



SUMMER 2007

H PERSPECTIVES

The newsletter of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

There are more than 1.2 million people working in voluntary and non-profit organizations across Canada. In this issue of HR Perspectives we'd like to introduce you to three of them:

MARGIE BECK

**a residential support worker from
New Glasgow, Nova Scotia**

SHABNUM BUDHWANI

a program coordinator from Toronto, Ontario

TED KERR

a volunteer coordinator from Edmonton, Alberta

At first glance, it doesn't seem that Margie, Shabnum and Ted share much in common. If you take a closer look however, you'll discover that what they do share, along with 1.2 million others, is a genuine desire to make a difference.

So take some time to read their stories, learn more about the interesting and important work they are doing, and appreciate the unique perspectives they have on working in the voluntary and non-profit sector.

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In the last edition of HR Perspectives, we provided readers with an overview of the key projects that the HR Council is undertaking in 2007 and beyond. Here's an update on our progress so far:

Project: Communications

Communications Strategy Development

With over 69,000 workplaces across the country, it's a challenge for the HR Council to get the word out about our organization and the services we offer to people working in the sector. Our communications strategy has identified a number of objectives for the HR Council to pursue in this endeavor, including: increasing awareness of the HR Council, its role, and its activities; informing stakeholders about paid work in the sector, its issues and challenges; and facilitating information exchange between, and among, the HR Council and its stakeholders.

Website redesign and content development

Earlier this year the HR Council held focus groups and posted an online survey to solicit input on new content for the popular HR Management Toolkit. Work is currently underway to create new content based on feedback from focus group participants and survey respondents, with the goal of launching a new and improved hrcouncil.ca later this year.

Project: Study of voluntary and non-profit sector human resources

The participatory sector study aims to provide critical insights into key characteristics of the voluntary sector's paid labour force. After two steering committee meetings, the project team is working on the upcoming twin surveys of sector employers and employees. The sector study's first report is due to be released in February 2008.

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MARGIE BECK

Age: 58

Location: New Glasgow, Nova Scotia

Organization: Highland Community Residential Services

Position: Residential Support Worker

Length of Service: 1 year

After 38 years with the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, Margie Beck was ready to retire, however she wasn't ready to stop working. Like many people who have had long and fulfilling careers in the private or public sector, Margie didn't want "to be put out to pasture," as she says, so she started working part-time as a residential support worker with Highland Community Residential Services (HCRS) in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia.

A community agency providing residential support services for people with developmental disabilities, HCRS turned out to be an ideal fit for Margie, who had spent her career at the school board working with special needs children and their families. One of the reasons she decided to apply was that she could use the skills, knowledge and community networks acquired during her tenure at the school board directly in her work with HCRS. "In fact, many of the students that I

worked with in the past are clients of HCRS," she says. It's wonderful that I am able to stay connected with them and their families."

Margie enjoys the new-found flexibility of working on a part-time basis. With a work schedule that averages 20 hours per week, Margaret still has plenty of time to pursue her other interests, including spending time with her grandchildren and gardening.

While she may only work part-time, Margie is involved in several HCRS programs including the innovative United In Friendship, a program that works with parents and special needs children to develop sustainable friendships with other children. "Having good friends is one of the most important things in a child's life," says Margie. "Whether it's through crafts, games, or outings, the kids play together and become friends. It makes a world of difference come September when they go back to school,



SHABNUM BUDHWANI

Age: 43

Location: Toronto, Ontario

Organization: Skills for Change

Position: Program Coordinator

Length of Service: 7 years

Shabnum Budhwani knows first hand the impact that Skills for Change can have on new Canadians who are looking for work. Before she started her career with the organization, she was a client. Founded in 1982, Skills for Change (SfC) is a not-for-profit organization that has

pioneered programs for internationally trained professionals seeking employment in their field. With programs and services designed to fully integrate newcomers into the Canadian work environment, SfC helps new Canadians like Shabnum achieve their employment goals.

Shabnum is originally from Jamnagar, India, but she, her husband and two daughters immigrated to Canada from Dubai, in 1999. "We decided to move to Canada for a number of reasons," she says. "We heard that Canada was very welcoming to newcomers and that it was a safe place to raise a family. We also thought that in the long

term there would be better opportunities for our daughters, who were 12 and 10 years old when we left Dubai, to pursue post-secondary education."

Like many new Canadians, Shabnum was eager to find a job. "Almost immediately after we landed I started to look for work," she recalls. "I saw a Skills for Change flier in a local employment office and after doing some research, I registered for a workshop designed to help clerical workers refine their skills. On the first day I still remember vividly, thinking that I'd love to work here and help people who were looking for work." After completing the workshop, Shabnum found a job in telemarketing because as she says, "it was the easiest type of job I could get." A month and a half later, she received a call from SfC, who had kept her resume on file from the workshop, inquiring if she would be interested in a position with a non-profit organization. Two days later she found herself working at SfC as an administrative assistant.



TED KERR

Age: 28

Location: Edmonton, Alberta

Organization: HIV Edmonton

Position: Volunteer Coordinator

Length of Service: 1 year

Ted Kerr was born in Edmonton in 1979 and has lived in the Alberta capital his entire life. In 2001, after completing several courses at the local community college, he wanted to see more of the world and travelled to Europe, spending six months in England and another six

in Spain, pursuing a number of interests, including writing and photography.

When he came back to Edmonton, he worked a number of jobs before deciding to focus on his writing and photography. During this time he also started volunteering at a few non-profits, including HIV Edmonton, an organization that provides education, support, harm reduction and advocacy for individuals infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Ted volunteered at HIV Edmonton for several years. "I was drawn to the cause for a number of reasons," he explains. "Living in a western community, I had a strong desire to be more

knowing that they already have friends.” She also supports a summer recreation program for 25 children and is actively involved in the development of a support group for parents.

Another reason Margie chose to work at HCRS was that she could free herself from administrative work, and focus on what she loves: working directly with clients and their families. “I get to do the things I did before, but without the pressure and stress of managing budgets and traveling a lot,” she recounts. “It’s great to sit at a kitchen table and talk with parents over tea about the progress their child is making instead of sitting in a boardroom presenting budget proposals.”

One of the things that Margie enjoys most about working at HCRS is that she is part of diverse team that bring so many different and unique perspectives and experiences. “After working for 38 years, I’ve learned that you can’t possibly

have all of the answers all of the time. It’s great to be able to draw upon the expertise and knowledge of those around you.” Margaret also points out the value of working with people of a younger generation. “They bring a tremendous amount of energy to work, which keeps us all on our toes,” she says. “Young people are bigger risk-takers in terms of looking at jobs, but they always seem to sell themselves short—they think they need a PhD or classroom training — but real life skills are important too. If they can be team players and roll with the punches they’ll be set to work anywhere.”

With her dedication to the children and families that she works with and her desire to keep busy, it doesn’t look like Margie will be “retiring” from her post-retirement job any time soon. “I’m not a senior citizen at 57. I still have a long time to go — I might learn to play golf when I’m 85.”

Nearly seven years later, Shabnum is still working at SFC and is now the program coordinator for Teach in Ontario, providing assistance and support to internationally trained teachers to become certified and find teaching jobs in schools across the province. A few years ago, she was selected to participate in The Maytree Foundation’s Leaders for Change Program. The program gives social activists and community leaders the opportunity to build on their leadership skills and to apply new knowledge and insights in small group work with community partners, with the hope of bringing about systemic change through action-based poverty reduction initiatives.

Shabnum can relate to the challenges that new Canadians face when looking for work. “The major hurdle is the lack of recognition of international credentials and experience. Employers always want to see relevant Canadian experience, but how can we get experience if no one will hire us?” She finds it ironic that employers are dealing with skills shortages when there are qualified

people who want to work. “There are a lot of barriers and hoops to jump through, and that’s frustrating for people who come to Canada and are willing and able to work.”

Shabnum doesn’t hesitate for a moment when asked what she finds most rewarding about working at SFC. “That’s easy. It’s the look on a client’s face, a smile, or a hug, when they come to me and say that they’ve either started a training program or have found a job in their field. You can see the joy in their eyes, the excitement about the future and their ability to make a positive contribution to society.”

In September, Shabnum’s youngest daughter will begin her first year at York University, joining her older sister who is already in her third year of a Public Policy program at University of Toronto. “I look back at our time here and sometimes I can’t believe how fortunate we are to have come to a country like Canada,” says Shabnum. “It hasn’t always been easy, but it is rewarding to have been able to find a job that I love, live in a wonderful community and see

connected to global issues, and HIV/AIDS is a global disease that has a major impact on the community level.” When the opportunity to join the staff team as a volunteer coordinator arose, Ted saw it as a natural way for him to strengthen his commitment to the organization’s cause. “For the first six months I was running on adrenaline, it was a rush to be working at HIV Edmonton in an increased capacity” he recounts. “Now I’m past the honeymoon phase and the learning curve has kicked in.”

Ted coordinates the participation of nearly 100 active volunteers in all aspects of HIV Edmonton’s operations, including special

events, community development and the traditional administrative functions that while less glamorous, are no less critical.

His approach to volunteer management allows him to find something meaningful for everyone to do. “It’s my philosophy is to never reject a volunteer. I’ll find a place for them in the organization. Everyone who walks through our doors has a drive to be a part of the HIV/AIDS community. My job is to help them find a meaningful way to participate.”

Like many non-profit organizations, the staff complement at HIV Edmonton is small and lack

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Part-time employees make up 36% of the voluntary and non-profit workforce.

Nearly 60% of voluntary and non-profit sector employees have completed post-secondary education.

For more information about Highland Community Residential Services, visit www.nsnnet.org/hcrs

my children grow up and become active and contributing members of society.”

14% of voluntary and non-profit sector employees are new Canadians.

More than half of the employees in the sector work in health, social services or development & housing.

For more information about Skills for Change, visit www.skillsforchange.org.

For more information about the Leaders for Change program, visit www.maytree.com

75% of voluntary and non-profit organizations have fewer than 10 employees. 50% have fewer than five.

< TED KERR: continued from pg 3 >

of funding is a perennial issue. While a source of frustration for some, Ted sees this as an opportunity to step into a number of roles, to learn from his peers and to apply his creativity to find solutions. "My job title may be 'Volunteer Coordinator,' but often I'll work on a communications or community development project. The lines between staff roles are blurred and that's one of the reasons that I like non-profits. You're able to learn new things and try different roles within the organization, and that's something you can't always do in the private sector."

The economic boom in Alberta had led a fair number of Ted's peers in the voluntary and non-profit sector to consider leaving organizations for higher paying jobs with better benefits in the private sector, however Ted doesn't see himself leaving. "I've always felt more comfortable in the non-profit sector. I feel blessed that I am able to earn a living while making a difference,"

he says. "When you work in a non-profit, you're always in touch with reality and there's no time to be complacent. It keeps you on your toes."

Then there's the gender issue. Men make up only 25% of the workforce in the non-profit sector, with the majority of them working in sports and recreation. "The gender politics in the non-profit world are a little different," admits Ted. "There's a stigma that it's women's work. We need to get over that."

With many non-profit leaders set to retire in the coming years, Ted sees a bright future for himself and for young people in the sector who are looking to better align their careers with their civic and social values. "There are many people in the sector who are thinking of retiring after championing the cause for ten, twenty or more years. Who's going to take their place to ensure that the work gets done?" he asks. He's quick to respond: "I'll gladly bear the torch."

Only 25% of employees in the voluntary and non-profit sector are men. In the private sector, that figure is over 50%.

For more information about HIV Edmonton, visit www.hivedmonton.com

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Project: Identifying the need for HR management training and resources

Looking at the supply and demand for HR training within the sector, this project recently launched a survey targeting executive directors and managers responsible for human resources to solicit their perspectives on the need for and accessibility of HR management training. Once the project is complete, the HR Council will identify strategies for the development and delivery of HR management training and resources across the sector.

Project: HR needs assessment of national voluntary organizations working in health

This project was completed in April 2007 with the submission of a final report to the Office of the Voluntary Sector at the Public Health Agency of Canada. The final report highlights the findings of a survey undertaken by the HR Council to identify the pressing HR issues in a cross-section of national voluntary organizations in the health sector and a series of recommendations to address those issues.

Discover practical tools, information and services related to non-profit workplace issues and HR management online at hrcouncil.ca

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