

Despite difficult economic times, Canadian workers remain generous

As the economy melted down last year, jobs were lost and savings eroded, the common wisdom was that people would hunker down and try to protect what they had. Everyone was worried about the potential impact on retail, investment – and, for many of us, the voluntary and charitable sector.

The United Way – Centraide (UW-C) Movement is the largest funder of the voluntary sector and social services in Canada, after government. We have depended on the generosity of working people since our inception, with individual workplace donations making up around 54 per cent of our national total. Our annual campaigns were just underway in 2008 when it became clear how tough it might get for the coming months. We held our breath.

But, once again, working people across Canada stepped up to the plate. Despite the fear and uncertainty regarding the economy, workplace giving *increased* from the previous year – not only in actual dollars, but in the proportion of our national total.

In some communities we saw workers waiting for plant closures or layoffs commit to weekly check-offs right up to the date their work ended. In other communities, we saw workers earning minimum wage build their community with donations of a dollar a week. In 2008, workers gave almost 56 per cent of our national total of \$483 million. We are deeply impressed by the generosity of working people and their commitment to building strong, healthy and vibrant communities. And, we admire the many others who work together for their community, including business and labour organizations.

The UW-C Movement supports a wide range of community-based resources that speak to the need of our most vulnerable citizens. A decade ago we realized that we needed to continue filling ever-growing needs in the community but we also needed a long term strategy to address the root causes of social problems. In 2003 our Movement began to shift our focus to work with the community in identifying and eradicating the things causing these needs, such as poverty. Our actions are now driven by community impact.

This shift in focus also means that we begin to see our community as a whole, all of us working together to make things better for everyone. We move away from a charity mode, where we give to someone else who has “problems” – to a collective development mode, where we work together to build the communities we envision. Everyone can help and everyone needs help.

Early results for 2009 indicate positive results, with working people once again providing the backbone for the important work we do. We believe that this confirms our shift is the right one – with people coming together in good times *and* in tough times to care for one another. And, it’s not too late for you to make a contribution to your local United Way-Centraide.

On behalf of United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada and the United Way – Centraide Movement, thanks to all of those who believe in their community and have chosen to walk with us as we build stronger Canadian communities together.

Al Hatton,
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