
150 Profiles: Joshua Smee

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: Joshua Smee

Current role in the sector: Provincial Expansion Coordinator at Choices for Youth; Board Chair at the St. John's Farmers' Market Cooperative and Happy City St. John's

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

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

My first job in the sector (kind of) was as one of those bright-vest-wearing, annoyingly-chipper street fundraisers that people cross the street to avoid. Quite a time!

One defining moment I like to look back on was last year, when I stood grinning in front of a room packed with farmers, crafters, cooks, and all three levels of government as the funding was announced to create a permanent community market space in a lower-income neighbourhood in St. John's. This was the culmination of 5 years of hard, deliberative work by a huge, inspiring team. So exciting!

Describe your desk/workspace.

My desk is in a gorgeous old law office building that serves as the HQ for Choices for Youth; it was renovated by some of the youth we serve and is full of light, colour, and energy. I share the office with two great people, so it's often full of excited scheming. My desk itself is pretty bare—just a laptop and a revolving fleet of coffee mugs; paper is not my friend! My window looks up across at a hill full of brightly-coloured row houses; it's classic St. John's.

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

One of my early jobs in the sector involved putting together a newsletter for community organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are so many thoughtful people out there! On the practical side I always get a lot out of Beth Kanter's social media wisdom; I also love the sauciness of the NonprofitAF blog. I also think a lot of local literature has informed my work—you need to understand the soul of the communities you serve.

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

As a "millennial", I do spend a lot of time thinking about what generational change means for our sector. Almost everyone I know is somehow driven by a desire to make a better world, but the nonprofit/for-profit distinction is dissolving into meaninglessness pretty darn fast. I also think a lot about privilege. I feel thankful to work in a sector with a lot of women in leadership, but I still see on a daily basis how being a large, loud, white, male person makes things a lot easier for me.

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