



headline

This issue

Mr. 10,000

New Staff

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If there isn't
a door
make one
page

Who would have thought it?

We had an important moment recently. We signed up our 10,000th member and that focused our attention on what has been happening here in the last year or so and also caused our own little millennium crisis.

That we signed up our 10,000th member shouldn't have been surprising. We have had a 40% increase in the number of people coming through the door here in the last year. We have days with 200 or more people coming to use our services.

What sense can we make of this figure of 10,000? I keep reading reports that the estimated population of the Downtown Eastside is around 16,000. And we have 10,000 of them on our rolls? I don't think so. I think what this says is that the DTES is a place where a lot of people pass through. And some don't.

We have a special code for people who we have signed up but haven't seen for years. This keeps our numbers honest when the person reappears. It seems to be the nature of employment in general these days that no job is forever. The DTES has always been the gathering spot for people in cyclical industries, construction contracts, and the first to be unemployed. Lately, we have been seeing more people who normally have more job longevity. Presumably this is the economy speaking.

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The 10,000th cake Going... going... gone



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10,000 continued

And so, our 10,000th member maybe responded to with a mixed response. On one hand it is good to know that we are providing a much needed service. On the other, it is unfortunate that this service is so much in demand.

As I mentioned, however, the arrival of Mr. 10,000 [for a Mr. it was] has had some interesting consequences.

Our millennium crisis

When we first moved in at 390 Main the Four Corners Bank was still in operation and we were kept hopping trying to get established, plan for the future, and handle the people already here. We made the mistake of giving our very first member the number 1. We never imagined ten thousand. If you know anything about computers you will know that we should have assigned our member the number 00001 otherwise it would stop sorting properly once we hit 5 digits. The solution was my job. Find or write a formula to find all of the incorrectly formatted member numbers. Add the necessary number of preceding zeros and rewrite them. Fortunately, as with many computer problems, you can be sure many others have suffered with something similar. The internet assisted with this problem and most of the numbers got corrected properly. Now we are good to 100,000 but I am not expecting any problems there.

The challenge of good news

The good news is that we got funding for a year to hire two more employment counselors. The challenge is that adding two more staff members meant we needed to sit down and decide what we had accomplished since we started and what we should be doing now and in the future. Exciting, satisfying, but also demanding of time and effort when the place is hopping simply doing what we are doing now. And, of course, there are the ironies. We hosted a study last year with two Occupational Therapy students to find out from our members what was working for them and what wasn't. One response that surprised us was how important it was for them to be able to choose when, during the day, to come and see us and our employment counselors. It gave them a sense of confidence at taking control of their day if only in a small way. When did we get this information? About the time when we were so busy that nobody was getting a drop-in appointment. However, with the new staff on board, we made sure there was drop-in time available.

The clean-up that accompanied all this change also brought to light a report from one of our practicum placements describing how, over the course of a month, he had helped a new member go from being unable to use the computer to look for work to basic literacy and finally to employment. Every now and then you need to remember that you are doing useful work.

There is a lot of change going on at the moment: in the DTES, the economy, and the world. We ate our slice of 10,000th member cake and went back to work.

Don't just wait for jobs. Create them!

While completing my BSW in 1990, I had the opportunity to work with the start up of Canada's first revolving loan fund. Later when I went back to Business school to further study Community Economic Development, I returned to work with the Montreal Community Loan Association.

CEC continued and new staff

The Montreal Community Loan Association continues to be a viable entity today. I still have money invested in the fund giving me a wonderful social return on investment.

In those early days we identified a group of people in the community (single mothers, unemployed youth, new immigrants and refugees and visible minorities who had great viable business ideas but no avenues for capital). We recognized that within our neighbourhood there were people with money and people with great social enterprise ideas that we could match up.

The first loan we made in 1990 was to a group of single mothers on Welfare who wanted to sell a cloth diaper in the age of disposables—a truly green business idea. No banks were willing to fund their project—after all they did not have husbands to back their loans and why would anyone want to deal with messy diapers? That same year, among other projects we also lent money to a group who created a training restaurant that hired mental health consumers and provided low cost meals to people in the neighbourhood.

Social enterprises are emerging everywhere as people seek ways and means to get people participating actively in community and the economy. This week I listened to a group of people who have launched social enterprise in New Westminster hiring homeless people to do street cleaning.

That same day, I received a newsletter from the Montreal Community Loan Association—20 years later, *Bummi*—the diaper cover company—has now got 50 employees working for them and a turnover of 5 million annually—pretty good for a few women on Welfare just trying to create jobs for themselves and others like them.

Note: Carol is the Program Manager at Pathways

New Staff—wide is good

Two pieces of good news in all this demand for our services was being able to hire two more staff people. During a research study that was done with the cooperation of our members we asked, “What makes a good employment counselor?” The answer was interesting. A good employment counselor will have had a varied background so that they are bringing a wide range of experience to the job. This, of course, goes with both the ability to listen and relate to a wide variety of people. We certainly got lots of “wide” with our two recent hires in their lives before employment counseling.

Chessa One of the stories that Chessa tells about her working life was being on a study investigating the re-integration of child soldiers in Uganda. That may have been before or after working for an NGO in India or the Paul Newman Camp for kids with life threatening illnesses.

Stephen's working life includes running a café/cycle rental, building specialty wheels for Senior's Triathlon bike riders, teaching carpentry, joinery, and kite making [though presumably not as part of the same course], building adventure playgrounds, and experience with various community arts projects.

With that variety of experience and with that of the rest of the staff, I think we have most days covered.

Have you updated your organization's page on dtes.ca lately?

Contact Glenn for more information 604-682-7353

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