
150 Profiles: Pietro Bozzo

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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: Pietro Bozzo

Current role in the sector: Executive Director, Dawson Boys and Girls Club

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: I have been working in the non-profit sector since 1990.

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

My first real contract was as an employment counsellor for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). I found those two years as an employment counsellor very instructive and inspirational as the job exposed me to people living in isolation, in less-than-adequate living conditions, experiencing family violence, dealing with illiteracy, and having learning disabilities. I soon realized that disabilities are not always physical and obvious. This is why community work is so important. If a service is more accessible and informal, the more likely that those who need it will use it and break out of their cycle of need.

Describe your desk/workspace.

I am currently working at the Dawson Boys and Girls Club as Executive Director. The Club is situated in an inner-city neighbourhood inhabited by a high number of members of the English-speaking minority. Being mostly unilingual, they are often caught in a cycle of need due to

underemployment, poor living conditions, illiteracy, family violence, addiction, etc.

The Club offers everything from after school programming for youth aged 4 to 17 to a rooftop gardening program with community gardens to weekly activities for seniors. The Club also operates a support program for young parents with children 0 to 4 years of age.

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

There is not really one source that I can quote here, although I have read several books and articles dealing with my sector. I believe my understanding of this sector comes from many years of hands-on involvement with different communities in numerous capacities. I have worked with several age groups, with people with disabilities, with different cultural communities, housing groups and, most recently, with an inner-city community now facing pressures from gentrification. This places me in a privileged position of having seen many challenges from different perspectives.

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

I am worried about the community sector in Quebec. In the 1970s, the province witnessed a popular movement that created growth in charitable organizations. Now, globalization and a shrinking middle-class have put financial pressure on funders, leaving a social safety net under duress. Government funds are directed elsewhere and there's more focus on project-based financing, corporate sponsors concentrate on marketing, etc.

My fear is that this trend will effectively eliminate the smaller agencies and the less popular causes. We need to convince our public officials to better recognize community work and engage the public in highlighting the important work we do.

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