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150 Profiles: Sahar Vermezyari

By Sahar Vermezyari

As we mark the 150th anniversary of confederation, The Philanthropist is profiling Canadians from across the non-profit sector and putting a face to 150 individuals who work or volunteer in Canada's social sector.



Name: Sahar Vermezyari

Current role in the sector: Program Manager of Fellowship in Inclusion and Philanthropy (AFP Foundation for Philanthropy–Canada)

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: It has been over 15 years. I started to volunteer and work in the nonprofit sector in my second year of university while studying social work at Ryerson University.

What was your first job in the sector or your defining moment?

We have a long family history of working in service of people, and long before I even considered making a career out of supporting people, it was a family value and a reality of life. My father also works in the sector, and inspired me to enter the sector.

I started working full-time after completing my Master's in Social Work. My title was Community Engagement Worker and I worked in an adjacent community to the one that I had grown up in, so in many ways it felt that I had come full circle.

I have been lucky to have amazing supervisors who have become mentors and friends to me. This has meant that I have had many defining moments as I have learned from their integrity, humility and wisdom under difficult circumstances.

Describe your desk/workspace.

For the past two years I have been working from home, and rather than setting up an office (which made me feel isolated in an upstairs bedroom) I choose to sit and look out into our backyard as I work.

What are you reading or following that has expanded your understanding of the non-profit sector?

I generally read fiction books, which are not directly linked to my work or the sector, but I find myself constantly analyzing them with an equity lens.

My current role has allowed me the chance to read up on philanthropy and fundraising, a field I previously didn't know much about. Some of the [blog posts](#) the fellows have written during their fellowship have been very eye opening for me.

A blog that I was introduced to about two years ago is [Nonprofit with Balls](#), where Vu Le connects both the program and fundraising aspects of our work beautifully and brings a lens of equity to everything, which is where my passion lies.

I have also enjoyed listening to the podcast about race in Canada called [Colour Code](#). Although the podcast is not directly about the nonprofit sector, the issues discussed resonate with some of the challenges we face in equity work. I have been able to share this podcast with many people as a way to open up and engage in often difficult and uncertain conversations that happen around the topics of race and equity.

What matters to you that you think our sector needs to be thinking about?

Right now my focus is on equity and inclusion work. How do we work in the social profit sector, ultimately toward equity, without recreating inequitable microcosms of our society in our organizations, on our boards and in our daily interactions with co-workers and the people we serve? How do we look at, recognize and learn from the root causes of the injustices we are working to dismantle, while continuing to move forward without being immobilized in only looking to the past? How do we create living and breathing organizational cultures with systems and mechanisms in place to actively encourage values of inclusion, equity and social justice when we all have biases? How do we have courageous, yet gentle conversations that move us toward reconciliation?

Do you know someone we should profile as part of this series? Email us at philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com