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150 Profiles: Sarah Kerr

By Sarah Kerr

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: Sarah Kerr

Current role in the sector: Executive Director, SchoolBOX Inc.

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: 14 years volunteering and working in the sector.



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

I co-founded a social justice group to raise funds for school supplies for children in Ecuador when I was 15. When I first traveled to Nicaragua to help build our first SchoolBOX school, I thought a new

classroom would have the greatest impact on kids. However, while on the build site the community mothers would continually ask when our school supplies were coming! I realized that these women knew if their kids had a notebook and pencil, it didn't matter if they were outside under a tree, they would be able to learn. This simplicity continues to shape our work at SchoolBOX.

Describe your desk/workspace.

As long as I have my phone, computer and a good old-fashioned notebook, I have my workspace. When starting SchoolBOX, we'd work all over; our Nicaraguan Director's back patio in one of the largest slums in Central America or out of a church storage room in our hometown of Almonte, Canada. Sleep Country Canada hosted us in their head office in Toronto for years and today Knox World Missions donates a desk at their 'missions hub' co-working space. However, I'm often traveling to events and visiting our projects in Nicaragua. With an international team, Wi-Fi is the only essential.

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

I recently tuned into Cause Camp organized by Nonprofit Hub, featuring a roster of inspiring non-profit experts. Dan Pallotta, the author of *Uncharitable*, boldly addressed the underlying problems of our charity paradigm: that our industry is at a severe disadvantage of achieving large-scale social change with our existing limitations to compete in a capitalist market. I also loved that this challenging topic was balanced by a talk by Beth Kanter, who wrote *The Happy Healthy Nonprofit: Impact without Burnout*. We can't begin to dream of tackling massive social issues if we're burned out.

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

We need to champion women in this sector, who are still at a disadvantage in the higher ranks here in Canada and at all levels globally. We also need to be thinking globally AND locally. This year we're exploring how we can bring our development model home through our First Nations, Metis & Inuit youth volunteers. Their communities face similar challenges to the developing world, including lack of schools, books, and basic infrastructure. If every non-profit in Canada committed to supporting Indigenous people and movements not only overseas but in Canada, we could see real reconciliation and transformation.

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