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# 150 Profiles: Carissa MacLennan

By Carissa MacLennan

*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:** Carissa MacLennan

**Current role in the sector:** Strategist, Coach and Facilitator

**Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector:** Eighteen years.



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

My most defining moment was a trip to Cameroon for a teaching practicum when completing my Bachelor of Education. I was asked to teach about climate change with 20-year-old textbooks donated from the United States. This was my first encounter with unintentional neo-colonialism and the understanding that good intentions are not enough. My work in the non-profit sector has been defined by this experience as I encourage organizations, businesses, philanthropists and governments to think

about their impact on global systems and to design strategies that will ensure they have a positive influence and move away from token endeavours.

**Describe your desk/workspace.**

After many years of sitting in dark closet-like spaces that sometimes comes with the non-profit job description, I am grateful for the ability to now work remotely. Working on my own allows the opportunity to work from a coffee shop, in a client's space, or in my home office. I am often making use of my floor and/or walls with flip chart paper and sticky notes, trying to create order out of the world's (or an organization's) problems. I like to call my space, organized chaos. I keep an essential oil diffuser at hand and a Buddha statue collected in Myanmar as reminders to stay present (and adventurous).

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

While I follow many accounts on the non-profit sector (eg. @SSIRReview, @MaRSDD, @ImagineCanada, @Phil\_journal, @nonprofitwballs, @FSGtweets), I also follow other areas of work I believe important for the sector thrive and expand outside our silo.

Startups: Much can be learned from a hungry entrepreneur hell-bent on making a successful business out of nothing. Eg. @ashmaurya, @LetsStartup\_Can

Mindfulness: Compassion is the core of what we do – tools to foster this are important. Eg. @mindfulonline, @mindandlifeorg

Corporate Leadership and CSR: Follow the money (and trends) of corporate engagement in sustainability and social impact. @HarvardBiz, @corporateknight, @GuardianSustBiz, @SVInitiative

**What do you think our sector needs to be thinking about?**

I believe the non-profit sector will always play a meaningful role in our world, but I would like to see our focus shift from cleaning up messes to preventing messes. This shift has begun as we see more and more collaborations between corporations, government and non-profits to change practices. Focusing on systemic change does not mean every non-profit must be doing systems change work. However, all non-profits should understand how their work, such as providing services, fits into, and can better influence or support, other organizations working in the broader system. How can we be better collaborators in creating equitable and healthy global systems?

*Do you know someone we should profile as part of this series? Email us at [philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com](mailto:philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com)*