

CONNECTING WITH NEEDY SENIORS FROM COAST TO COAST

by Pierre Barbeau
 Executive Director

Building relationships and helping seniors who have had difficult lives full of poverty and isolation is what our programs in Canada are all about. During the next two years, we will be able to reach many more seniors thanks to a grant received from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. This grant has enabled us to hire 33

young people throughout the country to work directly with the local charitable organizations we have assisted with your support. All of these organizations work with frail and isolated elderly people who will greatly benefit from the additional staff support provided by Help the Aged and HRSDC.

This newsletter will give you background information about some of our interns and just a
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OTTAWA

“How does someone become homeless?”

by Jan Labelle
 Help the Aged Volunteer

I recently interviewed Wendy McCarl, a Help the Aged intern working at The Mission in Ottawa, a shelter for homeless men that has been assisted by Help the Aged for the past 16 years.

Wendy informed me that she “feels compelled to help others” because of her own life experience. Wendy was placed in foster care by the Children’s Aid Society and, as a Crown Ward, was adopted by the loving and nurturing Chapman family. She believes that it is her mission to give back the kind of emotional and financial support that she received from her family.

Wendy helps to assess a variety of male residents at the mission. She says that she prefers to forget

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Wendy and Serge at The Mission in Ottawa. “Many Canadians live from paycheck to paycheck – really only one step away from The Mission.”



SURREY

“I think anything would be better than the slippers he was wearing ...”

by Caroline Neville
 HTA intern with the Surrey Seniors Support Services

On my desk lay a new referral. It read, “Visually impaired, very poor hearing, wife is in care and he is lonely, stressed and needing community support. He can’t make his own phone calls so you must mail a request for an appointment.” It is not too unusual for seniors to be visually and hearing impaired, I thought, but if he can’t see well and is hearing impaired to this degree, how am I going to get in touch with him?

I decided to call John to see what would happen. A shaky voice came over the other end of the line.

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Caroline and John: “a good fit”

“You are so sweet!”

by Tiffany Oliver

Help the Aged intern with Home Support Services team, Waterloo

The most meaningful aspect of this experience with Help the Aged is the interaction I have with older adults and knowing that even having a brief conversation when I see them at the centre means such a great deal. One gentleman in particular uses a walker and walks all through the centre for approximately one hour each day, getting his exercise and fresh air. When I see him, I stop to talk with him, just simple, polite conversation. One day I said to him you are so sweet and he reached over and he gave me an enormous hug. It was one of the most genuine and heartfelt hugs I have ever received from anyone. It is amazing the connections we can make with other people when we simply take the time to care, even if it is only a moment of chit-chat each day.

“How does someone become homeless?”

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about the “sheets of paper” and assesses the men’s needs through chats in the lunch line or in private conversations. A champion of the Mission’s motto, ‘more than just a shelter’, she uses her counselling skills to help the homeless men move beyond temporary solutions. Wendy and other staff in the centre provide employment and training resources, help in finding permanent housing, and referrals to other community programs.

For the men, it is an opportunity to make a fresh start. As a former child in care, Wendy truly understands the need for this kind of helping hand. Others, however, do not. She says that she is often asked by friends, “How does someone become homeless?” To her, the answer is clear – there is very little difference between her or for that matter us, and the residents of the shelter. As she maintains, “Many Canadians live from pay check to pay check – really only one step away from the Mission.”

Wendy says that she has “a drive to succeed so she can prove everyone wrong – that Crown Wards can really make it.” If making a difference in people’s lives is any measure of success, then Wendy has already made her mark.



“Reflecting upon my own mortality”

by Tim Kirkwood

Help the Aged intern with the Victoria Order of Nurses of Greater Halifax

The most challenging aspect of my internship thus far has been coming to terms with the many sick people we work with. It has been hard for me to confront the fact that one day my parents may end up with a disease such as Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s. I may end up with one of these diseases myself, so it has been tough to see what kind of degeneration they inflict upon the human body and mind. We also work with seniors who are near the end of their lives and I have had to reflect upon my own mortality when working with the people we do. This has been very hard but also very rewarding.

I feel fortunate because my job allows me to spend time with people who have seen many things and they realize what is really important in life. The majority of seniors I have worked with have all have a great sense of humor and have made me realize that most of the time it is just better to laugh at the worries in life than to stress about them.

The most rewarding experience thus far has been spending time with the elderly. I feel as though our society devalues the experience of the elderly, when in fact we should cherish it and nurture senior citizens so they can impart the knowledge they have learned over the course of their lifetime. Despite the stigma of old age, the elderly people I have encountered through the VON have shown me that you can be young at heart even when you are a senior citizen.

Connections



HTA intern Matthew Feltmate, through Ottawa's Good Companions, has

many opportunities to share good times with seniors like Mary and Pat (with teddy bear).

This HTA internship has given Wendy an opportunity to give back some of the same kind of protection and caring that she experienced in her own family.

Too many bulls and broncos

by Alexa Balen

Help the Aged intern with Operation Friendship (Edmonton)

Joe Ladouceur was born in Boyle, Alberta in 1935 and grew up on a farm. His Metis family consisted of his parents, seven brothers and two sisters that are now scattered all over with Joe being the oldest. He went to school up to grade five and then started to work on the family farm. For the next 23 years, Joe worked on the farm during the summers which he took over when his parents passed away. In the summers, Joe also enjoyed the rodeo life by riding bulls and broncos and in the winters he worked on the oil rigs. Joe never married which allowed him to travel to a number of rodeos and oil rigs.

Joe's health leaves a lot to be desired as a result of his rodeo lifestyle. For the last four or five months, he



Joe Ladouceur

has had trouble walking. He currently is in a wheelchair and previously had a walker which he hopes to start using again soon. His legs are sore and he also has a broken rib. Even though Joe may not be very mobile, he is still strong and able to stand up for himself.

The first love of Joe's is singing and playing the guitar. He grew up in a musical family and still enjoys music, especially country western. When he was younger he played many weddings.

When Joe first came to Edmonton he lived in a rooming house. He heard about Operation Friendship from some people he knew, then came to inquire about housing and decided to give it a try in 1997. He enjoys Operation Friendship and tries to "go along with whatever they tell me."

"We were worried that something terrible would happen to Sonny"

by Crystal DeLaval

Help the Aged intern with the Glace Bay Food Bank.

Sonny is an elderly client of the Glace Bay Food Bank who came one morning asking us to find him a place to live. Sonny's apartment had burned the night before and he was homeless and had no possessions.

I took Sonny to Town House (the Citizen Services League) to get him some clean clothes. We also went to buy the local paper that advertises apartments. I am pleased to say Sonny moved into a new apartment that day. This one is a lot safer, cleaner and nicer than his previous place.

Once we got him the apartment, we had to locate a bed and kitchen table with chairs. These things were purchased from a used-furniture store in Glace Bay. We also managed to get him some bedding from Town House, and utensils, dishes and groceries from the food bank.

The frustrating part was that Sonny would have had no place to go had an apartment not been found. There is nowhere in Glace Bay for people in this situation. There is a homeless shelter in Sydney, and the Salvation Army said they could put him up in a hotel. The problem with this is that there are no hotels in Glace Bay and Sydney is a 20- minute drive. Sonny suffers from mental illness and likes to go outside and roam around. We were worried that if he was placed in Sydney, he would get lost and something terrible would happen.

It is a relief that we found an apartment for Sonny, but I continue to worry about him. Sonny has no children to turn to. The only family that he had was his wife Theresa who passed away last year. Sonny continues to believe that she is coming home. I believe that without Help the Aged's financial assistance to the Glace Bay Food Bank to provide the services of a young person like me, Sonny would have been forced to live on the streets.

Connecting with Needy Seniors from Coast to Coast (continued from page 1)

few of the seniors who are now benefiting from this program and from your ongoing generosity. With your help, we are providing funds for programs such as meals on wheels, the purchase of eyeglasses, hearing aids and wheelchairs. We thank you and also HRSDC for their valuable support through this internship program which will directly assist the elderly poor through the following caring organizations:

- St. Christopher House, Older Adult Centre – Toronto
- CARP, Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus – Toronto
- Waterloo Home Support Services
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Seniors Health Resource Teams
- Operation Friendship and Operation Friendship Housing Society – Edmonton
- LutherCare Communities – Saskatoon
- Saskatoon Council on Aging
- VON Western region, Alberta
- Seniors Support Services – Surrey, B.C.
- The Teapot 50 Plus Centre – Lachine, Québec
- Seniors Resource Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Glace Bay Food Bank and Citizens Service League



Director Pierre Barbeau with Canadian Programs manager Marjorie Milloy (centre) signing contract with HRSDC representative Maren Delion.

- VON of Greater Halifax
- North Caribou Métis Association – Quesnel, B.C.
- Nunavut Tunngavik Inc – Iqaluit
- The Mission (Ottawa)
- Centre de jour Guiges (Ottawa)
- Centretown Community Health Centre (Ottawa)
- Ottawa Public Health
- Family Services Ottawa
- The Good Companions-Community Support Services (Ottawa)

"I think anything would be better than the slippers he was wearing ..." (cont'd from page 1)

Speaking very loudly and very slowly and using the simplest words, I was able to make an appointment with him. John agreed to meet me at his wife's care home. He walks there every day to visit and care for her, as she has Alzheimer's. Shortly after I arrived at the care facility, this petite, humble man arrived. John was wearing a fedora, suit jacket, bowtie, suspenders attached to his dress slacks and plaid-print house slippers!

The telephone is a real challenge for him to use, so we piled into my little car and went into town where I helped John buy an amplified telephone. We returned to his home where I set it up for him. He had just the person in mind that he would like to call. I helped him look around his house for his old phone directory so he could contact an old-time, Russian-

speaking female friend. Dialing the numbers on the large-font, push-button phone was a lot easier for him than his rotary phone, he commented. After his brief conversation, he hung up and looked at me with starry eyes of amazement and said "Yes, it works! I can't believe it! I haven't talked to her for years!"

Yet again, a month later, I thought I would call John to see how he was doing. He requested that I help him with a couple of things. Off I went. Upon arriving, he was again all dressed up, but still wearing his Scottish-print slippers as outdoor shoes! We got into my car and went to the mall in search of some proper shoes. John bought for himself a nice pair of functional supportive loafers. Although they were the most expensive shoes he had ever purchased, he let me know they were also the most comfortable. I think anything would be better than the slippers he was wearing for walking shoes!

Thank you! Your generous donations will be used to support the programs described in this newsletter.

Help the Aged (Canada)

1300 Carling Avenue, Unit 205, Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 7L2

1-800-648-1111 or (613) 232-0727 www.helptheaged.ca info@helptheaged.ca