



# Community Dispatch

Community Development Halton InfoFacts

December 2017

Vol. #23, No. #1

## VOLUNTEERS: BUILDERS OF INCLUSIVE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

*In September, Community Development Halton held its Annual General Meeting, with speaker Henriëtte Thompson on the theme of “Volunteers: Builders of Inclusive and Vibrant Communities.” As former Director of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice for the Anglican Church of Canada, and as its liaison to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Henriëtte Thompson’s message is a powerful one – that the indispensable contributions made by Indigenous peoples in building healthy communities throughout Canada’s history, from before and throughout the earliest settler days up to the present, have for far too long remained unacknowledged, and unreciprocated. In this year of Canada 150, and grounded in the TRC’s call for reconciliation and healing, I share with you Henriëtte Thompson’s reflections on the imperative that each of us, as individuals and in community-based organizations, act to learn and acknowledge this neglected history, and to foster reciprocity with Indigenous peoples in our shared endeavour to build an inclusive and vibrant society.*

Joey Edwardh

### **Address by Henriëtte Thompson, CDH Annual General Meeting, Sep 20/17<sup>1</sup>**

Good evening. I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is

part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit.<sup>2</sup> It is an honour to be invited to address all of you here tonight at the Annual General Meeting of Community Development Halton. Thank you.

The focus of this gathering and of my reflection is on the gift and the challenge of volunteers in building inclusive and vibrant communities, historically and in our contemporary context. I felt that this invitation was also an invitation to “name the moment”<sup>3</sup> – that is, to identify some of the deeper issues that provide both opportunity and challenge to the voluntary sector.

*Recognizing Volunteering in 2017*, is a report published by Volunteer Canada just a few months ago. Just as we have evolved a notion of Corporate Social Responsibility, the report presents a notion of Individual Social Responsibility as a way of describing attitudes toward volunteer action. Individual Social Responsibility refers to “the commitment to improving the quality of life of other individuals, groups, teams as well as society at large.” This is then referred to as each person’s own personal brand of Individual Social Responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

1 This transcript has been slightly abridged from remarks delivered

2 Map and description:

<http://www.newcreditfirstnation2015.com/community-profile/#traditional>

3 Naming the Moment is a participatory method of identifying and analyzing issues in order to decide how to act on them. It began in 1986 and is based on popular

education techniques, particularly those of Paulo Friere.

<http://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/naming-moment-participatory-process-political-analysis-action>

4 Volunteer Canada, “150 years of Canadian volunteering history,” June 26, 2017 (blog),

<https://volunteer.ca/blog/150-years-canadian-volunteering-history-les-150-ans-d-histoire-du-b-n-volat-au-canada>

Casting a backwards glance at the role of nonprofits and volunteers is helpful. Volunteer Canada offers a helpful overview in a blog entitled, "150 years of volunteer history." I would like to paint a picture of the ways in which volunteer history in colonial Canada unfolded alongside the historic experience of Indigenous people in Canada.

By way of explaining why I might be able to share some limited insight on this, I should mention that for six years (2009 – 2015), I represented the Anglican Church of Canada (itself a voluntary sector institution) at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, along with survivors of residential schools and Indigenous Elders, with national Indigenous leaders, and with the Government of Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report was published two years ago, and it included 94 Calls to Action. I'll come back to several of these shortly.

Several important and broad-based *insights* were generated during the TRC period –

1. Canadians were not taught their real history. The lament of many is "but, I didn't know..."
2. The devastating legacy of colonialism and residential schools continues to reverberate in the lives of families and communities today – there are more Indigenous children in care than during the residential school era and the Sixties Scoop;
3. Indigenous peoples who have lived on this land for 15,000 years(!) are resilient, have always resisted colonization since first encounter with Europeans, and are reclaiming their nationhood and their identities; and,
4. Systemic racism is present in Canadian government and social structures, and white supremacy threatens to undermine the goal of having vibrant and inclusive communities.

When we talk about social inclusion, we can look at its dimensions across space and time.

First, space (or distance). Just 35 minutes down the road from here is the Mohawk Institute, a residential school in Brantford for children from Six Nations of the Grand River, the largest reserve in Canada.

The Mohawk Institute ran from 1828 to 1970. It is one of only a handful of residential schools still left standing across the country. There is a "Save the Evidence" campaign to raise funds to restore the school building as a permanent witness to what happens when we don't challenge assumptions in dominant society.

Furthermore, just 20 to 30 minutes past Brantford live the Mississaugas of the New Credit on whose traditional land we are gathered today. 2017 marked 170 years since the Mississaugas of the New Credit moved from the mouth of the Credit River to Hagersville.

In spite of these short driving distances from Burlington to neighbouring Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe communities (and they are as different from each other culturally and linguistically as French and English), I would hazard a guess that the cognitive distance between most or many people in the Region and the Mississaugas or the Haudenosaunee is a world apart.

But, the gap is closing because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a roadmap to close that cognitive distance, and communities have a critical role to play in bridging these spaces.

Time – or the history of Canadian civil society organizations as they engaged in social change – is another way of understanding social inclusion at both national and local levels.

Before the first European settlers arrived and brought with them an understanding of state sovereignty, Indigenous nations were built on a notion of kinship that extended not only to human beings but to the non-human world. Indigenous nations are made up of four factors – a shared language, a sacred history, a ceremonial cycle, and

a place or territory. Geography and a harsh climate across this land, meant that cooperation and a shared responsibility for the impact of actions on seven generations in the future, were crucial.

Early European settlers from the 1600s onward were challenged to establish and run hospitals, schools, orphanages and homes for the elderly in order to support the needs of communities as there was very limited government provision.<sup>5</sup> Without establishing these services, death and illness rates would have been much higher, and the education of settlers to read and write would have been grossly inadequate.

The French and English settlers and explorers knew that their very lives depended on the knowledge and skill of Indigenous peoples. The earliest pre-Confederation treaties in eastern Canada were peace and friendship treaties because mutual interdependence was acknowledged by both parties. As Niigaan James Sinclair says: "When immigrants came and joined our nations they were offered a place, role, and responsibility not only, so the work would be shared but so that they could feel valued, be recognized, and feel at home. So that they could help build life too. This is, after all, what keeps families together."<sup>6</sup>

After Confederation, colonial volunteers focused on assisting with basic rights such as decent housing, adequate health care, and free access to education. However, these improvements in social change were not extended to Indigenous peoples. The disregard for post-Confederation treaties and the establishment of the Indian Act of 1876 resulted in federal responsibility for Indigenous peoples' welfare and an aggressive policy of assimilation that denied Indigenous peoples of their human rights still to this day. The ground is hopefully starting to change – three weeks ago, the

Prime Minister announced his wish to end the Indian Act of 1876.<sup>7</sup>

There was a colonial perception of an "Indian problem" that needed solving in the drive for water routes, land, and furs. To solve the so-called "problem" Indian residential schools were established.

Over a period of 150 years from the 1850s to the late 1990s, the government of Canada forcibly removed 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities and sent them far away to church-run residential schools. The children, some as young as three, were denied use of their language and culture; they were stripped of their identity, and siblings were separated from each other for years in the same or different schools. The government of Canada's aim was to assimilate Indigenous people into colonial society, beginning with the children, by removing them from their families, communities, and ways of life. The churches aided and abetted this aim. The intergenerational devastation of the First Peoples was actively underway.

At the turn of the new century, the national camping movement launched by Ernest Thompson Seton and his Woodcraft Indians movement exposed middle-class kids from the dominant culture to "Indian Days" at camp and to training in outdoors skills. Who doesn't love the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, and summer camp? While the camping movement grew, survival skills teaching was stripped from Indigenous kids as they endured residential school for years and lost access to how to live on the land.

"During the Great Depression in the 1930s, it fell to caring individuals and voluntary organizations to provide relief for the hungry and the homeless. The role of volunteers was especially essential in

5 Janet Lautenschlager, "Volunteering: a traditional Canadian value," Canadian Heritage. <http://en.copian.ca/library/research/heritage/compartne/tradval1.htm>

6 Niigaan James Sinclair, "Indigenous nationhood can save the world. Here's how", Globe & Mail, September 12, 2017.

7 Don Smith, "Toronto played a role in dark history of assimilation," Toronto Star, Sept 17, 2017.

supporting the war effort; and clearly proved to the world that Canadians could mobilize in times of crisis," notes Volunteer Canada's overview of 150 years of Canadian volunteering history.<sup>8</sup>

What is not as well known is that First Nations, Inuit and Metis people have a long tradition of military service. Awareness is growing around the role of Indigenous warriors during the War of 1812. In the past 100 years, 12,000 Indigenous persons are estimated to have served in the Canadian forces in three wars -- World Wars I and II and the Korean War. Sadly, the equal treatment that veterans experienced during the wars disappeared once they returned home to Canada and bureaucratic red tape between government ministries left them without access to services like housing and education that were available to other veterans. The federal government apologized in 2000 and offered compensation.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1950s, public health and medical research became a growing area for volunteer involvement across Canada, except on reserves. Recently, we learned that during the period between the two wars, medical scientists conducted tests on malnourished Indigenous people to answer questions about human requirements for vitamins. Research by the University of Guelph in 2013 revealed a long-standing, government-run experiment that came to span the entire country and involved at least 1,300 Aboriginal people, most of them children.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while public health and medical research improved for mainstream Canadians, isolated, dependent, hungry Indigenous people were unwitting subjects for medical tests.

Voluntary efforts in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s were dominated by citizens' movements that grew out of vital social issues of the time. During this

period, individuals and voluntary organizations began to focus on supporting the causes of disadvantaged Canadians. Volunteers worked on issues such as providing better services for disabled individuals and addressing environmental issues. Volunteer activity then began increasing throughout Canada as volunteer centres established themselves in many urban areas. Volunteers raised funds, helped run programs, and served on governance boards.<sup>11</sup>

Volunteering in the 1980s and 1990s continued to evolve to address the changing priorities of an ever-changing settler and immigrant society while Indigenous populations continued to struggle with marginalization, poverty, and the loss of traditional ways of life.

Tribal councils arose across the country to try to address the deep-seated discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples. Churches that ran residential schools began the difficult self-critical and constructive work of acknowledgement, apology, and living into apology. Comprehensive reports such as the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report were shelved by successive governments and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada grew.

The tone at the federal government shifted in 2015. Said the new Prime Minister: "No relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples. It is time for a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership."

Soon after the October 2015 federal election and the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation

8 Volunteer Canada, "150 years of Canadian volunteering history," <https://volunteer.ca/blog/150-years-canadian-volunteering-history-les-150-ans-d-histoire-du-b-n-volat-au-canada>

9 <http://globalnews.ca/news/3053299/national-aboriginal-veterans-day-continues-to-grow-in-size-and-scope/> November 8, 2016, accessed September 19.

10 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/hungry-aboriginal-people-used-in-bureaucrats-experiments-1.1317051> U of Guelph researcher, Ian Mosby.

11 Volunteer Canada, "150 years of Canadian volunteering history," <https://volunteer.ca/blog/150-years-canadian-volunteering-history-les-150-ans-d-histoire-du-b-n-volat-au-canada>

Commission Final Report two months later, the polling firm, Environics, produced a report on Canadian attitudes on Aboriginal peoples.<sup>12</sup>

The study revealed that there is a broad public consensus on the importance of learning about the historical abuses and discrimination that Aboriginal peoples have faced in Canada. Solid majorities strongly back education-related recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to include mandatory curriculum in all schools to teach about Aboriginal history and culture, and to ensure that funding for Aboriginal schools matches funding for other schools in the same province or territory. So, watch out – I say this in a good way! Our children and grandchildren will not be able to say as I and probably many of us in this room could say – “but, I didn’t know.” Education for reconciliation gives me hope.

The report also found that “...many non-Aboriginal Canadians acknowledge that discrimination represents an important challenge for Aboriginal peoples, one that is also tied to a sense of isolation, separation from others in Canada, and a certain stigma for being Aboriginal. And there is widespread recognition that discrimination against Aboriginal peoples is commonplace”<sup>13</sup> although this recognition varies by region across Canada.

This brings us to the matter of “belonging.” In 2015, Community Foundations Canada focused their Vital Signs study on the theme of belonging.<sup>14</sup> When people have a strong sense of belonging and trust at community or national levels, then good things

happen – social inclusion and public health improve, participation goes up, culture and identity flourish, communities are safer, and they bounce back after emergencies.

There are an estimated 4,000 Indigenous people living in Halton Region [since Henriëtte Thompson’s address on September 20, 2017, newly-released data from the 2016 Census show this number has increased to 5,455<sup>15</sup>] and, as noted earlier, the Region is within an easy drive of two reserves – New Credit and Six Nations.

Many of the TRC calls to action speak to the idea of “belonging” – of individual and communal healing that comes through recovery of language and culture; of apologies and commitments to Indigenous rights that create the conditions for reconciliation at the national level; of respect for land and resources to which they have treaty and constitutional rights, and that sustain a spirituality of kinship with human and non-human life.

In order to respect the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, leaders across Canadian society are called to educate themselves – to “paddle their own canoe” as it were, and obtain “skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.” (Call to Action #57 and others)<sup>16</sup>

As TRC lead commissioner, Senator Murray Sinclair said: “We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing.”

12 Environics, Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples, June 2016.

<http://www.environicsinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/canadian%20public%20opinion%20on%20aboriginal%20peoples%202016%20-%20final%20report.pdf>

13 Environics, p 25.

14 Community Foundations Canada, Vital Signs 2015 report, “Belonging”. [http://communityfoundations.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/cfc\\_vitalsignsreport\\_oct05\\_FA\\_digital.pdf](http://communityfoundations.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/cfc_vitalsignsreport_oct05_FA_digital.pdf)

15 Statistics Canada. 2017. *Halton, RM [Census division], Ontario and Ontario [Province]* (table). *Census Profile*. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed December 4, 2017).

16 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 94 Calls to Action,

[http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

In the Calls to Action, community-based youth organizations are singled out as significant in “delivering programs on reconciliation, and they are asked to establish a national network to share information and best practices.”<sup>17</sup>

Museums are called to collaborate with Aboriginal peoples. Nationally, the federal government and the Canadian Museum Association are to set aside funds for 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration projects on the theme of reconciliation.<sup>18</sup>

Sports and recreation represent a major area for volunteer engagement and are called along with “...all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.”<sup>19</sup>

And, finally, since Halton Region and many other regions in the country have welcomed newcomers from around the world for many years and continue to do so, it is important for voluntary sector leaders to know that there is a call to revise “...the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to reflect a more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including Calls to Action, information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools.”<sup>20</sup>

In conclusion, whereas engaging in the work of reconciliation in Halton Region may initially be regarded as one more requirement for a stretched voluntary sector, I wonder if there is another form

of math going on. That reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples will enhance the prospects for vibrant and inclusive communities in ways that are more than we can ask or imagine.

I am reminded of the words of Australian Aborigine activist, artist and academic, Lilla Watson, who said: “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Thank you for listening.

---

### To Learn More

**National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation**  
<http://nctr.ca/map.php>

The permanent home for all statements, documents, and other materials gathered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including the Calls To Action (see ‘Reports’)

**KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives** [www.kairos.org](http://www.kairos.org)

Ecumenical movement for ecological justice and human rights, encompassing 10 major churches and religious groups, in a cross-Canada network.

**Woodland Cultural Centre and the Mohawk Institute** <http://www.woodland-centre.on.ca>



Produced by Community Development Halton

3350 South Service Road

Burlington, Ontario L7N 3M6

(905) 632-1975, 1-855-395-8807

E-mail: [office@cdhalton.ca](mailto:office@cdhalton.ca)

Web site: [www.cdhalton.ca](http://www.cdhalton.ca)

[www.volunteerhalton.ca](http://www.volunteerhalton.ca)



**United Way**  
Halton & Hamilton

---

17 Ibid. TRC Call to Action #66

18 Ibid. TRC Call to Action #68.

19 Ibid. TRC Calls to Action #87-91.

20 Ibid. TRC Calls to Action #93 and 94.