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150 Profiles: Hilary Pearson

By Hilary Pearson

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: Hilary Pearson

Current role in the sector: President, Philanthropic Foundations Canada

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: Over 20 years.



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

I began working in the sector as a consultant in strategy and organizational development in the late 1990s. It was a period when many sector organizations were under great pressure from government funding cuts, as well as economic uncertainties dating from the recession in the early 1990s. Shortly after I began this work, the federal government launched the Voluntary Sector Initiative and I was able to work closely with many of the leaders of the sector. It was a defining moment for me as I realized

that there was indeed an opportunity for the sector to define itself in ways that it had not been able to do previously, as a force equal to the public and private sectors that seemed otherwise so dominant in Canadian society.

Describe your desk/workspace.

I travel a lot so I don't see my desk that often! But when I am there I am in downtown Montreal within walking distance of many of the foundations in our network. Since PFC was set up in 1999, we have moved many times. As a national organization we want to be fully bilingual and so we have been firmly anchored in Montreal despite these moves. After fifteen years, my four colleagues and I are finally enjoying a space where we can meet around a table and share it with others working in philanthropy and the non-profit sector.

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

There is a firehose of material available out there on philanthropy and the nonprofit world. I like to think that we at [PFC](#) contribute to that firehose with material that is specifically Canadian and with Canadian examples of philanthropy in action. Sources that I come back to are [Alliance Magazine](#) for a global perspective on philanthropic trends, the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#) for its thoughtful articles on the what's really new thinking in our field, and the work of [Lucy Bernholz](#) and [Clara Miller](#), both innovative and clear thinkers about where the social sector is going in the 21st century. Of course The Philanthropist itself is doing a great job of capturing Canadian thinking about what should matter to us all as sector leaders.

For you as a past author with the journal, please share with us your reflections on what has changed and/or stayed the same since writing the following article:

I have written about [funder collaboration](#), a topic that continues to evolve. When I started working with a network of private funders, there was relatively little collaborative action. This has changed enormously over the last fifteen years. Indeed I would say that this is one of the most notable trends in the development of Canadian philanthropy. Funders seek each other out, they ask about who else is working in a field, they try to understand the terms of a successful collaboration and they are thinking more deeply about what it takes to collaborate with their own grantees and partners, not just with other funders. This is one of the most exciting things that I see changing in philanthropy.

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