



# Partners

in diaconal ministry

## WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBOURS?

### What do you need to KNOW to get started in outreach ministry?

- KNOW the heart of God for the poor, and the vision of his coming kingdom (Isa. 25:6-8a; Rev. 7:9). We can create a piece of heaven in our communities by serving others with love, hope, healing and justice. We need to be in constant communication with God about every aspect of reaching out to those in need (who, where, when, how).
- KNOW the needs in your community. We can't presume to know the needs of individuals and communities without taking the time to ask. Conduct a community scan by talking to households, service providers, school staff and community leaders in the area.
- KNOW the resources available in your church. More than simply the financial resources available for a new ministry activity, a congregation should know the interests, skills and passions of its members. A ministry that best matches the needs of the community and the gifts of the church will be a place of mutual blessing and growth.
- KNOW what works. Consult with and visit other similar projects to discover what works well.
- KNOW your partners. Outreach into the community means partnering with other services and resources in the community. Be present at local school and municipal events and meetings. Meet with other service providers to build up one another's work, and avoid duplication.

This issue of *Partners* outlines some practical steps and helpful resources in starting outreach ministry in your local neighbourhood. It also includes stories of how God has used the gifts of His people to respond to the needs of their neighbours. These stories encourage us to continue asking "who are our neighbours, and how can we reach out to them?"

## The Love of Learning

Joyce had often been teased as a child about her lack of reading skills. As an adult, she continued to struggle with reading and with a lack of self-confidence. As she attended a variety of programs at the Thunder Bay Christian Community Centre, her struggle with reading and writing prompted the staff to offer Joyce literacy tutoring through the Centre. Now Joyce meets once a week with her tutor Karen, to work on reading and writing skills. Her goal is to gain confidence as her skills improve. She would love to be able to read and write so she will "know what's going on in the world."



Joyce (right) and Karen at the Thunder Bay Christian Community Centre.

Karen has also been blessed by the literacy program. "I volunteered to do this because I believe that if anyone improves their reading and writing skills, it will empower them to make great choices in life. I know that the time spent with Joyce is a way of reinforcing her dignity as God's creation."

Joyce is one of four learners who comes to the Centre to improve literacy skills. All of those at the Thunder Bay Christian Community Centre are blessed by this program, as they witness the excitement that comes with learning.

*By Yvonne Schenk*

## Community Night at Nelson Ave

My children, Rafael and Cristina, were attending Nelson Avenue Daycare, a ministry of Nelson Avenue Community Church (NACC) in Vancouver, when we received an invitation from the custodian to join her and her family one Sunday for worship. We soon became regular Sunday visitors. In Sept. 2001, the church started a Community Night. Dinner was served, followed by several programs (such as ESL, Alpha, New Members) for adults and children. People were encouraged to stay after dinner and participate in the different groups.

"I think the Tuesday dinners have been the catalyst for change!"

I decided to join the Alpha Course. I had been interested in joining more church-organized activities, but as a single working parent was unable to participate during the day. Evening classes were not an option either, due to babysitting costs and my desire to be with my children after day care. The Community Night dinner and programs took care of these concerns.

We soon began to see familiar faces throughout the week and my family felt an increase in the love being extended to us. I think that the Tuesday dinners have been the catalyst for change! As

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Drayton Youth Drop-In Centre

## The Walls Came Tumbling Down

One late evening in 1995, while driving through the village of Drayton, I saw three Ontario Provincial Police cruisers on one side of the street, and a host of young people on the other. It seemed the roadway had become an invisible impenetrable wall.

I could not sleep that night and as a result, contacted several people who I thought had a strong interest in youth. It took almost four years of planning and organizing until we finally opened up the Drayton Drop In Center in the basement of the Pentecostal Church in 1999.



Two youths at the Drayton Drop In Centre work on a skills training project.

Looking back, I have learned that developing and maintaining a Youth Drop In Center is hard work and takes commitment from many people. I compare the venture to a long distance run, not a sprint.

A strong board of seven people from different denominations now govern the Drop In Centre. We have a volunteer base of 54 people. A Youth Coordinator was hired in 2002 to respond to increasing needs, and to provide increased programming.

Yes, the wall is coming down. We received a letter from the area police saying, "... since the inception of the youth Centre ... crime statistics show that the Township of Mapleton, which includes the Village of Drayton, has the lowest number of calls for service in the county." By providing youth with a place to hang out, showing an interest in their lives, and getting them involved in a number of activities, we are keeping them off the streets and they are making positive changes in their lives.

Reflecting back I have often asked, "Why is the Centre such a success?" I firmly believe the main reason is not anything that we did, but that God heard our prayers. God heard our concerns and sent people and resources to help us.

In addition to prayer, the other keys to success were: a strong, committed core group; volunteer support; a clear Mission Statement; a visible location; financial support; the community (as a whole) had to "buy into" the project; and finally, to have fun in the process!

*By Andy Knetsch*

## Community Night Serves as Vital Bridge

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members get to see us and know us, they become aware of us as committed participants who simply have different barriers to becoming more active in the church. Every week, over a beautiful meal, we share fellowship with people we might otherwise have never exchanged more than a "good morning."

Later I joined a small group hosted by a family that also provided babysitting. This turned into a Welcome/New Member class. Each of my family was recently baptized and we became members of NACC. I cannot over-emphasize the vital bridging role that the Community Night has played in my family's life. We continue to look forward to "our" Tuesday nights with our new church family.

*By Karyn Scott*

## Resources

### BOOKS:

• *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the poor in your community with church-based ministries that work.* Amy L. Sherman. Published by Crossway Books. This book describes ministries that effectively restore hope to decaying, urban communities. It gives practical advice on implementing effective, holistic, church-based ministries.



• *Churches that Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works.* Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh. Published by Baker Books. Drawing on the authors' experiences, and a survey of churches making a difference in communities, this book provides a thorough discussion of what it means to do holistic ministry, and how to address some of the common obstacles churches encounter as they strive to meet the spiritual and physical needs of their communities.



### WEB SITES:

• Diaconal Ministries Canada: [www.diaconalministries.com](http://www.diaconalministries.com).

See the "Recommended Booklist" under Resources, Outreach and Community Development, and other DMC Services.

• Canadian Ministry Forum: best practices in the area of outreach: [www.crcna.org/cmfc](http://www.crcna.org/cmfc) (click on Best Practices, then on evangelism)

### STAFF:

Staff at Diaconal Ministries Canada and local Diaconal Ministry Developers (DMDs) are available to help churches through the process of identifying needs in their communities; to provide input into the design of community ministries; and, to provide consultation and funding through Operation Manna to outreach projects and programs.