

## From *The Tillsonburg News*, August, 2008

*This is the eighth installment of a series, prompted by stories that have appeared in **The News**, celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Multi-Service Centre (MSC).*

Labour Day traditionally marks the end of summer – a fitting time to discuss the history of the MSC employment programs.

These programs began with the opening of the Tri-County Youth Employment Service in April of 1985 with Bruce Bailey as the first staff member. Prior to this time, Oxford Youth Employment personnel (Woodstock's Community Employment Services today) had been providing outreach service through the MSC two days per month since 1983. Bruce provided many services including the first Job Finding Club in Tillsonburg and later became an Executive Director of the MSC. After leaving the MSC, Bruce served several different YM/WCA organizations and is the current GM of the Guelph branch.

The employment programs grew over the years and the **News** covered many of the developments. Susan Wavell joined the Youth Employment team in 1985 for a job placement program called Youth Works (a program replaced with "Futures"). An Oct. 11, 1985 **News** feature noted how lack of experience and public transit as well as life/ housing issues made job search difficult for some young people. Susan said something that is still true today: "it's difficult to do anything about those problems single handedly". However, as a member of a provincial network of community based providers, the YES offered a combination of assessment, referral, counselling & life planning, resource provision, workshop programming and job placement. A May 1986 photo shows Susan and Bruce with a teletrainer phone that was used in job search training. Susan (MSC E.D. from 1990 to 2000) is now Executive Director of Community Living Haldimand. And, while Futures is no longer a program, it led to the program we now know as Job Connect.

Over the years the MSC has also had many summer programs for youth (the first in 1986), supporting at risk students (SJI, WOW and Stay in School), linking young people to trades (SET), and services that focus purely on summer employment (like the current Summer Jobs Service first offered in 1997). The July 17, 1990 edition of **The News** contained an article written by a student in the WOW program who had a placement at **The News**.

There has also been a tradition of workshop and conference planning, the first being the Women's Conference held in Tillsonburg in November, 1990. The Minister of Education at the time, Marion Boyd, gave the keynote address. This tradition has been maintained and the next Tillsonburg Career Fair, organized by many partners including MSC staff, will be held on Oct. 2, 2008 in The Livingston Centre.

The first employment related programming for adults offered by the MSC was the Personal Life Management Program for women and offered a blend of employment counselling, upgrading, life skills and job placement. A story on the program was featured in the March 12, 1991 **News**. That first adult project evolved into several others over the years (academic upgrading, health care aide programs, Job Finding Clubs, jobsOntario) and identified some key needs for adults in the area, resulting in the Community Connections Resource Centre profiled in May of 1995 in **The News**. According to Oxford MP at the time, John Finlay, the centre was "probably the first of its kind in a rural/urban area in Canada". What are now the MSC adult employment programs and Resource Centre had their roots in these initiatives.

The signature legacy of the MSC employment programs to the MSC has been in the areas of program development and sourcing new funds (from many partners) and in the roles played by key personnel. Besides Bruce and Susan, this has included former Business Manager Marian Smith, who began in Futures, current Board member Jane Esseltine, who started in summer programming and this writer, who worked in the first summer program and later became department Manager (1991 to 1997).

Charles McNeil (Adult Employment) and Susan DeRoo (Youth Employment) are the current employment program coordinators.

Maureen Vandenberghe, MSC Communications & Development Coordinator