

# Women may have to get out of their comfort zone <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Dallaire, Jody

**Source:** Moncton Free Press

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 26 Jul 2012

## EXCERPTS:

"You should get involved in politics to make a difference." This was the advice given to me several years ago by a female Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) as we met to discuss the future of child care services in New Brunswick. My reply at the time: "I feel that I can make a bigger contribution to politics and advancing the issues that concern me as an activist in the community sector."

Is that still true, given the state of the community sector today?

Most women who are politically involved are also involved in the community, in volunteer unelected positions. It is much less confrontational than the political arena. Many community organizations were founded and are now run by women. Often these organizations come together to assist people who are marginalized and/or victimized. Think: shelters for battered women, adult literacy programs, services for troubled youth, services and activities for seniors, organized sports, anti-poverty and environmental groups, just to give a few examples.

It is well known that the non profit and charitable sectors are predominantly female. In 2006, a provincial survey of the NB charitable human services sector found that 91 % of employees working in the non profit sector are female, so are 71 % of its volunteers, 67 % of its leaders and 57 % of its board members.

This survey, conducted by the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre at UNB Fredericton, also found that volunteers and staff in these sectors have higher levels of education than the general population and that employees are generally paid lower wages than what they could receive for similar work in the private sector. On average, the organizations had been working in the province for 27 years.

The survey also found that most non profits receive less than 50 % of their funding from government. Most non profits are small in size, employing less than 10 people. The two biggest challenges raised by the sector are: securing funding and ongoing financial resources and the lack of qualified staff (recruiting and retaining staff).

Given that this is a low wage sector, this is not surprising.

Similarly, Enterprise Greater Moncton conducted a comprehensive study of the non profit sector in the Greater Moncton area in 2008. Its findings were quite similar to the UNB province-wide survey.

It found that in the non profit sector, the average salary is \$23,600 per year (\$13.76 per hour) compared to an average of \$16.12 for similar work in the private sector. It also found that the workforce is younger than the general population and highly trained, leading to unacceptably high staff turnover rates due to the low wages and lack of employee benefits. Most employees working in the sector in the Moncton area are female (by a ratio of 4 to1).

Also, 37 % of non profits work in the area of in social services; 17 % in education; 13 % in development and housing; 12 % in sports and recreation; 12 % in the area of health and 10 % in fundraising and volunteerism.

Like in the province-wide survey conducted by the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre, the Enterprise Greater Moncton study found that the two biggest challenges facing the sector are: 1) the lack of secure and stable core funding which leads to uncertain employment conditions and high staff turnover rates, 2) difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and volunteers.

Although these challenges are not new to the non profit sector, I believe that they are worsening over time. As mentioned last week in my column, a number of decisions made by the provincial and federal governments are making it more difficult for non profits to do their jobs.

And that does not take into consideration the advocacy chill across Canada and this province. There are fewer and fewer resources available to non profits that work for systemic change. For example, few resources are available to organizations that work to eradicate poverty and that work to advance women's rights. With fewer resources there, this will likely mean more strain on food banks and on shelters for abused women.

Governments gain a lot by having a strong non profit sector. Often, it relies on the sector to offer programs that fall within the mandate the government itself.

A couple of solutions to the ongoing problems plaguing the non profit sector include adopting pay equity legislation to ensure that the predominantly female jobs in the non profit sector are paid according to what they are worth. The other would be to offer sustainable and ongoing funding to the sector to support it more adequately. Alternatively, the government could take on offering these services directly.

But given the slash and burn nature of government spending these past few years, this is unlikely to happen.

I leave you with the following two questions:

What would our communities look like without organized sports, services for marginalized populations and groups that pressure our governments to adopt public policies to meet the needs of the community and to protect the environment?

Is it now becoming more attractive for women to get involved in electoral politics in order to improve our society and to support the struggling non profit sector?

-reprinted from the Moncton Free Press

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[3]</sup>

gender <sup>[4]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/08/women-may-have-get-out-their-comfort-zone>  
**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/08/women-may-have-get-out-their-comfort-zone> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender>