

First Learning Day for Volunteers a Success

The first of what promises to be a series of informative MAS Learning Days drew almost 30 volunteers to the North York Memorial Hall last month. The Learning Day – actually 9 a.m. to noon plus lunch – was arranged and conducted by Mark Ellwood with his assistant Barbara Lang.

The guest speaker was Rob Howarth, for the past seven years part-time coordinator of the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, an association of 30 multi-service neighbourhood centres throughout Toronto. Rob, through a range of community activities, including research, facilitation and mobilization as well as advocacy for reform, has been involved in efforts to articulate the possibilities and challenges facing the nonprofit community.

His talk covered a broad range of activities and challenges facing agencies working to make changes in their communities, including dealing with policies and practices. He pointed out that changes to

funding expectations and government objectives have redefined the role of nonprofits and affected their ability to undertake community development work. (A copy of his remarks is on file at the MAS office.)

Veteran MAS volunteer Fred Simons conducted a workshop on facilitation that compressed a normal day's session into about an hour and a half. The brainstorming covered a range of topics, with suggestions from the group on the implications for MAS of Rob's discussion of the challenges facing community development, many suggestions for practical steps MAS could take to generate more requests for help from nonprofit agencies and suggestions for actions individual volunteers could take.

It was agreed that more Learning Days should be held, the next one in September and a third in December. The session sparked many ideas for future "Days". More about this later.

A MAS Project Has Many Dimensions

Management Advisory Service exists to offer professional help in a variety of management disciplines to nonprofit organizations. How to judge its success? For a client it may mean solving an administrative problem or overcoming a technical or organizational roadblock. Or getting everyone to focus on the main objectives. For MAS it means having a satisfied customer, who may generate new business.

What does success mean for the volunteer consultant? Gail Whitbeck has had a number of successful projects and says it means different things.

"It is moving the thinking of the agency to a more sophisticated level: 'have you thought of this?', 'what might happen if you did that?', 'why do you think this situation exists?' and 'what other options do you have?'" she explains. "My sense of satisfaction comes when we next discuss the issue and I realize that they have incorporated that extra wrinkle into

their considerations."

"My objective," she continues, "is not to be noticed as an outsider and to slide my ideas smoothly into the ongoing flow of the conversation."

Things do not always go smoothly. After the

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MAS Charitable Number

MAS now has official charitable status (**Number 86043 1667 RR0001**) which means we can issue receipts for income tax purposes for donations in various forms.

In keeping with our policy of suggesting to clients that an honourarium be given on successful completion of a project, tax receipts will now be issued. Receipts will also be issued for other donations, which are welcome at any time.

Volunteer Involvement Focus

In mid-April MAS held a Learning Day for Volunteer Consultants. Initially proposed by volunteer Mark Ellwood, who organized and led the session attended by almost 30 people, it featured a presentation on community services, a mini-facilitation session led by Fred Simons and a wrap-up discussion period on where we might go from here. (Thanks again, Mark!) There was general agreement that more such Learning Days should be held to bring together MAS members to share learning experiences; and it was suggested that several such sessions should be held each year. The Management Committee will be following up and you may expect to hear more shortly.

Participants at the Learning Day also expressed the desire to be kept better informed about what MAS is doing. This too will be followed up. Planning is continuing to publish this newsletter on a regular and more frequent basis.

The MAS marketing team is continuing to make progress in its efforts to make MAS and its services better known among the many nonprofits in the Greater Toronto area. The number of MAS projects so far this year is up over the same period last year. But more work needs to be done in this area, both to expand MAS services and to provide project

opportunities for our qualified and dedicated volunteers. Financing remains tight; we continue to examine how to improve that.

A question was raised about when MAS is going to expand its corporate membership in order to provide volunteers with greater opportunities to become directly involved in the governance of our corporation. The short (but necessarily vague) answer to that fair question is SOON. Specifics must be developed based on data involving the current MAS membership roster and on meeting the requirements of Revenue Canada, from which MAS recently received its charitable designation. (All changes to the MAS (O) By-laws will require that agency's approval.) You can expect further information on this matter soon.

As your president, I am pleased that more VCs are stepping forward to express willingness to become more active in our organization. MAS exists to help our area nonprofit agencies and to provide opportunities for our volunteers to contribute to the community. If you have any comments, suggestions or are looking for ways to contribute, give us a call or send an e-mail.

Ed Monahan

VC Jim Campbell Honoured

MAS volunteer Jim Campbell has been honoured by the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (OPC) which awarded him their first Certificate of Appreciation at their recent 20th anniversary conference. OPC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping individuals, groups and communities use health promotion strategies to achieve health and well-being.

In January, 2004, OPC invited MAS to conduct an Information Management Strategy Study. After completing the study, Jim continued to work with OPC implementing its recommendations.

Jim has enjoyed a mutually beneficial and highly productive relationship with OPC staff at all levels as he helped them define and execute a wide variety of

projects. To date there have been many initiatives including: hiring new staff, introducing new IT practices and policies, facilitating user and IT requirements sessions and initiating new documentation practices.

Jim continually nurtures a long term client/volunteer relationship which results in a mutual respect for each other's needs and helps the client by providing a resource which can add ongoing value quickly as new support initiatives are identified.

Jim joined MAS in 2004 after completing a 31 year IT career with a major Canadian bank. Upon retirement in 1997, he started his own consulting practice. In addition to working with clients, Jim has advised MAS on its own technical matters.

Portrait of a Volunteer

Chris Govern retired from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce four years ago, in January, 2002, after having spent “27 years at the corner of King & Bay” but she never considered herself a banker.

Born in Indiana, she graduated from the University of Windsor in the early 1970's with a BA in Psychology. Perhaps, she says, it would have been more useful to study Computer Science which held considerable interest but like so many others the thought of a year or two with Calculus was sufficiently discouraging. After university the attraction of a banking career was not their customer-focussed front line activities but rather the challenge of developing highly analytical processes for a rapidly changing financial institution. She became, as she calls it, a sort of internal consultant at the bank and for many years was involved in analysis and planning for various bank businesses. Chris says that most of her assignments involved working across organizational boundaries and lines of business and it meant she had to learn to persuade people rather than to command them; these skills are quickly learned by those who work as internal consultants in these institutions.

By the time she retired there were many other opportunities available but she had decided that she had had enough of 9 – 5 demands in spite of their financial rewards. She was, however, determined to be active and when she heard about MAS it seemed like ‘an ideal fit’. She could pursue opportunities utilizing her analytical experience, helping organizations to do their essential work while maintaining an open and flexible schedule to suit her life style.

And an ideal fit it has turned out to be. MAS has kept Chris Govern as busy as she wants to be. Our clients may seem like a far cry from the CIBC. The situations, problems and opportunities to be analysed may be on a much smaller scale but they are important issues with community impact. The difference is that here there are inadequate resources available for implementation and virtually no infrastructure for analysis so the consultant is called upon to develop, almost alone, much more simple

and innovative approaches. That is the sort of challenge that good consultants always seek.

When you think about it, there should not be that much difference between these two types of situations. Above all, analysis is never performed for its own sake; it does not stand alone; its function is as a preparation for change. And change is the common denominator whether in the large multinational corporation or in the neighbourhood community health centre and human beings respond to the stress of change in much the same way.

The commercial world has learned, though the pressures of competition and the economic cycle, how to address change on an ongoing basis while in the nonprofit world of the MAS client base the funders have only in the last, say, 10-12 years begun to demand serious changes in the way their agencies manage themselves and deliver their services. As Chris Govern sees it, the main thrust from the funders will continue to be to encourage co-operation, co-ordination, even merger in some sectors as they seek to develop the critical mass required to effectively pursue their mandates.

And she sees many signs that the sector is responding positively to the need for change; in fact, many of them have been pushing for the same kinds of changes. To be sure, we still have some clients whose idea of co-operation, association and partnership goes no further than a ‘good group hug’ but Chris can cite examples of senior staff and Executive Directors discussing with objectivity the need for changes in what had until only recently been regarded as essential untouchable turf.

To work effectively in such situations the consultant must first gain the trust of the organization. Our first task then is to form a trusting relationship with the Executive Director. When that is achieved such work becomes exhilarating and it is that experience which motivates the MAS volunteers like Chris Govern.

What does MAS do?

We are often asked “What does MAS do?” Our brochure and other promotional material outlines in general terms the various areas where we have expertise and experience. This snapshot of some recent and current assignments will provide more detailed information on a variety of nonprofit organizations we have worked with:

MENTAL HEALTH (53 employees)

MAS helped the board of directors and senior staff in the development and implementation of a strategic plan.

SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY AND HANDICAPPED (3 employees) A plan to deal with a changing economic environment was developed.

A LARGE MULTI-PURPOSE AGENCY (250 employees)

An information system was developed to manage their funder and donor lists.

A GROUP OF CHILDREN’S ORGANIZATIONS

Facilitation was provided for discussion of common issues with a view to possible joint action by these agencies that shared a common mandate.

SERVICES FOR SENIORS (15 employees)

A one-year action plan was developed.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED (15 employees)

MAS worked with the board’s planning committee.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES (12 employees)

Two assignments involved review of their by-laws and human resource policies.

A PROVINCIAL SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION (several hundred members)

An evaluation of their web site effectiveness covered deficiencies, needs and solutions.

LARGE LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY

Training volunteers for retail commercial venture.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED (13 employees)

Reviewed the organization and function of the board.

Successful Projects (*continued*)

apparently successful completion of one project, an ongoing power struggle in the organization resulted in the executive director and others leaving. The new leadership had different priorities so there was no follow-through.

Many of Gail’s recent assignments have been with nonprofits making grant applications. She suggest points of clarification and ideas for more supporting data. As well, she offers “a little emotional support and cheerleading”.

“The facilitations I do are mainly one session where I typically concentrate on the emotions and mirror back what they say in very basic language.

People in the nonprofit world tend to be too cerebral and jargon-ridden.”

Gail cites one ethnic youth organization where they had never shared their feelings about their culture. This opened up much new thinking about what they wanted to do for their young people.

Gail sums up: “People seem to appreciate me because I ‘keep their feet on the ground’ and not because of anything I ‘do’ in the conventional sense.”