

The StarPhoenix

Satisfaction sometimes trumps paycheque

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For the head of a Vancouver health agency that feeds people living with AIDS, the decision to work in the nonprofit sector started with a gut reaction.

"A very good friend of mine had an accident with a condom," recalls Sue Moen, executive director of A Loving Spoonful.

"In those days, you had to wait two to three weeks for (AIDS) test results and he was frightened out of his mind -- and I felt very strongly that that was wrong, so I started volunteering." While she continued to work in the for-profit world -- past stints including banking, owning an audio company and co-ordinating special events -- for five years, she volunteered in the AIDS community.

And then "a passion coincided with a position" and she made the switch more than 10 years ago to full-time employment in an administrative job for a drop-in centre for transgendered people.

"My story is pretty typical in the nonprofit sector in that most of us used to work in the corporate world," says Moen.

Several years later, she was hired by A Loving Spoonful, where she initially worked directly with clients.

After becoming executive director five years ago, she is returning to a more hands-on approach at the agency, and a search is on for her replacement.

However, salaries are lower in the nonprofit sector, benefits usually limited or non-existent, hours longer and jobs less secure than in the corporate world.

The median hourly wage for a manager in the non-profit sector was \$16.44, for example, compared with \$20.14 for the same position in the for-profit sector, according to a 1999 survey by Statistics Canada.

In these days of widespread skilledlabour shortages, who would step up to that job description? About 40 per cent of non-profit workers are more than 45 and three-quarters are female.

"You get people who have kind of had it with the corporate world, those who find very little value in their work besides a paycheque," says Keith Seel, director of the Institute of Non-Profit Studies at Calgary's Mount Royal College.

"This is work that means something," he says. "You can go to your job to generate wealth for others or you can see how you've helped somebody today." Seel says when Mount Royal launched what he says is North America's only bachelor's degree in non-profit studies in 2002, 40 per cent of the 35 enrollees were mature students, a percentage that's dropped to 15 to 20 per cent, with the average age around 19.

"The young people in our courses are very passionate about the issues of social justice," he says.

Moen, 47, describes her career choice as something that chose her. "Once I started volunteering, it became a calling," she says.

IMAGES



Wayne Leidenfrost, The Province
Volunteering led Sue Moen to her job as executive director of A Loving Spoonful

A Loving Spoonful has three full-time employees and five part-timers, as well as 170 active volunteers. It runs on a yearly budget of \$700,000, mostly from donations, to feed 225 people a week.

"We are expected to do so much more with so much less, and that can be a real challenge and it can be tiring and it can be frustrating," says Moen, who works 50 to 60 hours a week and spends all her social time at job-related fundraisers and functions. "I do it because I believe in it and I know the work doesn't stop," says Moen.

She makes \$62,000 a year, has her health benefits covered but has no pension plan and gets three weeks of holidays, which doubles after five years.

"It's not poverty wages, but I could earn 25-per-cent more (for a comparable job) in the for-profit sector," she says.

Moen says adaptability and interpersonal skills are more important than education, but notes that non-profits are being forced to adapt to a more traditional business model because donors expect accountability.

Some non-profits are attracting workers with a master's degree in business administration or fine arts.

But, Moen says, "I don't think a degree would have made me better in my job." slazarukpng.canwest.com (VANCOUVER PROVINCE) NON-PROFIT WORKFORCE **Canadian Policy Research Networks** compared paid employment in non-profits, for-profit companies and quasi-government organizations like schools and hospitals. In the non-profits' workforces:

- 74 per cent are women.
- 39 per cent are more than 45.
- Nearly 60 per cent have post-secondary education.
- About 14 per cent are immigrants.
- About 40 per cent of paid employees are union members.
- Managerial and professional employees in non-profits have more flexibility in scheduling their work, but clerical and administrative staff have less.
- Managers and professionals in non-profits earn significantly less.
- Benefit coverage is on par with for-profits, but is highest in health, education and social services and lowest in sports and recreation and arts and culture.
- Workers have more access to training but more of them feel training does not meet job demands.

(VANCOUVER PROVINCE)

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- Photo: Wayne Leidenfrost, The Province / Volunteering led Sue Moen to her job as executive director of A Loving Spoonful

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