups in Toronto and Montreal were well known for their charities by the 1920s.

Chinese immigrants were perhaps unique in that they tended to form voluntary associations very soon after their arrival in Canada. In British Columbia, as early as the mid-19th century, they began local organizations based either on kinship or on the district of origin. Volunteers ran hostels and co-operative boarding houses for miners and transient railway workers; others focused on maintaining contact between immigrants and their relatives in China.

By the 1880s, Victoria's Chinatown was booming. Chinese organizations there and elsewhere in British Columbia were continuing to grow in number and size. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) of Victoria, the first community-wide Chinese association in Canada, was formed in 1884. Supported by a network of volunteers and donors from throughout the province, this organization advocated for changes to the legal system to prevent discriminatory practices towards Chinese-Canadians and provided many services to its members.

Working for the CCBA, volunteers ran homes for the sick and the poor of Chinese ancestry. (Many of those in need were unemployed workers who had been dismissed by railway construction companies and left penniless in various towns along the railway.) Volunteers raised funds to assist elderly men who could not afford the fare to return home to China, to cover the burial costs of Chinese-Canadians without relatives who had died in poverty, and to provide legal aid to any members of their community accused of a crime. Volunteers also arranged for the shipment of the bones of the deceased back to China, a practice that had become common by that time. In addition, the CCBA founded the first Chinese public school in Canada and the Jubilee Hospital, both in Victoria.

There is no doubt that the many and diverse ethnocultural organizations that were formed across Canada filled an important role in the lives of those who belonged. They met needs that were not being, or could not be, provided by society at large. Among the many benefits these organizations offered their members was a way to maintain contact with others of their same background and native tongue. Also, these organizations were often the key player in representing their specific ethnocultural group to the various levels of government in Canada — and to the rest of the world.

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# The Late Nineteenth Century

## Providing crucial services and spearheading social reform

The last decade of the 19th century saw the beginnings of major voluntary organizations concerned with health care. Notable examples include the St. John Ambulance Association in 1877, the Canadian Red Cross Society in 1896 and the Victorian Order of Nurses in 1897.

Many other organizations were founded to provide much needed social services. First organized in Montreal in 1851, centres of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) were being established in other larger communities in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Then as now, these associations relied on volunteers to raise funds, to help run programs and to serve on the management board. Guided by an ideal of health that promoted the development of the body, the mind and the spirit, the YMCAs initiated fitness and recreational programs and residential summer camps for boys from all segments of the community. With their aim of fostering well-being, self-confidence and competence, these organizations made a major contribution to children's social welfare at that time.

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was introduced into Canada in 1870 in Saint John, New Brunswick. Within five years, local associations were also founded in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City and Halifax. By the end of the century, Kingston, Hamilton, London, Ottawa, Brantford, Peterborough, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Victoria all had local YWCAs.

The primary objective of the YWCA movement was to improve the status of Canadian women by fostering leadership potential and self-reliance in young women and by helping them develop skills, while also promoting physical and spiritual well-being.

The local YWCAs rapidly established themselves as respected institutions in their communities. With the help of volunteers, they ran employment bureaux and room registries for young women, homes and training centres for girls in trouble with the law, social and fitness clubs, summer camps, and libraries. Many also offered training courses for young

women in office and cooking skills which were the first of their kind in their communities.

From the 1890's onwards, Canadian volunteers played an important role in bringing about social change through active involvement in social reform movements and the labour movement. These advocates challenged society's norms in a period that tended to deny citizens what many by that time regarded as basic rights (such as decent housing, adequate health care and free access to education).

For example, labour groups advocated on behalf of the retired citizens who were no longer able to support themselves adequately. Women's groups fought for legal equality for women, including the right to vote. Social reformers took up the plight of children, whose neglect and abuse was becoming especially evident in large urban centres.

In 1897, local women's organizations in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax formed a coalition known as the National Council of Women. Volunteers worked at both the local and national levels to improve the legal status of women, particularly their rights with respect to their children. (Fathers had exclusive rights over children at that time.) The Council and its local affiliates also sought to reduce infant mortality and to improve the health and welfare of Canadian children.

Across Canada, advocates for children's rights argued passionately that all children should be protected from ill treatment, sensitively cared for if orphaned or neglected, and reformed if in trouble with the law. Volunteers promoted a good home life as crucial in the prevention and cure of delinquency.

They also advocated the concept of foster homes as a substitute for the child's own home in cases of neglect or severe abuse. (Prior to this period, children were generally viewed as needing very strict treatment if they were to develop into mature adults, and abandoned children were kept in institutions, often under harsh conditions.)

Through the hard work of dedicated volunteers, social reform gained a broad base of community support. By the turn of the century, there was a virtual revolution in ideas and methods for the care of children.

In response to the growing public acceptance of society's responsibility to care for neglected and delinquent children and to intervene on their behalf, the Children's Aid Society of Toronto was organized in 1891.

Although receiving public money and vested with statutory responsibility for the care of children, this was a private organization under a volunteer board of directors and it relied on salaried staff and volunteers to run its services. Through new legislation in Ontario, the Society was given guardianship over neglected children.

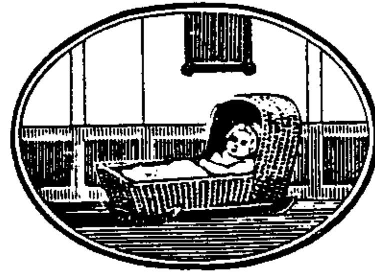
The concept of foster care (whereby caring citizens volunteer their time and parenting skills to raise children in their own homes on a temporary basis) was also introduced and funded by public sources.

Over the next two decades, the system of Children's Aid Societies spread to cities and towns throughout Ontario and also to Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia. Canada was thus in the international forefront of child welfare.

In the field of literacy and basic adult training, Toronto-based Frontier College emerged in 1899 as a pioneer and leader. Its innovative programs addressed the educational needs of working people across Canada, particularly immigrants who were unable to read and write in the languages of their adopted country, and of others who had had little or no opportunity for education.

Volunteer tutors from Frontier College joined logging operations and railway camps and went into mining towns and fishing villages in remote parts of Canada to reach those working and living in difficult conditions and to empower them through literacy and learning. Tutors worked side by side with labourers and, on a voluntary basis in their free time, taught them basic educational skills. During its first twenty years, over 600 volunteer instructors trained by Frontier College served in virtually every province and territory of Canada.

The crusade against tuberculosis (the main cause of death in Canada at the turn of the century) gave birth to Canada's first national voluntary organization in the health area in 1900 — the Canadian Tuberculosis Association (which later became the Canadian Lung Association). Its original aim was to provide facilities such as residential sanatoria and centres for diagnosis and treatment in the care of TB patients.



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# Into the Twentieth Century

## Crusading for the welfare of children and improving human services

In the early decades of the 20th century, social reformers continued to work through voluntary organizations to prod and support government efforts to improve the health and well-being of Canadian children.

The priorities of these organizations were the high rate of infant mortality, poor pre-natal care, the lack of support for mothers in caring for their babies, and the impurity of milk and water supplies. Other concerns included the education and the social development of underprivileged children and overcrowding and poor housing conditions in the urban slums.

Advocates in smaller cities and towns and in rural districts joined in this crusade on behalf of Canadian children, which had previously been active only in the larger cities. Local associations of the National Council of Women sprang up across Canada and chapters of the Women's Institute and farm women's groups also took up this cause.

Montreal, in particular, became the site of an enormous volunteer effort to improve the conditions of children's lives. The Montreal Council of Women, for example, began a campaign to reduce infant deaths in their city. Volunteers undertook to inform the public on the importance of pasteurizing milk, and they set up a dispensary to provide pure milk to infants in needy families.

In 1912, a host of community groups, led by the Montreal Council of Women, sponsored a major exhibition on children's health and welfare issues aimed at arousing public interest in these critical issues. This sparked similar exhibitions in cities and towns across Canada over the next few years.

The period between 1900 and 1920 also saw a growth in the number of services offered by major voluntary organizations to promote the social development of children. Existing programs were expanded and new organizations came into being.

The Boy Scout movement came to Canada in 1908 (the same year that it was established in England), and the Canadian General Council was incorporated in 1914. Based on the principle of respect for others and self,

the Scouting movement aimed to encourage boys to become responsible, involved citizens. Adult leaders volunteered their time to run programs that offered interesting and challenging opportunities for boys from all segments of society in order to develop their mental, physical, social and spiritual potential.

The Girl Guides organization was established in Canada in 1910, and there were soon branches from coast to coast. The Canadian Council was incorporated in 1917. Committed to the ideals of personal development, self-reliance and respect for others, volunteer leaders organized programs for girls that aimed to promote practical and leadership skills and to instil a sense of service to the community, while also developing physical and emotional fitness.

Both the YMCA and the YWCA movements expanded and grew in strength through the early decades of the 20th century. For example, summer camps for girls were established in various regions.

In 1912, the Big Sisters program, which matched female volunteers with needy girls in a one-to-one relationship, was initiated in Canada by the YWCA in Toronto. That same year, the Canadian National Council of the 7 YMCA was formed.

The Big Brothers movement was introduced into Canada in 1913 with the establishment of an agency in Toronto. To ensure the well-being and social development of fatherless boys, this unique program paired them with adult volunteers as special friends in a relationship which could last for several years.

In 1918, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) was born. In an era when government-sponsored social services were virtually non-existent, this voluntary organization responded to the desperate need for services for veterans blinded in the First World War and for other blind and visually impaired Canadians.

In addition to programs to help them develop practical living skills, many of the CNIB's early clients needed emotional support and help in obtaining food, clothing and shelter.

Since an important goal of the CNIB was to ensure that the world of reading remained open to blind and visually impaired Canadians as a vital link to society, a lending library became a key part of the organization in 1919. Volunteers began transcribing into braille literary and educational materials which were then sent out to the CNIB's clients on request.

The Toronto Family Service Agency was founded in 1914. Similar voluntary organizations were established in many urban areas across Canada over the next decade. These agencies were aimed at keeping the family unit intact and oriented primarily to individual and family counselling. Assisted by volunteers, professional social workers ran services that provided support and direction to families under stress. Homemaker and daycare programs were also commonly available.

During the great flu epidemic of 1918, volunteers from the St. John Ambulance Brigade served in hospitals and cared for the sick in their homes. In several small communities, volunteers took complete charge of the hospitals when the entire staff was stricken with the flu.

St. John volunteers were sent to a coal mining settlement in Alberta, where the entire group of miners had come down with the deadly infection. In between nursing their patients, these volunteers chopped wood for the fires and cleaned the bunkhouses.

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# The Twenties

## Growth in social services and health organizations

By 1920, Canada was moving away from its farming roots and becoming a mainly urban, industrialized society. Although the decade between 1920 and 1929 witnessed economic progress and material prosperity, some Canadians were still in desperate need of help. As a result, there was increasing pressure on government to take greater responsibility for health and social welfare.

As a result of social unrest, such as the Winnipeg General Strike, the federal government made its first major entry into the area of income security in this period. Various financial aid programs were established for veterans who were unable to find employment after their return from the First World War and for widows and orphaned children of soldiers.

A national program of allowances for the elderly, determined by need, was also introduced. These were the first steps towards an eventual federal policy on social welfare.

The number of voluntary health and social service agencies continued to grow during the Twenties, with volunteers taking an active role in management, fundraising, and the front line of service delivery. A number of religious organizations in larger urban areas founded missions for transient and homeless men. Advocacy for social reform continued to occupy the agendas of many volunteer organizations during this period.

The Canadian National Council on Child Welfare was formed in 1920, with the support of local chapters of the National Council of Women and a number of Protestant churches. Organized and run by volunteers, this organization was a strong advocate of children's rights. It was particularly concerned with the fate of immigrant children who, by virtue of being paupers or orphans, had been sent to Canada by the British government in large numbers since the time of Confederation.

By 1926, the Council's mandate expanded to include all underprivileged citizens, as reflected in its change of name to the Canadian Welfare Council.

The Community Chest movement (which later developed into the

United Way) was launched in Canada in 1918 with the founding of the Toronto Federation for Community Services. During the 1920s, this concept of a centralized canvassing effort for voluntary social service agencies in the community spread to other cities. Montreal and Winnipeg, for example, adopted this cooperative form of volunteer fundraising as a practical solution to the increasing number of local charities and public appeals.

# 10

## The Great Depression
### Responding to urgent need

With the stock market crash in 1929 and the economic collapse that followed, many factories were closed. Large numbers of people across the country were left without a way to earn a living. This situation was made even worse by a seven-year drought on the Prairies that caused serious food shortages and massive migration from the farms to cities in search of work.

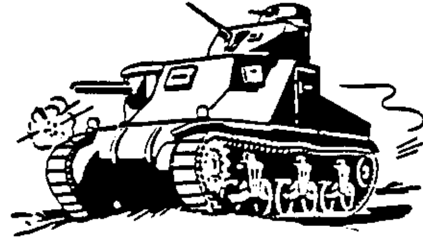
During that decade of hardship, people across the country were left without the means to obtain food, shelter and proper clothing. For many, the downswing in the economy brought despair. The few public relief agencies were quickly overwhelmed, and many municipal governments (to which the responsibility had been left) were virtually bankrupted by the demand for relief. Although the federal government responded by creating work projects and labour camps for the unemployed, this was not enough to meet the desperate need.

It fell to caring individuals, religious groups, and voluntary organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross Society, to provide relief for the hungry and homeless during the 1930s. Ad hoc volunteer groups sprang up across the country to meet the need. Soup kitchens and bread lines were established; clothing was collected and distributed to the needy; various missions provided shelter for homeless men. All of these activities depended on massive volunteer energy.

In the health domain, cancer was the disease that drew public attention during this period. In 1938 the Canadian Cancer Society was founded to educate the public about the vital importance of early detection and treatment of cancer.

Over the years, as local branches sprang up across Canada, the Society's mandate was expanded to include direct services to cancer patients. Volunteers offered practical help and emotional support to cancer patients and their families. They visited hospitals and homes, paying special attention to the elderly and those who lived alone.

# 11



# The World Wars

## The essential role of volunteers in supporting the War Effort

The two World Wars clearly demonstrated the ability of Canadians, both as members of voluntary organizations and as individuals, to mobilize in times of crisis.

The First World War brought unprecedented co-operation among major health-related organizations (notably the Canadian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance Association) to assist the war effort both on the home front and overseas. During the Second World War, these voluntary organizations responded with even more impressive measures of assistance.

During both wars, St. John Ambulance volunteers actively supported Canada's war effort on the home front. They were responsible for first-aid training for all military service personnel and for civil defense workers, as well as for civilians. They prepared civilian air raid wardens for possible emergencies.

These volunteers put in long and difficult hours of service to sick and wounded soldiers returning to Canada for rehabilitation or convalescence, even accompanying them to their homes. They also provided training for care-givers at home and assisted nursing staff in all military and public hospitals across the country.

Volunteers from the St. John Ambulance Association were also actively involved in the civil defence movement during the war years. Large-scale programs to maintain civilian warning systems and to train local citizens in survival techniques were organized and run exclusively by volunteers.

Later, during the early Cold War period that followed the Second World War, when concern for emergency measures and civil defense loomed heavy in the minds of Canadians, St. John Ambulance volunteers would attempt to prepare citizens for the horrors that a nuclear holocaust might bring.

Overseas, volunteers with the Canadian Red Cross Society worked to provide relief to civilian victims in war-torn countries. The St. John Ambulance Association organized and trained Voluntary Aid Detachments

whose members came from the volunteer Brigade units across Canada. Volunteers from these detachments served in air raid shelters, prisoner of war camps and mobile surgical units, as well as in both military and civilian hospitals in Europe and East Asia.

During the Second World War, with more and more men drafted into the armed forces, most volunteers were women. In larger cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, Women's Voluntary Services were established to assist the war effort. WVS volunteers ran day nurseries for the children of women employed in war industries and collected clothing for civilians in war-torn countries in Europe. They also assisted the staff of war service bureaux and worked in emergency blood donor clinics managed by the Canadian Red Cross Society.

The two World Wars and the Depression that was sandwiched between them dramatically demonstrated our vulnerability as individuals and our need for mutual support. During those three decades, many thousands of once self-sufficient Canadians, particularly veterans who had become sick or disabled or were unable to find work and farmers who had lost their land, found themselves unable to provide for themselves and their families.

This new awareness was eventually to lead to the creation of our modern-day system of health and social services in which public programs and services are complemented and greatly enhanced by a vast network of voluntary agencies.

# 12

# The Post-War Years

## Changing expectations about the role of Government and the birth of new voluntary organizations

Following the Second World War, there was dynamic growth in industry and the economy. The standard of living increased dramatically, and our society became more urbanized. During this period, the baby boom and a large wave of immigration caused a major increase in the Canadian population.

Despite its growing prosperity, Canadians remained scarred by the deprivation and anxiety they had endured through the Depression years. They yearned for security, and needed assurance that such a great catastrophe would never occur again. The eventual result was unparalleled government involvement in welfare, health and education.

The Depression had given new focus to the political and economic struggles of the nation and played a significant role in triggering the call for increased public intervention in health care and social welfare. There was also a growing recognition of the extent and effects of illness and poverty.

Enormous changes in social welfare took place in the post-war era, as governments started to respond to the pressures of volunteer advocacy groups by assuming a much greater role in the health and social welfare of Canadian citizens.

From World War II onward, government came to assume responsibility for a wide range of services that had previously been provided by private organizations and delivered by volunteers.

This was the beginning of modern Canadian social welfare policy. In 1940 the federal government had established an unemployment insurance scheme; in 1945 the universal Family Allowance program was introduced to guarantee a monthly income supplement to families based on the number of children. In the late 1940s, the provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia began to provide limited health insurance. Then, during the 1950s, the federal income security program for the elderly became universal and government support to chronically ill and disabled Canadians was extended.

Yet in spite of this increase in social welfare legislation at both the

federal and provincial levels, the need for volunteers remained strong after the war. Voluntary organizations continued to proliferate and offered new types of services.

With the impetus of wartime appeals for charitable donations, the Community Chest (United Way) movement gained a solid foothold in urban areas in the decade following the Second World, reflecting the growing needs of social service agencies.

Volunteers also continued their role as social advocates, prodding governments to implement new initiatives that would improve the social welfare of Canadians.

Introduced to Canada in 1931 in Vancouver, the John Howard Societies blossomed after the Second World War as local organizations were founded in every region. These voluntary groups took on responsibility for the care of men upon their release from prison, from basic needs to counselling and vocational guidance. They also promoted crime prevention and lobbied for reforms to the criminal justice system.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, Elizabeth Fry Societies were established throughout British Columbia and Ontario to help girls and women in conflict with the law. Volunteers offered one-to-one emotional support and training in life skills and basic education to women in prison, on parole or probation, or back in the community.

These Societies also advocated changes to the criminal justice system, especially as it affected the lives of women.

In 1947, the Canadian Red Cross Society, supported by volunteers from the St. John Ambulance Brigade, started a system of blood donor clinics to supply blood and blood products free of charge to patients in all Canadian hospitals.

Uniquely Canadian in concept, this system continues to rely on volunteers to donate the blood and to run clinics in communities across the country.

From the late 1940s through the 1950s, important national voluntary organizations in health care were founded. These included: the Arthritis Society (1948), the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (1948), the Canadian Haemophilia Society (1953), the Canadian Diabetes Association (1953), the Canadian Heart Foundation (1957), and the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation (1959).

The primary aims of these organizations were to support and encourage medical research in their respective areas, to promote public awareness of the importance of early diagnosis and treatment of the condition in question, and to provide emotional support and much needed services to afflicted individuals. As chapters of these organizations were established across the country, volunteers remained particularly active in patient services and in raising funds for research.

# 13

# From the Sixties to the Eighties

## Mobilizing for social change and forming new kinds of voluntary organizations

The era of economic prosperity continued into the 1960s. In keeping with changing priorities of society, government involvement in social services and health care was rapidly evolving.

During this period, Quebec launched a complete reorganization of health and social services with the aim of ensuring that all citizens had equal access to these services, regardless of social status, place of residence or religion. In this new model for health and welfare services, state-funded services were administered through local agencies governed by boards of volunteer directors chosen by the community. This new system replaced the traditional parish structures dealing with problems such as poverty and the poor health of workers.

The decade between 1960 and 1969 also witnessed more substantial action by the federal government in the areas of health care and social welfare.

The Canada Pension Plan, a social insurance scheme covering retirement, widowhood and permanent disability, was introduced in 1966 (the Quebec Pension Plan, begun at the same time, provided similar coverage for Quebec residents).

The Canada Assistance Plan extended federal cost-sharing for provincial programs in social welfare.

With the introduction of a federally supported medical insurance program in 1968, the developments in social welfare that had begun during the 1940s were essentially completed.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were dominated by citizens' movements that grew up around vital social issues of that time. There is no doubt that this change-oriented volunteering shaped our present socio-cultural environment.

Social advocates worked to gain public support for the causes of disadvantaged Canadians. Women's groups across the nation mobilized to win what they regarded as long overdue recognition of women's legal rights and a redefinition of the status of women in Canadian society. Volunteer groups lobbied for social justice for disabled persons to enable them to

participate more actively in mainstream Canadian life and to have a voice in the services and policies affecting them.

Also at this time, Greenpeace began in Vancouver in 1970 as a small group of concerned citizens opposed to nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific.

The 1970s and 1980s were periods of dramatic growth for Native organizations in Canada. Many local groups were revitalized, and new volunteer organizations were formed in the territories and provinces and at the national level to address common concerns.

Advocates lobbied the government for improved human rights and better opportunities for Native people. Other volunteers worked to ensure the survival of Aboriginal languages and culture across the country. For example, to help preserve the Native identity and culture and to reach those in remote areas, Native organizations began to publish their own newspapers and to broadcast their own radio and television programs via satellite.

Friendship Centres were established in many cities to provide a place where people of Native ancestry could meet to socialize and to help each other cope with the alienation, racial discrimination and poverty that many were experiencing as part of urban life. Volunteers offer counselling services and provide information on training courses and finding employment; other volunteers organize cultural events and sports and recreation activities.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, volunteer activity was increasing throughout Canada. Volunteer bureaux and centres were established in many urban areas. (The first volunteer bureau was founded in Montreal in 1937). Their mandate was to support the voluntary sector and to strengthen the volunteer base of their community by recruiting, training and referring volunteers and by promoting the concept of volunteerism.

The 1980s witnessed a shrinking government role in providing social services because of severe financial pressures. At the same time, the demand for social services mushroomed.

Volunteers addressed these unmet needs from many directions, and, as specific concerns emerged as priorities, new forms of voluntary organizations developed — food banks, soup kitchens, meals-on-wheels, emergency shelters, transition homes for abused women and their children, rape crisis centres, telephone hotlines, and drop-in centres in the downtown cores of major cities to help street kids.

An innovative movement known as *Chantiers jeunesse* began in Quebec in 1982. Volunteers between the ages of 17 and 25 devote over 30 hours a week to special projects that last from one to twelve months. Working together in a community, these young adults plan and carry out projects such as the development of a park or the restoration of a heritage structure. In addition to reinforcing the spirit of service to the community, these volunteer projects enrich the life experiences of young adults,

increasing their self-confidence and teaching them new skills.

One of the most serious medical crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s has been presented by AIDS. New volunteer groups and networks formed in every region of the country to lobby for public education campaigns and increased funding for research, to organize support groups for people with AIDS, and to advocate on behalf of the human rights of those who have the HIV virus.

Since the availability of safe blood products and the threat of AIDS was of particular concern to those with haemophilia, the Canadian Haemophilia Society quickly turned its attention to this urgent issue. Supported by a strong core of volunteers, the Society has been promoting AIDS research, developing educational materials and counselling those of its own clientele who have contracted AIDS.

# 14

## Cultural Diversity
### Working for full participation in Canadian life

It was not until the 1960s that the government became involved in a major way with the needs of immigrants arriving in Canadian cities.

Until that time, this gap (even more critical in times of heavy immigration) was bridged by volunteer groups from both society at large and from specific ethnocultural groups. Language training, translation services, information on government programs and other services for new Canadians were offered by volunteers, many of them affiliated with religious organizations.

Today, the voluntary sector continues be actively involved with immigrants. A myriad of voluntary groups across the country help immigrants make the difficult adjustment to a new country, by addressing their immediate needs and longer-range needs for successful integration into our society.

These groups help new Canadians understand many aspects of Canadian life, from filing income tax returns to civic responsibilities. They teach English or French; they help with immigration problems; they offer orientation and training to help with job searches. They also work to increase cross-cultural understanding and to eliminate racism in our society.

Religious organizations continue to provide services to new Canadians, particularly their own members. Some examples are the Jewish Immigrant Services of Canada, the Catholic Immigrant Society, and the Services d'accueil aux voyageurs et aux immigrants (SAVI) in Montreal.

Ethnocultural associations also often help new members of their own communities. A well known example is COSTI in southern Ontario, which began as an organization to assist Italian immigrants and now helps new Canadians of all ethnocultural backgrounds.

An outstanding example of a community organization of this kind is the Multilingual Orientation Services Association for Immigrant Communities (MOSAIC). For over 20 years, MOSAIC has provided a range of services to help immigrants and refugees in the Vancouver area overcome language and cultural barriers so that they can integrate into Canadian life more

successfully.

The backbone of MOSAIC for many years has been its 400 volunteers who offer interpretation services in up to 70 languages, even maintaining an emergency service around the clock. These interpreters accompany their clients to government offices, schools, hospitals or police stations, according to their individual needs.

In addition, volunteers from a variety of organizations — ethnocultural, visible minority, race relations, social justice — work together to give people from all backgrounds the opportunity to deal with common social, cultural and economic concerns. While some public funding may be available for certain activities, these organizations rely on dedicated volunteers to help meet real needs.

The most widely known multicultural organization is the Canadian Ethnocultural Council. Founded in 1980, this is an umbrella organization of some 37 national ethnocultural organizations. It aims to find consensus on issues of particular concern to the ethnocultural communities, promote a united ethnocultural voice and advocate for social change to ensure equality of rights and opportunities for Canadians of all origins.

The member organizations of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council include established communities represented by groups such as the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Chinese Canadian National Council. But also included are more recently arrived national groups, such as the Federation of Lao Associations of Canada and the United Council of Filipino Associations of Canada.

A common objective of these organizations is to promote intercultural understanding. They may also focus on specific concerns, such as the needs of seniors in their communities, the education of their youth and the isolation of immigrant women.

People who face discrimination in Canadian society have a special insight into the many forms that systemic barriers take. For this reason, they are in the best position to advise on ways to remove such barriers. Volunteers from race relations coalitions, visible minority organizations and multifaith associations support each other in the goal of ensuring that all Canadians have a true sense of belonging.

There are many volunteer organizations across Canada working for racial harmony and full equality for all Canadians, regardless of background. The most established are found in our largest cities.

In Vancouver, the Society for Racial Justice was founded in 1981 to combat racism, to help protect human dignity and promote human understanding within society, and to voice the concerns of its members organizations on these issues to all levels of government.

In Toronto, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations in Toronto has been addressing race relations through public education, research and advocacy since 1975.

Similarly, the Centre de recherche-action sur les relations raciales (CRARR) was established in Montreal in 1983 to promote racial harmony and equal opportunities for visible minorities in all aspects of Canadian life. Volunteers are actively working in areas such as police-community relations, access to services, employment equity, and the depiction of visible minorities in the media.

# 15

# Around the Globe

## Helping developing countries

A rich nation, Canada began accepting the obligation of helping poor or disaster-stricken countries just after the Second World War. Beginning with postwar reconstruction in Europe, Canada developed programs of international aid and social development that are respected around the world.

Nevertheless, Canadian voluntary agencies were active in developing countries long before the Government of Canada became involved. Ethnocultural organizations were often the first to respond to crises in their country of origin. But the support of Canadians in times of need is by no means limited to those who share a common ethnic origin.

The YMCA, for example, has worked in international development since 1889, and Canadian missionaries of various faiths were working overseas before the turn of the century.

In the years immediately following the Second World War, a number of relief and refugee agencies were established in Canada. Many of these served primarily as fundraising branches of foreign charities, usually British or American: CARE (originally the Committee for American Relief in Europe), Foster Parents' Plan and WorldVision are just a few.

The 1960s saw the coming of age of the voluntary development organizations. Canadian-based agencies like CUSO/SUCO were established and began sending volunteers to developing nations.

At the same time, many of the Canadian branches of foreign organizations loosened or even severed the links with their parent bodies (notably OXFAM Canada, originally the Oxford University Committee for Famine Relief, and the Canadian Save the Children Fund). The creation of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation was a first step toward formal co-operative effort.

The surge of concern and involvement in international development by ordinary Canadians that began in the 1960s was stimulated because Canada was one of the first Western nations to give direct financial support to voluntary development agencies in the form of grants matching private donations.

This growth period for Canadian-born agencies continued into the 1970s, when the balance had clearly swung away from foreign-based agencies. Other Canadian organizations involved in relief work were created in the 1980s, many in response to famines in Africa.

In addition to the large development organizations in Canada, a great many local and regional agencies are flourishing, particularly in Quebec and on the Prairies (for example, the Comité de Solidarité tiers-monde and the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta).

While Canadian assistance in the developing countries has moved away from its missionary origins, religious organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee remain very active, and there are many inter-denominational committees.

Although they differ greatly in size and purpose, most development agencies have been born out of a passionate, humanitarian concern for others around the world — to feed the hungry, to care for those ravaged by disease, to assist refugees and others in distress, to provide basic educational skills, to strengthen a community's capacity to solve its own problems, or to provide emergency relief in times of natural disaster or famine.

Development agencies may embrace any of the following goals: meeting human needs in poor countries, stimulating awareness and support for international development by the Canadian public, and advocating public policies that promote the creation of a more just and peaceful world order.

Responding to pressing needs at the grass roots level, these agencies deal directly with communities and individuals in developing countries, rather than going through government and official institutions. They are thus able to reach needy groups that may not be accessible through official channels.

In recent years, for example, the responses to major food crises in areas such as Biafra, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the Sudan, to the plight of the Asian boat people, and to major earthquakes in Mexico, Italy and China, have demonstrated Canadians' compassion for the victims of tragedy. Our voluntary organizations were among the first to react, with money, food, supplies — and volunteers.

Canadian agencies and their volunteers are prominent on the international scene, and their achievements are widely recognized. Organizations such as the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE) have emerged as leaders and pioneers in innovative approaches to basic education in developing countries.

# 16

# When Catastrophe Strikes

## The crucial role of volunteers in disaster and emergency relief

In 1945 spontaneous combustion caused a violent explosion that wrecked a giant grain-storage elevator in Port Arthur, Ontario (now part of Thunder Bay), killing twenty people and trapping many injured workers.

Unusually heavy and prolonged rains in the spring of 1949 caused the Fraser River in British Columbia to surge over its banks, flooding the Lower Mainland and threatening lives and homes.

In Springhill, Nova Scotia, in 1956, a coal mine explosion killed five miners and left 118 others injured and trapped below ground. In the same mine two years later, a cave-in imprisoned 174 workers.

More recently, in 1979, chemical-laden train cars derailed just outside Mississauga in southern Ontario, leaking deadly chlorine gas and requiring the immediate evacuation of the population of that major city.

In 1987, a fierce tornado whipped through Edmonton, leaving a path of destruction and large numbers of people homeless in its wake.

Whenever a Canadian community is struck by catastrophe, a host of volunteers arrives on the scene, ready to provide crucial assistance to the victims and to bring order out of chaos.

From large-scale disasters that attract national media attention to the thousands of smaller emergency situations that occur every year across Canada, well trained and dedicated volunteers from organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross Society, the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the Salvation Army and the Mennonite Disaster Service are on the scene. These volunteers form the backbone of the system of disaster relief in Canada.

As a first priority, disaster relief volunteers take care of the basic survival needs of the victims — search and rescue; emergency medical aid; food, temporary shelter and clothing. Other relief services include: counselling for victims or for their grief-stricken families and friends, transporting evacuees to temporary shelters, distributing bedding in emergency shelters, locating missing persons and providing temporary childcare services.

An excellent example of the vital work performed by these skilled

volunteers occurred in 1942 in the town of Almonte, Ontario, the site of one of the worst railway accidents in Canadian history. Three passenger coaches were demolished, killing 27 people and injuring 150 others. Nearby units of the St. John Ambulance Brigade and The Canadian Red Cross Society rushed to the scene to care for the injured and tend to the dead. Using make-shift stretchers and beds, skilled volunteers set up an emergency hospital and accompanied seriously injured patients to hospital facilities in Ottawa, 40 miles away.

With roots dating back to 1896, the Canadian Red Cross Society has a country-wide network of volunteers ready to mobilize in the event of an emergency. Volunteers provide emergency medical care, temporary shelter and other basic needs, and handle enquiries about the safety and whereabouts of family members.

Similarly, the uniformed members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, established in Canada in 1895 and composed solely of volunteers, are always on call to provide emergency assistance and disaster relief.

Since their first public service in 1881, the members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade (now numbering some 11,000 across the country) have been donating their time to provide emergency medical care in communities across Canada.

Wherever people come together in large numbers — whether at huge annual events like the Calgary Stampede, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto or Québec Expo, or at the host of smaller fairs, sports events or other special events in communities across the country — the distinctive black and white uniform of the Brigade can be found. These volunteers are always ready to take action in the event of injury or sudden illness.

The Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) of Canada has been assisting in salvage and reconstruction on Canadian disaster scenes since 1956. MDS has a unique network of volunteers from the western provinces and Ontario who come at short notice and often from distant points to help total strangers.

These volunteers undertake such tasks as scrubbing out mud-filled houses and digging out debris. They also provide food and clothing to the victims and emotional support as needed. After the immediate cleanup work is finished, it is not uncommon for MDS volunteers to sacrifice months of their time, remaining in the community to repair the homes of disabled, elderly or impoverished victims.

Volunteer fire departments remain an integral part of many smaller communities (which might surprise those who have always lived in large urban areas). In Canada today, there are approximately 94,000 trained volunteer firefighters — 80 per cent of the country's firefighting forces. Many of these volunteer firefighters also take part in search and rescue operations.

In times of disaster, victims also receive support and encouragement

from many other volunteers in local community and religious groups. Private pilots undertake search and rescue operations; amateur radio operators provide vital communication links, and some are on continuous alert for sudden, unpredictable changes in the weather. As well, many people who have not previously been associated with such volunteer groups turn out to be willing and eager to help.

# 17

# Volunteering for Change

## Advocating for the rights of disabled persons

Until quite recently, prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities were commonplace in our society. Disabled people were objects of pity and were seen exclusively in the light of their incapacities. Social isolation was the rule, not the exception.

People with mobility impairment, as well as those with other disabilities, were routinely prevented from adopting and even from bearing children. Children were removed from their developmentally disabled parents with no consideration of the degree to which the disability affected the parent's capacity to raise the child. Women and girls with intellectual disabilities were routinely sterilized.

Many disabled people were confined to institutions, with little or no contact with the outside world. Others were trapped for their entire lives in sheltered workshops, unable to earn a living wage or to find opportunities for employment. If accepted into public education systems at all, disabled children were usually placed in segregated schools. Regardless of their qualifications, individuals with epilepsy could be denied access to employment and to career paths in teaching and medicine.

In the early 1970s, groups advocating on behalf of the rights of disabled individuals joined together to actively challenge the attitude of social exclusion to which disabled people had traditionally been subjected. Dedicated volunteers worked vigorously to promote policies that would allow disabled children and adults the opportunity to live, learn, work and play in 'normal' surroundings — the right to have life experiences in the mainstream along with nondisabled Canadians.

The Canadian Association for Community Living, for example, began in the 1950s as a group of parents with developmentally disabled children. As symbolized by the removal of the label 'mentally retarded' from its official name in 1985, the organization underwent a profound shift in emphasis in its focus. Today, with many volunteers across the country, CACL works with families, government, educators, industry and the general public to change systems that have traditionally excluded people with a develop-

mental handicap.

Because of the commitment and determination of volunteer groups such as CACL and the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (Canada's national cross-disability organization), legal recognition of the human rights of disabled persons was eventually won in Canada through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982.

Today, society's attitudes favour greater acceptance of disabled persons in mainstream society in areas such as education, housing and employment. Disabled persons are being taken out of institutions and returned to their homes and communities. Disabled children are being integrated into their community schools and, in some cases, even into regular classrooms.

With the establishment of group homes, local training centres and community-based social services, especially in the more populated areas, disabled adults are now being encouraged to remain in their own communities.

The availability of technical and other kinds of support is allowing more disabled persons to enter the workplace. There is a growing recognition that public buildings must afford access to those with mobility handicaps. Parallel public transportation systems in the larger cities offer them much greater freedom within the community.

While the situation of Canadians with disabilities has improved in recent years, many social and economic barriers remain to be torn down. The myths are slowly being dispelled, yet for many people with disabilities, being disabled still means living in poverty and being marginalized by the economic fabric of our communities.

Many volunteer-driven organizations representing disabled persons at national, regional and community levels are actively lobbying for a fair chance at employment for disabled Canadians and for the high-quality, integrated education disabled children need in order to become contributing members of society.

# 18

## Voluntary Action
### Working together to improve the quality of Canadian life

Dedicated to meeting the needs of others, volunteers and the organizations they work for embody the principle of collective responsibility and express the ideal of pluralism. Rooted in the community, volunteers have always been vital in identifying and responding to human needs. Many of the programs and services they pioneered in health and social services areas were considered so essential to the welfare of the nation that government has assumed primary responsibility for them over time.

Throughout Canada's history, movements led by volunteers have had a tremendous impact on society's attitudes and public policy. Because of their hard work and their commitment to their cause, groups that deal with issues such as child welfare, women's equality, and the rights of disabled persons have been able to convince a sizable body of public opinion that changes were needed. The values of fairness and equality have become firmly entrenched in our social values.

Canadians now accept everyone's right as a citizen, to expect the assistance of society in times of need, whether by way of government or through a voluntary organization.

Canada's 125 years have been marked by dramatic changes in our society and its institutions. Yet the irrepressible dedication of Canadian volunteers to the shared task of improving our life together, evident from earliest times, has remained constant.

The traditional Canadian qualities of concern for fellow citizens and commitment to causes have taken new forms as we tackle present-day challenges and chart our course for the 21st Century. Indeed, the willingness to volunteer has always been a fundamental Canadian value — the hallmark of a caring and democratic society.

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