

healthcare. Professional human service workers (in the helping professions including social work, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychology, psychometry, child development, and community development) largely displaced lay persons, including volunteers, by the end of the century. An implicit message was that trained professionals were better, more competent than volunteers. Government support of community, non-profit volunteer organizations was not strong. Indeed, changing fiscal policies meant less generous funding to voluntary organizations when it was available at all.

Society at the millennium is significantly different in other ways as well, including the women's movement that supports the founding of new service oriented organizations such as rape crisis centres, shelters for battered women, and women's reproductive health services that rely heavily on volunteers for direct service work. Democratic decision-making, involvement of service users, and relatively non-hierarchical structures are characteristic of these organizations. New ways of thinking emphasize the importance of understanding how social identities are influenced by social structural variables such as class, gender, and race. There is heightened awareness of the consequences of political and economic culture for lived lives (Gordon & Neal, 1997).

These societal changes are especially important because, with health reform of the 1990s, governments in the latter part of the 20th century started devolving responsibility back to the community and its not-for-profit sector after largely taking over their traditional areas of involvement (Gordon & Neal, 1997). The current devolution of service programs, programs previously provided by government, to the voluntary sector has enormously increased the pressure and opportunities for this sector. Governmental reform has meant that administrative and financial responsibility for the social net for vulnerable persons and groups now falls to the community. However, aside from a declared interest and minor sums being provided to national volunteer and philanthropic organizations, it is not clear that the government is going to provide substantial support to this area.

There is major concern that the infrastructure necessary in order to undertake this task has been allowed to deteriorate during the building of the welfare state to the point where it is no longer adequate. That is, with governments now embracing partnerships and promoting community agencies that have been starved for resources for several decades, the community infrastructure necessary for the new collaboration may well be insufficient to carry this new role. The infrastructure requires resources for rebuilding but there is no indication at present that substantial resources are going to be put into this sector.

Two issues require attention. One is governmental support in the form of resources (funds but also training sessions in building and maintaining community infrastructure) and the opportunity for seniors themselves to assist in creating volunteer opportunities which they themselves consider meaningful. 'Meaningful' for many includes feeling that they are making a significant contribution. Despite a national network of volunteer organizations, many of these agencies focus on listing redundant and repetitive tasks such as receptionist, stuffing envelopes, pouring tea, etc., which may suit some elderly individuals but are not preferred by others. What is meaningful will vary; for some it will include utilizing past professional expertise when they were in paid labour; for others, it will not. And there is resistance from some quarters. Integrating meaningful volunteer roles includes evolving volunteer roles within employment organizations. This requires the involvement of both management and unions, and a detailing of appropriate roles so volunteers are not exploited and employee job security is not threatened. Another difficult issue being raised in Canada but not yet resolved refers to liability, particularly where volunteers are working with children or with vulnerable populations such as cognitively impaired or demented elderly populations.

The topic of volunteerism and seniors' active contribution to mainstream society relates to the issue of public and private responsibility. Despite a philosophy that generally