
150 Profiles: Joanne L. Murray

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: Joanne L. Murray

Current role in the sector: Executive Director, John Howard Society of Southeastern New Brunswick Inc.

Years working and/or volunteering in the nonprofit sector: 40 years.

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

I have been volunteering since I was 16 years old. My first experience was as a volunteer with Laubach Literacy in 1978, and I have volunteered doing frontline work and as a board member with a number of non-profits since that time. My first job in the sector is my current one as Executive Director of the John Howard Society. Before I took on this role, and by that time I had spent 17 years working in various sectors and I changed jobs every 1-3 years—none of them made me want to jump out of bed in the morning. Within 6 months of starting as Executive Director here, I knew I had found the perfect job for me. It is a privilege to work in the sector at this point in time. We are facing many challenging social conditions, and to be a part of making positive changes by sharing what we know, what we learn from the people we serve, and working with government to influence policy is one of the most important responsibilities of this sector.

Describe your desk/workspace.

There was a time that my office was so messy that someone visiting thought it had been broken into and ransacked. True story! My office now tries hard to be clutter free, so it embraces neat piles of papers...everywhere. The room and the furnishings are fresh with crisp blue and white décor, and dark wood. Bookshelves are filled with leadership books, research, stories of changed lives and communities, and these keep me inspired. Vision boards keep me focused. And lists...there are so many lists...on white boards, flip chart paper, and in my Outlook calendar. I handle a large volume of work, like most people managing a non-profit, and this is working for me right now!

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

The non-profit sector is all about understanding people, and so a lot of my reading is centred on how to better understand people and social conditions, including understanding myself better.

I am currently deep into *Personal History* by Katherine Graham. It's a stunning memoir about how a woman who led a sheltered upbringing found the courage and mastery to deal with personal and professional crises that surrounded her life, including her husband's mental

illness and eventual suicide and taking over the Washington Post in some of the most tumultuous times in the American newspaper business. I have drawn many life lessons from the book already – it's a fascinating read.

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

What is on my mind lately has been the need for succession planning for the sector and to rethink how organizations are run. I see an aging leadership that will be retiring within the next 5-10 years, and I feel that we need to start coaching and mentoring the next generation of leaders and redefining these roles now. I predict that the job description for the senior leader positions will change, given the needs and wants of the leaders coming up behind us and the rapidly growing demands on the sector.

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