

Senate honours Catholic Social Services volunteers for making community a better place



The way Betty Boyd sees it, volunteers receive much more than they give.

“I never felt I was doing that much,” said Boyd, 88, who has served with Catholic Social Services for more than 20 years. “And the people that you’re helping are so thankful and so grateful.”

She and her fellow volunteers recently received one more note of appreciation when their efforts were recognized by the Canadian Senate.

Catholic Social Services (CSS) was awarded with the Senate 150th Anniversary Medal, minted to commemorate the first sitting of Parliament’s upper chamber in 1867.

It is given to Canadians who make their communities a better place, said Alberta Senator Betty Unger, who presented the medal to a number of organizations at a May 14th ceremony at Government House in Edmonton.

“Albertans embody the spirit of volunteering,” said Unger during the ceremony.



Troy Davies Chris Berthelot, Grandin Media

CEO Troy Davies accepted on behalf of the agency's 673 volunteers, who last year gave 44,684 hours to various social programs run by CSS.

"We wouldn't be able to do everything that we do unless it was for our volunteers," said Davies.

"The number of hours that (volunteers) contribute and the various services that they're involved with are extraordinary. We have a couple of ministries in our programs that are almost strictly volunteer-run."

*Founded in 1961 by Monsignor William Irwin, CSS provides more than 100 services for new immigrants, low-income families, people struggling with addictions, and others throughout central Alberta. A park is named after Irwin in the lot south of École/Escuela Grandin School.

"We're attempting to serve and meet the needs of vulnerable Albertans and provide them with supports, care and a sense of hope," said Davies.

Boyd first started volunteering after she retired at 65. She joined the Host program, a mentoring program for new immigrants, and still remains close to some of the families she's helped.

"It was very rewarding for me, because I was meeting new Canadians," said Boyd. She continues to volunteer with the Welcome Home program, offering companionship to formerly homeless families and individuals as they settle into new homes and communities.

Bea Salmon has also volunteered with Catholic Social Services since retiring in 1994. She helps with the annual Sign of Hope fundraising campaign and hand-writes thank-you letters to donors. Sign of Hope raised approximately \$2.4 million in 2017.

Her Catholic faith plays an important part in her volunteer service.

“Like the Lord says, ‘I was hungry and you fed me, I needed clothes and you clothed me,’ ” said Salmon.

“It’s like that’s my purpose, and I’m just trying to follow what Jesus said, what Jesus asked of us.”

The spirit of volunteerism is part of what makes Canada a great country, said Davies.

“We’re a stronger country and a stronger province, and a stronger community because of the invaluable services that volunteers bring and provide – purely from a generosity of spirit – and it’s nice to see that recognized.”

**Editorial note: An earlier version of this article stated that CSS was founded by the Archdiocese of Edmonton. It has been updated to reflect the priest who founded it, Monsignor William Irwin.*