
150 Profiles: Sylvia Cheuy

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: Sylvia Cheuy

Current role in the sector: Director, Deepening Community with the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement and Volunteer Co-Chair, Headwaters Communities in Action

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

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

I've had several defining moments but I will share one here, the launch event for the first Headwaters' Community Well-Being Report. The report was the result of over three years work as well as leadership and dedication of many people. The event created the opportunity to come together; reflect on the report's key findings; and, begin building consensus on how to act upon those findings. It offered a diverse group of community leaders the opportunity to reflect on their shared sense of identity with a sense of tremendous pride. The experience reminded me that: "hosting" is an act of leadership; shared identity can co-exist within diversity; emphasizing assets and strengths builds a sense of community pride which, in turn, fuels shared aspirations and positive community action.

Describe your desk/workspace.

Tamarack is a remote organization, so my desk is in my home office, which is in a rural subdivision in North Caledon. I look out on a wooded lot and I am always amazed at the wildlife there. This winter I even saw a mink! My dog is usually curled at my feet and both my cats have designated "work/sleep spaces" there as well. I am surrounded by books and my office walls are decorated with photos and various art projects that my three kids have given me with over the years.

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

Most recently I have been inspired by the report [Choreographing New Practices for Social Change](#) which documents the past two years of work by InWithForward, whose aim is to reimagine and redesign social services. Their approach uses the lens of experimentation and has social scientists and service designers working directly with non-profit organizations and "people at the margins" to create front-line innovation teams, scalable solutions and stories of innovation.

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

The questions I am most focused on lately centre around the growing reports of loneliness and isolation among virtually every age-group in Canada. Evidence clearly shows that loneliness has a very negative impact on individual health. Feeling connected to others is also a

necessary precursor to having a willingness to “work for the common good” – either by voting, volunteering or otherwise contributing to the well-being of others and the community. What are the factors that contribute to the growing sense of isolation and disconnection? What can be done individually, as families, as neighbours, as organizations; and as governments to deepen the experience of community for ourselves and each other?

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