

NEWSLETTER – MAY 2003

VOLUNTEERS STILL THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE TERESA GROUP

The 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating indicated that since 1997 there has been a 15% (57 million hours) decline in volunteering in Canada and for those who do volunteer, there is great reluctance to make a year round commitment. These are alarming statistics for literally thousands of charities like The Teresa Group that rely on volunteers to carry out their mandate.

The Teresa Group is now serving over 200 families and 350 children with diverse and complex needs. Client records for 2002 indicate that 60% of all our clients in the Greater Toronto Area requested volunteer services. Never in our history has there been a greater need for committed volunteers. Whether it's planning the annual Holiday Party, tutoring a child, visiting a client in hospital, being a special friend to an HIV affected family, providing transportation for children to groups or medical appointments, directing fundraising initiatives, helping out in the office, working on the Board or assisting with the newsletter, our Teresa Group volunteers are a very special group of people. Just how special came through loud and clear in a recent evaluation of our Volunteer Program. Here's what we found. Unlike an increasing percentage (62%) of individuals in Canada who are volunteering as a route to paid employment, over 90% of our 2003 Volunteer survey participants indicated that their personal philanthropic needs were what brought them to The Teresa Group. They spoke about caring and love and friendship, opportunity to help others and an enjoyment of working with people. One volunteer respondent noted,



A group of volunteers enjoy themselves at a recently held Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

"I get back more than I give. It feels great."

As to why they continue to volunteer,

"Hopefully, as a volunteer you can help in some small way. It is a very humbling experience."

"Knowing that however little my contribution, maybe someone is benefiting from it somehow."

"I feel I am helping people improve their quality of life. The staff are terrific and I feel like I am doing something worthwhile."

"There is satisfaction in being part of an organization that cares so deeply for its clients."

The fact that our volunteers routinely commit to a year or more of service speaks volumes about the level of satisfaction they feel through their work with The Teresa Group. Of those responding to the evaluation, 81% had been with the organization for more than one year. One

volunteer said that she expected her volunteer assignment to be short and intense, but she has now been a volunteer with the organization for eleven years. Amazing!

From an organizational point of view it was important for us to know if volunteers felt supported in their role. Over 95% of respondents rated their volunteer experience as “great” or “really good” and over 80% were very appreciative of volunteer recognition events and awards sponsored by the organization. One respondent noted,

“Even if I don’t get to recognition events, being invited reminds me there’s an organization behind me and that my contribution is being recognized.”

Others felt they were well supported by staff and appreciated the many thank you’s they received on an ongoing basis.

“Staff are never too busy to support us in our duties.”

At The Teresa Group we consider every week to be volunteer appreciation week and we extend our heartfelt thanks to those dedicated individuals who collectively devote over 9,000 hours annually to the successful operation of this organization.

THE TERESA GROUP TO HOLD A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Be careful what you wish for, it just might happen. For years we have been wishing for and talking about the need for a national conference dealing with the complex issues facing HIV/AIDS affected children, youth and families. This year The Teresa Group decided to do something about it. We applied for a grant from Health Canada’s Capacity Building Fund and to our surprise and delight in early March we received confirmation from the Minister’s office that our conference proposal had been approved. Wow!

Now the real work begins. We are very pleased that both Health Canada and The Hospital for Sick Children will be partnering with The Teresa Group in this venture.

The conference planning team is already busily at work developing a site location, print materials and key working committees. Our program planning committee will include a diverse team of community organizations and individuals.

Our “Let’s Talk” National Capacity Building Conference is scheduled for March 5-7, 2004 in Toronto. The overall goal of the conference is to strengthen the capacity of staff, volunteers, organizations, health professionals, counsellors, educators and other individuals who are working with HIV/AIDS affected children, youth and families by offering an innovative conference environment and exceptional presenters. As part of the process we also hope to increase national media awareness of the situation facing hundreds of children, youth and families affected by HIV/AIDS across the country.

HOW LEADING THE WAY HELPS HIV AFFECTED CHILDREN

Making a difference in the lives of HIV affected children is not easy. Ask any of the facilitators in our Leading the Way emotional support groups. The kids who come together for our Saturday morning support groups are dealing with huge issues and in most cases big secrets. For most of them, Leading the Way is the only place where they can talk openly, ask questions and get information about HIV and AIDS.



In the words of one young client,

"I don't feel as alone as I used to. I don't know anyone else at school who has HIV or AIDS. I can talk about things that I can't talk about to my friends."

And while the topic is serious, the facilitators and the children have devised some very innovative and creative ways of addressing the subject.



Through expressive arts, children can take the first steps towards dealing with their emotions. They paint and draw their feelings and develop scrapbooks to display their work. Some will use music and songs to release emotions.

Sometimes the children dress up in costumes and for a period of time they can be someone else, in some other place, speaking in another voice.

**"I love the group,
it's so much fun!
I have made friends already.
I don't have to talk about HIV,
but if I do
there is
someone
to talk to."**

Puppets are another popular item with children as they act out their feelings. Recently some of the children wrote their wishes on paper, put their papers inside balloons and then released them outdoors. Another time, they created a memory quilt.

In keeping with the children's wishes, their Memory Quilt now forms an important part of the National AIDS Names Quilt. We hope to have the quilt back in Toronto for display at the Let's Talk National Conference in March of 2004.

Two children who attended our Leading the Way groups offer excellent examples of what a significant difference the groups can make. Both children were traumatized by their mother's untimely death from AIDS. The younger boy was full of anger, hit other kids, lashed out verbally and found learning difficult. Over time the changes in this child were nothing short of a miracle. Now he does much better in school, is able to deal with his emotions and has become a role model in the group, helping other kids deal with their feelings. His older brother went from being withdrawn and emotionally bereft, to blossoming into an energetic and optimistic young teenager.



In the words of one mother,

"My children feel wanted, nurtured and comforted in their group – they are no longer ashamed of who they are. They know there are other good families just like us."

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

JOIN US ON

Tuesday, June 24th, 2003
at the
Red Foster Club House
40 Birch Avenue

6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
for light refreshments and meet the people involved in the work of
The Teresa Group

Official Business Meeting will commence at 7:00 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Mark Beckles, Executive Director
Nelson Mandela CHILDREN'S FUND (Canada)

Please rsvp to Wendy at 416-596-7703 or info@teresagroup.ca.
(Birch Avenue is just south of the Summerhill Subway station, west off Yonge Street.)

VOLUNTEER NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE LUCKY WINNERS IN THE MANE EVENT'S ANNUAL RAFFLE:

First prize - 18kt green gold chain courtesy of Royal de Versailles Jewellers – Monica Anas

Second prize - one year's free internet access, plus installation from Rogers Cable Systems – Gina Ryder

Third prize - of one night's accomodation for two, plus brunch, at the Sheraton Centre Toronto and Four Points Sheraton Toronto Airport – Gloria Sandre.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW

The Sixth Annual Mane Event fundraising haircutting event is scheduled for Sunday, October 26th. Fun, food, gifts, silent auction and impeccable haircutting and salon services all combine to make for a remarkable day.

Last year's Holiday Auction with Wal-Mart and the toy industry was such a success that we are making plans for another event this year. Scheduled for Thursday, December 4 at Strate's Banquet Hall, this year's event promises to be even bigger than last year.



Executive Director, Karen Vance-Wallace accepts a cheque for \$5,764.86 from Special Events Committee members of The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. The generous donation was a result of a year-long employee fundraising drive that involved raffles, multicultural events, a bake sale and payroll deductions.
Many Thanks!