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# 150 Profiles: Tracey Robertson

By Tracey Robertson

*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:** Tracey Robertson

**Current role in the sector:** Strategy Lead for Prosperous People, Ontario Trillium Foundation and part-time faculty, MSW, Wilfrid Laurier University and a mentor for social entrepreneurs.

**Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector:** 27 years.



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

In the early 80s, I was a manager of a group home. As part of the community integration model, we moved five seniors from living in an institution for over 40 years, into a beautiful home in a middle-class neighbourhood. There was lots of media attention about how wonderful the home-life living was.

But neighbours complained and expressed concern about potential criminal behaviour. In the second week of moving in, one of the residents, a 50 year-old man with developmental challenges ran out the front door, jumped a fence and went upstairs into an empty house and was terrified. From then on we had to lock the door and keep people in the group home. It made me think about the integration model and how it was designed. Did we understand that individuals and systems are complex? This experience led me to appreciate that there are no simple solutions and that multiple approaches are required to solve social problems.

**Describe your desk/workspace.**

Desk? What desk? I have several places of work: office desk, dining room table, kitchen island, front porch, but all have to be near a window. I have several articles and books piled up around me that give me comfort and inspiration. Some people call that clutter. I call it a sign of creativity and imagination. Ok, maybe not, but believe it or not, it helps me think.

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

I constantly read Twitter feeds, LinkedIn, creative thinking articles, [Nesta's](#) website, and anything about emerging approaches to complex social problems. I also enjoy the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), Tim Brown's *Change by Design*, James Doty's *Into The Magic Shop*, and one of my favourite books is by Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind*.

**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 co-authored an article with Diane Denton called [A Kaleidoscope of Innovation: Designing Community Impact In The Waterloo Region](#). It was an experiment to work in-between the spaces of the different silos and sectors in a community. We were curious about these questions: How do we foster a culture of innovation for our community sector that will have greater transformative impact? What elements and characteristics in the current culture drive this picture? What if we had a culture that enabled us to prototype ideas, learn through failure, and embrace risk? What would that look like? How do we build it? I learned, since then, that we need creative spaces to think and work and we need people, system connectors, who see opportunities and work between and across disciplines for transformation to occur.

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