
150 Profiles: Owen Charters

Title: 150 Profiles: Owen Charters

Author: Owen Charters

Published in: *The Philanthropist* , 150 Profiles

ISSN: 2562-1491

Date: August 17, 2017

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2017/08/150-profiles-owen-charters/>

Date of PDF Download: July 12, 2020

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: Owen Charters

Current role in the sector: President & CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada, and adjunct faculty in non-profit management at the Schulich School of Business, York University.

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: I've volunteered my entire life in this sector, but I've been working in one way or another in this sector for over 26 years.

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

I'm one of those odd people in the sector who have always worked in the sector. My first jobs as a teenager were at the YMCA and also working with kids through Easter Seals. I've loved all aspects of the sector, from start-ups to hospital foundations and health charities, but my time as CEO at CanadaHelps was probably most intriguing from a sector-perspective—I had the opportunity to see the work of thousands of charities across the country, and learn firsthand about their work, and their struggles.

Describe your desk/workspace.

The first thing people always comment on when they enter my office are the six clocks, each for a different time zone across the country. It's a good reminder of the fact we're in a national role, and it's also a really good reminder that you shouldn't call a donor in Vancouver when it's

a 9am in Toronto (a rookie mistake I made on my first job!). Otherwise, my office has lots of pictures of the kids we serve and other reminders of the work we do. Frequently, however, my office is my lap on an airplane—where I can get lots of uninterrupted writing and thinking done, or a table in a coffee shop between meetings.

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

I devour non-profit articles and writing (including *The Philanthropist*), but also [Nonprofit Quarterly](#), [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), and numerous blogs and websites. However, I actually think it's business-focused writing, like [Harvard Business Review](#) and the [Economist](#), which often give me the most insights about our sector. I think we 'preach to the choir' too often in non-profit publications, and the perspectives in business-oriented articles challenge me to realize how others are viewing the world and where non-profits fit, or how non-profits can take on and adapt some of the most forward-thinking management practices and ideas.

For you as a past author with the journal, please share with us your reflections, reactions, thoughts about what has changed and/or stayed the same?

I was fortunate to [review](#) Colburn Wilbur and Fred Setterberg's *Giving with Confidence: A Guide to Savvy Philanthropy* in 2013. It's a short book by the former CEO of the Packard Foundation, focused on effective philanthropy. I actually think the book is more relevant now than before, as there has been too much written in the meantime about effective altruism or philanthrocapitalism; the authors remind us that effective giving is to give where it matters—both to organizations that make change, and also to help organizations change and grow. Instead of chasing the latest fad in how to give, the book remains a reminder of the fundamentals.

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

I think we're worried about the wrong things far too much—leadership and succession, millennials, funding core expenses. And we're using terms like social entrepreneurship and innovation in ways that cheapen their meaning. Instead what we need to be thinking about is how to see and recognize true innovation, like creative sources of revenue (e.g. licensing our ideas, products, and programs, not just asking for funding), and encouraging young managers by giving them wide latitude, responsibility, and exposure so they can grow quickly into more senior roles with a breadth of experience that will make them strong leaders.

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