

# Positive change through giving

Non-profits are uniting communities and responding to urgent challenges



Michael Messenger visits livelihood projects in Kachin State, Myanmar, during his last international trip in November 2019. WORLD VISION CANADA

Hidden heroes inspire World Vision’s fight against COVID-19 and hunger in areas of need around the world

While Canadians are understandably focused on the impact of COVID-19 here at home, Michael Messenger, president and CEO of World Vision Canada (WVC), is asking all of us to think beyond our borders and expand our concept of community to include the world’s toughest places. “What’s critical to remember is the health of Canadians is linked to the health of people in other countries. To fight COVID-19, we have to have a global response: our well-being depends on the well-being of children and families everywhere, so doing whatever we can do to improve their

health and break the cycle of the coronavirus is not only the right thing to do, it is also in our self-interest as a country,” he says. World Vision is currently leading the largest humanitarian response in its 70-year history to curb the impact of COVID-19 by reaching 72 million of the most at-risk people – half of them children – in over 70 countries. Mr. Messenger says Canadians’ own experiences with COVID-19 helps them to understand better than ever what it means to be faced with a crisis and to recognize the challenges facing communities in parts of the world

where underequipped health systems and social safety nets can become overwhelmed. “By expanding our concept of family and community beyond our borders, we recognize that a child in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Afghanistan or Bangladesh is part of our community as well,” he says, adding Canadians have a history of caring about the most vulnerable people in the world, and given the opportunity to make the connection, they respond. Mr. Messenger says COVID-19 can be compared to an earthquake – it is the aftershocks that could do the most damage. With developing countries dedicating limited resources to stop COVID-19, basic health-care initiatives could become secondary, he warns. “We’re worried children aren’t going to get access to vaccinations and regular checkups, and prenatal care will suffer,” he says, noting the progress made over decades to improve access to water, education, child protection, health, livelihood and food security could be jeopardized. To fight the pandemic, the NGO is taking advantage of its global presence, established community relationships and built-in flexibility to pivot quickly, reallocate funding and scale up fast, says Mr. Messenger. Work on the front lines comes with risk, he says, but the aid agency is doing all it can to keep its staff safe, noting the implementation of rigorous protocols, supplying personal protective equipment and the creative use of technology.

Mr. Messenger says during the pandemic he has been heartened by many hidden heroes stories encountered at home and abroad. World Vision Canada has launched a video series featuring local heroes including Neil Hetherington, CEO of Toronto’s Daily Bread Food Bank. In addition are efforts to recognize corporate partners like Sahar Saidi, founder and CEO of LUS Brands, who generously gave a \$20,000 gift to give back and support WVC’s global COVID-19 response efforts, while fulfilling a sense of duty. “These are local heroes who share a common interest ‘glocally’ – locally and globally. Our goal is to stand together. We are stronger together. And together we want to ensure we continue our fight against COVID-19 and hunger in areas of need around the world,” says Mr. Messenger. He also points to hidden heroes abroad like Canadian-born Anne-Marie Connor, national director, World Vision Democratic Republic of the Congo, who turned down the opportunity to return to her hometown Sarnia, Ontario, and chose instead to stay and continue to lead the aid agency’s team in Kinshasa. “While all our offices, here at home and around the world, are affected, we can make connections and understand the pain and challenges people are going through. I think it will be a wonderful testament to our country if we recognize that together we can make a difference at home and extend our arms to embrace a broader community outside our borders,” says Mr. Messenger.

## PANDEMIC SPURS INNOVATION

Recovery and resilience are two watch words for CESO as the Canadian economic development organization tackles challenges around the world at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the way services are delivered. CESO’s mandate is to build capacity to drive sustainability that empowers people and communities by strengthening small and medium-size businesses and institutional infrastructure in Canada and globally. “As a development organization, we are often working in scenarios where we are building resilience so clients can bounce back more quickly from a crisis,” says CESO CEO Wendy Harris. “This experience is valuable in the current situation,” she says. With field work on hold due to

COVID-19, CESO is scaling up the virtual delivery of programs. For example, CESO advisor Kathy Comfort was on assignment in the hamlet of Kugluktuk, the western-most community in Nunavut, when the pandemic forced her to return home to Ottawa. However, she used the internet to continue mentoring Marissa Mercurio, Kugluktuk’s community economic development officer. “There wasn’t anything we set out to accomplish that we weren’t able to accomplish. I felt proud of what were able to achieve,” says Ms. Comfort. Ms. Mercurio agrees. “After the mentoring was completed, I was able to put together some funding proposals under culture and heritage programs and came

back with successful results. I’ve also written my own proposal for federal funding for food security during COVID-19,” she adds. Ms. Harris says the pandemic has spurred innovation and believes a hybrid model of in-person and online mentoring could become the new norm. CESO has been implementing a model of online support for many years even before the pandemic, including a two-year virtual assignment that matched up 10 Canadian mentors with 10 Ethiopian women entrepreneurs. Zemen Tefera, owner of Amour Leather, a company that manufactures and sells leather fashion items from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is a member of the Ethiopian Women Exporters Association (EWEA), an organization that supports the country’s women entrepreneurs. Ms. Tefera was partnered with CESO



CESO advisor Kathy Manners meets with Zemen Tefera, owner of Amour Leather in Ethiopia. Ms. Manners had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Tefera at her workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to continue providing capacity-building support. CESO

advisor Kathy Manners, and the two formed a strong bond, communicating mainly through WhatsApp. As a result, Amour Leather developed new products, expanded export markets and increased revenues. “Recognition as an up-and-coming entrepreneur that a Canadian organization would invest in boosted [Ms. Tefera’s] confidence,” says Ms. Manners. “This impact is not as tangible as a business plan, but it is hugely significant.” “Entrepreneurial work isn’t easy,” says Ms. Tefera. “Sometimes, you need someone to rely on. CESO has a strong support system through mentorship – a system that has

helped me become a successful businessperson.” CESO has worked in more than 120 countries, and its 1,300 volunteer advisors typically complete more than 700 assignments a year, says Ms. Harris. “Canadians are generous with their time and expertise, and we find our approach is appreciated; we listen, and it’s very much a collaborative effort that is positively received around the world,” she adds. CESO gratefully acknowledges financial support from Global Affairs Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, private-sector supporters and individual donors.

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## SURVEY SHOWS FUNDRAISING HIT HARD BY COVID-19

Seventy per cent of fundraisers expect their charities to raise less money this year compared to 2019, according to the Coronavirus Response Survey conducted by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) in May.

More than 160 fundraisers from charities across Canada were surveyed about the impact of the coronavirus on their organization's fundraising and asked if their organization was being forced to lay off staff or enact pay cuts.

"From the moment the pandemic was declared, we knew there was a strong likelihood that charities and non-profits would be hard hit," says Paula Attfield, chair of AFP Canada. "World markets took a nose-dive, meaning that corporations and wealthy Canadians would likely have less money to make their charitable contributions, and further, traditional face-to-face methods of fundraising have been curtailed.

"As revenues have decreased, the need for charitable services has increased as a result of the effects of the virus. As Canadians lose their jobs, food insecurity has increased along with a host of other socio-economic issues. Our research has borne out our worst fears on the impact to our sector and our society."

Charities saw mixed returns in the

first quarter of the year, with approximately 46 per cent of respondents seeing reductions in giving compared to the same time in 2019.

But fundraisers think the second quarter – and the rest of the year – will be far more challenging. More than seven in 10 respondents (72 per cent) think they will raise less in the second quarter of 2020, and for the year, 70 per cent think their charities will raise less money in 2020 compared to 2019.

While expecting drops in giving, almost half, (47 per cent) of the organizations surveyed are expanding fundraising programs to include initiatives such as donor stewardship – connecting donors to the cause and inspiring them to get more involved – social media, online fundraising and creating virtual events.

"Our work is more important than ever, and AFP has advised our members to continue their vital fundraising efforts," adds Ms. Attfield.

Not surprisingly, charities are turning away from in-person events for the immediate future, with 92 per cent of respondents indicating they would reduce the number of such events during 2020. More than two in 10 organizations (23 per cent) have already postponed five or more special events, and 14 per cent have cancelled five or more events.

"Our new abnormal has impacted how charities interact with their communities of donors and supporters, especially for those organizations who fund a large portion of mission through special events," says Ken Mayhew, chair-elect of AFP Canada. "While the enhanced use of technology and virtual events are good options, migration to different channels needs to be done in careful consideration of an organization's capacity, culture, volunteers and donor base.

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**Paula Attfield**  
Chair of AFP Canada



Donors and event volunteers want to help and appreciate how their support is needed now more than ever, even as events go virtual."

Fundraising has been made particularly challenging as fundraisers and other staff have been forced to work from home. Ninety-three per cent of fundraisers indicated they were working from home, not having immediate access to resources at work or being able to touch base with donors face to face, a key part of fundraising.

The decrease in giving due to the coronavirus has had additional effects on charities throughout Canada. Thirty-one per cent have laid off staff, while an equal percentage have laid off staff temporarily. In addition, 18 per cent of organizations have instituted pay cuts for staff.

"The good news is that Canadians continue to be incredibly generous," says Ms. Attfield. "We're asking all Canadians to please donate to your favourite charity if you are able. There are still so many ways that can be done, online through the mail or by phone. Giving to help the community is a critical way that Canadians can have a lasting impact and help create a better tomorrow."

## HELP FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

It took only a month following its launch in April for The Frontline Fund to raise more than \$11-million to support Canadian health-care workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representing more than 160 hospital foundations across Canada, money raised by the fund is being used to purchase supplies and supports for frontline workers and for research.

Caroline Riseboro, president and CEO, Trillium Health Partners Foundation and a member of The Frontline Fund Steering Committee, says individual Canadians and corporations have stepped up to help frontline health-care workers, and their support is making a difference in hospitals across the country.

"That said, COVID-19 remains a threat, and those who continue to fight bravely against this deadly virus need our ongoing support," she says. "Even as certain restrictions begin to be lifted, health-care workers are still fighting every day, and this war is far from over."

Ms. Riseboro says the situation facing frontline health-care workers is unprecedented.

"They are working around the clock, at risk of contracting COVID-19. They are isolating themselves from their families to avoid spreading the virus. They are tired, anxious and under relentless pressure to keep fighting. And yet, every day, they go back to work to protect us. We need to protect them too," she adds.

Funds have been provided to all participating hospitals and are being used to pay for meals and meal gift cards, coffee and tea for frontline health-care workers, temporary accommodation so that workers can avoid potentially taking the virus home to their families, supplies such as scrubs and caps, piloting non-standard virtual care to reach those who cannot go to a physical hospital, and clinical research to improve outcomes for COVID-19 patients.

The fund's major corporate donors include Canada Life, Canadian Tire Corporation, CMA Foundation, CP, Maple Leaf Foods, Kruger Products, TD Bank Financial Group and Rogers.



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