

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

WOOLWICH COMMUNITY SERVICES

SPRING 2010



OVERVIEW DON HARLOFF

WCS

- COMMUNITY INFORMATION
- GROWING TOGETHER
- THE KIDS & I
- FOOD BASKETS
- YOUTH DROP-IN
- THRIFT STORE
- CHRISTMAS GOODWILL
- CARE-RING
- RED CROSS LOAN CUPBOARD
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- FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM
- ST. JACOBS FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRE

Hello everyone, and welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter to volunteers and friends of WCS. Undoubtedly, you have seen the recent advertisements in the newspapers regarding staff positions within the agency.

Mary Visneskie, after 18 years will be retiring and will be leaving us at the end of April. All of us will miss Mary's knowledge and expertise. We will also be looking for a person to take care of our many fundraising events and to help in completing a communication and marketing plan for the agency.

Kelly Christie will be responsible for our emergency food bank, new program development and ensuring people are properly supported when working through financial, housing, shelter, or other such life issues.

These changes reflect our desire to better serve residents of Woolwich Township and North Wellesley. It has been just under 10 years since we have added to our staffing level. Much has changed in this time and demand for support has increased.

Up to now we have managed to address these needs by stretching our staff resources to the limit. The addition of one extra staff person will mean we can provide a higher concentrated level of service. We wish to be better at what we do, and better we shall be!

We have a lot to look forward to in the months ahead with our annual Volunteer Appreciation evening, Mary's Retirement Open House, our Wild Woolwich Challenge Event, and our summer golf tournament. I hope you have a chance to participate in some or all of these events.

We highlight in this newsletter the work of the St. Jacobs Family Support Centre program and the history of Low German families from Latin America who have settled in this area.

As always, I continue to be amazed by the generosity of this community in assisting those in need. Thanks so much for all you do.

April 18th to 25th is National Volunteer Week. The staff each year looks forward to this opportunity to say "Thanks" to the many volunteers of Woolwich Community Services. WCS Volunteers "Olympians of the Community"



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TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Low German-Speaking Mennonites of Latin America

Historical Background

The conservative colony Mennonites of Latin America are the descendants of the approximately 8,000 Russian Mennonites who settled in western Canada in 1874-76. These Mennonites came to Canada on the basis of assurances from the federal government in 1873 that they could enjoy freedom of religion, exemption from military service and complete freedom to operate their own schools. In spite of hardships as they established themselves on farms in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, by 1920 they had achieved a comfortable standard of living. About this time, Canadian provincial authorities withdrew some of their privileges. The governments of both Manitoba and Saskatchewan began to require mandatory school attendance and English-only instruction.



During WWI Mennonite insistence on retaining the German language and culture ran counter to Canada's increasing nationalism and anti-German sentiment. Some families were fined and even imprisoned for not sending their children to recognized schools. Some Mennonites felt their beliefs and way of life threatened by this increased nationalism. Therefore, in 1922 approximately 6,000 Low German-speaking Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan and moved to Mexico.

In the last few decades difficult economic situations, a search for more land, the pressures of technology and globalization, and church differences have impelled many of these Mennonites to move from Mexico to Belize, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay or the United States. Others have returned to Canada. Some of their movements, such as those to Mexico in the 1920's, have been described as controlled migrations of faith led by church ministers. By comparison, since the 1970's uncontrolled migrations have resulted as individual families have sought greater economic and educational opportunity in Canada and the United States.

It was in the 1950's when drought and the rapidly growing population of the Mexico colonies led to strain in the community, that MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) responded to local church leaders' requests for assistance. Many of the Low German Mennonites are entitled to Canadian citizenship through their parents or grandparents. Upon returning to Canada they often found employment as agricultural workers harvesting the summer vegetable crops in Ontario, Manitoba or Alberta. As their numbers increased in the late 1980's Canadian government and social services called on MCC to help with the work of processing immigration papers and integrating these families into Canadian society.



St. Jacobs Family Support Centre —

A program of Woolwich Community Services

Imagine you're a young mother who has moved to a foreign country. You need a home, but cannot read the newspaper to check ads. At first, you are living with relatives, but their living space is already inadequate for their family. Your husband needs a job. He doesn't have the proper papers to work here because you are the one with Citizenship and are sponsoring him to get his Permanent Resident card. This process confuses you both. You can't work because you have 4 little children to take care of and another one on the way. You are six months pregnant and need to find a doctor for you and your family. Your youngest fell and broke his arm. After weeks of searching, your husband finds work, but it pays only \$10/hr. which doesn't begin to cover all the bills. The one relative you know cannot help because his English is only rudimentary. Once you have found a rental by word of mouth, you need help to set up utilities, but are not sure where to begin. You have heard from others that there is government support for your children-but what do you need to do to be eligible? Who can help your family? Your sister-in-law introduces you to Brenda and Esther at the **St. Jacobs Family Support Centre**.

Here at the **St. Jacobs Family Support Centre** we continue the work that two courageous women, Sue Shantz and Marge Unger, began so many years ago. They saw a need in the community as these families began moving into the Woolwich area to work in shops and home-based factories owned by the Old Order Mennonites. Today, the work is very similar. We help Low German-speaking Mennonite families with settlement, medical, and educational needs.

Newcomer Settlement Support

These newcomer families have many needs, such as early on we are helping with OHIP, Child Tax Benefits, Social Insurance, and citizenship documents. All of this is difficult without the English Language or knowledge of our systems. We help them to find a family doctor and assisting them to enroll their children in schools are still priority issues.

Language and Cultural Interpretation

A great part of our work involves providing translation at a variety of appointments, usually medical, or dental. We also provide support to families in translating for government agencies, utility companies, landlords, employers, etc.

Promoting and Supporting Children's Education

We are often the liaison between home and school, especially in the first few years of the children's schooling. This is mainly because of the barriers of language and the fact that most families are still striving to learn English. We spend a good deal of our time reading papers that the children come home from school with and interpreting report cards. It is not uncommon for us to deal with issues of attendance, frequent absences, or behavioral and learning problems of school children.

The children often begin school late and are often sent only in Grade 1. Language process and school readiness fall far behind their Canadian-born peers. This trend is slowly changing. We have seen enrollment in Kindergarten and even Junior Kindergarten become more of the norm. We continue to emphasize the importance of an early school start so the children can gain the most from this experience.

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." Benjamin Franklin



English School

We believe that our Thursday English School for women and their children is a priority. Through partnerships SJFSC provides an English as a Second Language program for mothers and a school-readiness for preschool children. We work collaboratively with volunteers and agencies to help women learn English speaking, reading and writing and help children get prepared for school in Canada. The Literacy Group of Waterloo Region plans and facilitates the women's learning while the Ontario Early years provides an excellent preschool program. Volunteers (of which we always need more of) care for the babies and toddlers while their moms are in class. Finally, Woolwich Community Health Centre provides a hot, healthy lunch to promote good nutrition and allow for an extended learning day.

To be able to speak and read in the language of their "adopted" home will in the long run be as valuable, or more so, than all the material help we give them. Our literacy program for moms and tots has been going on for many years. There are women who have been consistent in their attendance for at least 5 or more years, and there are always newcomers, who stay as long as they are in our transportation area. For many years, we, also had a foreign student through the MCC volunteer program, and this year there's a community member attending.

One woman is so excited about learning English that she's taking the "city" bus from Elmira to St. Jacobs with her three little children. What a brave and courageous undertaking for this young mom to tackle! Another young mom faithfully attends our Thursday English School, which she only misses when her children are ill. She still struggles with literacy, but her verbal skills have improved to the point that she assists many friends and family members with translation at medical appointments. She also challenges herself in other ways. She tried more than three times to pass her G2 driver's test, and finally made it!

We see many advancements in the community and are privileged to be their to provide assistance as necessary.

35 Years and Counting.....

Twenty-five years ago Linda Snyder opened up a room in her home to the community. Lynda, along with seven other women started the Woolwich Community Information Centre in a 'granny flat' at her Centre Street home in Elmira.

The centre was run with two volunteers at the time. One would answer the phones, and deal with drop-in requests, while the other would care for their children in the kitchen. In this way, Snyder and the women would be able to volunteer and remain a part of the community while being with their young children. It was an ideal situation for all of them. Most of the initial work was simply to provide information, but it was not long before other services were offered as well. Volunteers would drive residents without other means of transportation to their doctors' appointments, and help seniors fill out government forms for the guaranteed income supplement.

The Christmas Goodwill program also started at this time, with 12 families benefitting in the first year of the program. Snyder stayed involved with the centre for its first two years, until it moved to the Township offices in 1976. The centre continued for some time with volunteer help, and in 1980, it advertised for a part-time coordinator to take over its programs. Pat McLean became the Coordinator at that time. In 1986, WCS moved to its current location on Arthur Street. As needs became apparent, new programs and services were added. The result is what you see today.

Now known as Woolwich Community Services (WCS the agency), provides help to approximately one in five Woolwich Township residents, and has more than 130 volunteers running a variety of services. What started quite modestly 35 years ago in Lynda's home is now one of the most important community agencies in Woolwich Township.

"Reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life." Mortimer J. Adler



Ruby & Elroy Wideman

2010 RECIPIENTS

YVONNE REID MEMORIAL

VOLUNTEER AWARD

After a few years enjoying retirement leisure, Ruby and Elroy began thinking and talking about becoming involved in volunteer opportunities in our community.

Woolwich Community Services Emergency Food Bank was at the top of the list of places where they felt they could be helpful. It soon became apparent that we had made the right choice as they both describe the food bank as being a "good fit" for them.

Every Monday afternoon (and then some) since 2005 Ruby and Elroy sort food, complete hampers, and rotate food to ensure freshness. In addition, Elroy lends his carpentry skills to make cupboards, fix shelves, and come up with creative ways of making the food bank more efficient.

Many thanks for all your efforts and commitment to serving others.

" We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." - Sir Winston Churchill

RETIREMENT!!!!!! Last Day at WCS Friday April 30th

(As interviewed by Kelly)

Q: Mary how many years have you worked for WCS?

A: 18 fabulous years!

Q: What was your job when you started back in 1992?

A: I worked part-time 20 hours a week, Tues. to Thurs. as the bookkeeper and filled in as receptionist.

Q: What is your present job?

A: Jack of all trades, master of none. I still do the book-keeping, and coordinate the Foodbank, the Office, Care Ring, Mobility cupboard, Income Tax Clinic, Employment Services and Community Information Centre.

Q: Are you looking forward to retirement?

A: **ABSOLUTELY!!!!**

Q: What are you planning to do in your retirement?

A: Enjoy more time with my family.



Q: Besides Kelly what will you miss most about WCS?

A: The people! Everyone of the staff and the people who come in for assistance. I will miss the opportunity to help people.

Thank You ,Thank You, Thank You!!!
To all our donors, volunteers and community.
Your financial contributions, time, talents,
fundraising support has once again made it
possible for Woolwich Community Services to
enjoy another year of providing friendly,
useful services and
support to all community members.



DATES TO REMEMBER



Volunteer Appreciation to
Celebrate the
"Olympians of the Community"
April 22nd, 7:00 pm, Lions Hall

Mary's Goodbye Open House—All Invited!!!!
Wed. April 28/10 2-4 at WCS



The "AMAZING" Wild Woolwich
Challenge **Sat. May 1st**

Annual General Meeting &
35 Year Celebration
June 15th, 7:00 pm



Jeanne Renault Golf Classic
Thurs. Aug. 12th
Conestogo Golf & Country Club

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