

Commemorative Naming OOECA Concurrence June 10, 2025 – Eleven Short Stories About Barbara McInnes

1. **Wendy Muckle** Co-Founder, Ottawa Inner City Health

Barbara McInnes was not afraid to invest in an idea to help make it work. I started working with Barb in 2001 when Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH) was starting. We were full of good ideas but no resources to make them a reality.

Most people don't know that many of the successful innovations in harm reduction in Ottawa started with small amounts of funding supported by Barbara McInnes. Barb really cared about the people who were struggling the most and she did not back off from supporting ideas to help them which were unproven and controversial. She really saw the value of doing the right thing and not necessarily what convention viewed as acceptable at the time.

Barbara fought hard for funding for the pilot project which is the Managed Alcohol program of today. From a six-person pilot project, Managed Alcohol has grown into an international best practice intervention supported from a national community of practice and research operating in almost every major city in Canada.

Ottawa Inner City Health's approach to improving health literacy among the homeless is entirely due to the support of the Community Foundation and was a project which Barbara strongly invested in. When efforts to improve life expectancy among the homeless started to succeed, Inner City Health faced a new challenge of helping people learn to live well with chronic health conditions. To go to anyone but Barbara to ask for money to translate chronic disease management information into a delivery format based on the strengths of street culture would have been a very hard sell but it was an idea that captivated her imagination. It is also a program which was so successful, that it is still offered in all OICH supportive housing programs.

Whether it was harm reduction, palliative care or helping Inuit people explain things in their own voice, Barbara very much believed—not only in helping those who needed it most—but in their right to do so on their own terms and in their own way. This belief underpinned much of her work at Community Foundation and is imprinted in the corporate culture to this day.

2. **Alex Munter** Former Ottawa City Councilor, Board of Directors, Community Foundation of Ottawa and CEO, Canadian Medical Association.

In the early 1990s, I was in city government. I had heard of Barbara and clearly recall the first time I met her in person. She was a small person physically, but came into the room like a whirlwind—with ideas of what needed to be done and how I could help.

This would have been in the early years of the Community Foundation of Ottawa. When, in many ways, it was still just an idea. Barb turned this idea into a remarkable force for good in our community. It reflected her personality and energy, her passion to make a difference and her ability to connect people and ideas with programs and organizations.

After I left city government, I sat on the grants committee of the Community Foundation and Board of Directors for a few years. Most funders have narrow criteria; organizations compete for funds and

must meet funders' requirements. Barbara was a fierce protector of the Community Foundation's resources. She set very high standards for what she would fund, yet at the same time she did not impose a lot of rules and restrictions. She was all about results —

- *How can we make things better?*
- *How can we use community foundation dollars to create change and attract other funding?*

She loved this community. She wanted to make things better for people and was always trying to figure out ways to make things better for people. She was a remarkable person, and I learned so much from her.

Barb had a vision of a community that is just and fair— where there's opportunity, where there's joy, where art flourishes, and where children can play and thrive. She devoted her life to making those things happen and it was never about her. With humility and determination, it was all about making our community stronger and better. Not in some theoretical or rhetorical way but in looking for practical, realistic ways to help organizations succeed. The goal was to expand the number of people they could serve and to make every dollar reach its maximum impact.

When I think of Barb, I think of Ottawa. I think of the countless people who never knew her name but whose lives were improved by her work.

3. *Elsbeth McKay* Retired Executive Director, Operation Come Home.

In 2007 OCH was operating a non-traditional, one-room classroom (with a seconded high school teacher in partnership with the Catholic school board) as well as a drop-in. Barb and the community foundation played a critical role as our budget grew from \$465 thousand to \$2.8 million over 15 years. She had an uncanny way of understanding exactly what very small grassroots organizations were trying to do. She knew we could have a lot of impact for a very small amount of money and would ensure that we received annual funding for various programs and social enterprises and encouraged our social entrepreneurial spirit.

And not just us.

Barb would convene meetings with nonprofit groups to forge a common goal. She would come up with a solution with all the parties at the table, each one assigned a role unique to their asset or expertise. This was unusual. Many social service sector organizations are forced to compete for funding, and typically don't want to partner with other organizations. As a funder, Barb understood this. She was not the funder we were used to.

Barb would let us do the work, without a lot of evaluation and reporting required from government. She was always present at our AGMs and face-to-face meetings and she was very interested in the young people we served, who primarily came out of the child welfare system.

She shared our view that we had to lift people up by providing resources and supports required for employment, so the homeless would find jobs and not go in and out of the system—commonly known as the revolving door syndrome. Over time, the community foundation provided funds that would positively impact many young people who became employed and housed. They no longer had to rely on community housing and welfare. Barb was unique—running a foundation with

creativity and an understanding of the importance of small grassroots organizations. Were it not for her, many small organizations probably would not have survived. OCH relied heavily on Barb and the foundation to provide funds to keep us going and to make sure that there was a place for young people to go. Now, we have a lot of supporters, donors and stakeholders. People tell us, "...you helped my brother, or my sister reunite with the family", or "I was a parent of someone that you reunited", or "my son got a job/ finished high school/ is now in university because of one of your programs". Barb helped us change lives and save lives.

There are very few executives in a funding position who can identify with smaller organizations that need funding, yet come with more risks in comparison to larger government-funded entities. Large funders and nonprofits tend to be risk adverse, while smaller nonprofits are "on the ground" doing the work instead of branding their organization or doing marketing and fundraisers. Barbara respected that. She wasn't interested in press conferences or recognition plaques. She wanted the money to go directly to serving young people and getting the results we wanted to deliver. Barb accepted the organization's view of what money was needed and how they would use it and she didn't nickel and dime every expense line.

Barb was a creative out-of-the-box thinker with an interest in organizations and people that also demonstrated unique and innovative ideas and ways of thinking.

4. Medin Admasu, Program Manager at the Boys and Girls Club and Former Program Youth Coordinator, Community Foundation of Ottawa

I met Barb in 2004 while in university when she interviewed me to be an advisor for a newly launched youth philanthropy program at the Community Foundation. My job was to recruit 14- to 18-year-olds to an organization that had never dealt with young people and make sure they felt comfortable.

We formed a grant-making committee for young people, influencing where funding would go. It was a big responsibility for 14- to 18-year-olds and Barb made sure they knew that they were safe being open and honest.

It was a big deal for youths to give \$500 or \$1,000 grants to other youth groups. A lot of our youth participants came from my connections in social housing. I grew up in social housing, so I knew a lot of people from those neighborhoods. I recruited from my networks, and the groups I had been part of including my family background in the Ethiopian community. Barb assumed we could figure out what to do.

Today, I'm the Program Manager at the Boys and Girls Club serving almost 5000 kids every year with a budget over \$8 million. My experience with the Ottawa Foundation was facilitated by Barbara McInnes who taught me grant making. I was around social workers my whole life and grew up going to the Boys and Girls Club and Youth Centers.

I've been involved in the sector since I was 14 and I'm 40 now. I learned from Barb's example. Barb created a positive and uplifting atmosphere whenever she entered a room. Her approach was consistent, whether at meetings or events. I realized early on that this was the way to build relationships with people. You create the space that you want people to excel in.

5. **Vinod Rajasekaran** is Publisher and CEO of Future of Good, a digital publication covering the social-impact world. Previously, Vinod was the founding Managing Director of Rideau Hall Foundation, and the Co-founder of Impact Hub Ottawa.

Barb knew deep down that all kinds of people and organizations needed to come together. She saw how the Hub brought people together in a community. She also had a deep desire to contribute to our types of initiatives. This was a profound experience for me. It showed there were people that thought differently, and had a forward-looking mindset about how change happens when people come together, and how collaboration and an exchange of ideas can happen to create new initiatives. I had this idea that CEOs of big organizations had a lot of ego and big personalities, but Barb debunked that.

She really believed in humility and vulnerability and how important learning is if we really want to see lasting change. We have to be okay with being wrong and being vulnerable and sharing our learning with others. Barb helped us become a learning organization—one of the core values of the Hub—. It has also influenced the people that use the Hub and helped them to develop their own values.

6. **Roger Greenberg** has been with the Minto Group for 40 years and is currently the Executive Chairman of the Board and has been the Managing Partner Ottawa Sports and Entertainment Group for 11 years. He was Invested into the Order of Canada in 2013.

When Barb asked if I would sit on the Community Foundation Investment Committee, I wasn't sure because my experience was in real estate investment. I didn't really have broad experience, but she assured me that it would be a great experience, and they would benefit from having a strong local businessperson. I absolutely loved it.

What struck me about Barb was her understated way of conducting herself. It was never about her, and she always maintained that she never “asked people for money”—she provided people with an opportunity to invest in good causes. Initially, I questioned the sincerity of her statement, but after being around Barb, you couldn't help but realize that she was true to her word. Barb taught me how to approach people. It was never about her or her ego. Barb was just this pleasant, thoughtful, educated person that had a great way with words, who presented the situation directly. I'm a competitive person, and Barb wasn't. At her core was a love of humanity and a desire to help those who needed it.

7. **Manjit Basi** Founding Franchisee/Owner of The Body Shops in Ottawa and Former Member of the Board of Directors, Community Foundation of Ottawa

In 1996, Barb called me and said, “I'd like you to join this new initiative to bring a Community Leadership Program to Ottawa.” I was 29 and I remember answering, “I don't know how you know me. I don't think I know anything about philanthropy or leadership.” Her response— “Manjit, of course you do!” was said in a way that became very familiar over the next 25 years.

Barb was supportive of so many people, but her interest in lifting other women up captures her very, very well. Her ability to see people's potential—especially other women's—was quite incredible.

She believed in people before they believed in themselves and that raises a person's sense of self, and of belonging to their community. Of course, this engages them even deeper in wanting to do more. That's what Barb did for me.

One of the legacies that Barb left in this community (and across the country) is that she wanted others to pass on that sense of philanthropy. If you had it, she wanted you to share it with someone else. One of the things I think of in relation to Barb is the Möbius strip, that infinite loop of reciprocity of giving and receiving, because she personified that.

8. **Ken Hoffman** Former Director, Community Health Promotion, Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (1992 – 2002) and co-founder Rideau Street Youth Enterprises (1995 – 2010) – a social enterprise to provide employment and education opportunities for street-involved youth.

I was a manager in an Ottawa Community Health Centre in the mid-1990's when I met Barb. The focus of my work was community development, and she had started a working group on the topic of "Asset-Based Community Development". This approach supports the sustainable development of communities by focusing on peoples' potential and building on their assets, rather than "fixing" and focusing on their problems and deficits.

It was an approach that inspired me when I worked with others to co-found Rideau Street Youth Enterprises (RSYE), one of Ottawa's first social enterprises. RSYE brought street-involved youth together with local businesses to create opportunities for the youth to re-engage in employment and education and start to realize their potential. Barb provided encouragement and helped make connections to support the work. Barb used her role to be more than a funder—she was a catalyst for change. Not only did she challenge the priorities of funders, but her work also changed the way that funders worked with communities. She had great respect for organizations, like Community Health Centres, who were working on the front lines with the most challenging community issues, and those organizations equally respected her. Being a change-agent isn't easy. It requires the ability to bring together people (who might view the world very differently) around a common cause. With charm and good humour Barb could help people find common ground. She helped create and nurture relationships and trust, which allowed people to take a chance on doing new and innovative work together. Barb made people feel valued and respected, and with that, it is possible to go far beyond what money can buy.

9. **Yasir Naqvi** Member of Parliament Ottawa Centre, Former Attorney General of Ontario, Former Board of Directors. OrKidstra, United Way East Ontario, and the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership. He immigrated to Canada from Pakistan with his family in 1988.

I met Barbara McInnes after I was elected as a member of Provincial Parliament when I was still in my early 30s. My constituents were mostly in Ottawa's Centertown area, not the entire community, as is the case now. It was in the beginning, getting to know and meet people, that I was introduced to Barb. I was immediately struck by her kindness. She didn't judge. She also didn't overly praise. Her kind approach was consistent—the same every time we met. That kindness meant a lot. It gave me confidence. It made me feel like I belonged.

I was new to Ottawa when I first ran for public office, but Ottawa was my home and I had something to contribute to the community. Wanting to build a better community was one of the reasons people elected me, but having a sense of belonging is intangible and comes from acceptance. Now, I've become part of this community, and nobody doubts my affection or connection to it. Barb is one of the people who made that possible.

10. Michael Maidment President and CEO of the Ottawa Community Foundation and Former President and CEO, Ottawa Cancer Foundation and CEO Ottawa Food Bank.

My career began at the Salvation Army. I was responsible for homelessness, housing, addiction, rehabilitation and poverty relief, and was also the volunteer chair of a City of Ottawa advisory committee on poverty. Barbara asked me to join the Committee she was co-chairing.

We worked over two years on one of the first poverty reduction strategies in Canada. Barb put together a comprehensive group. The business sector was represented by Jeff Dale, the head of OCRI. She felt strongly that school boards be represented, because we needed to think about kids. She formed a cross-sectoral group to develop a strategy which the Council endorsed in the Spring.

In 2013 the Ottawa Food Bank was seeking a new CEO and Barb was encouraging, giving me guidance and the confidence to apply. I held that position for seven years. My vision at the Food Bank grew out of my work with the poverty reduction committee and the belief that we could do better for people facing poverty.

Now I am leading the Ottawa Community Foundation. It has been a full circle for me. I witnessed Barb's leadership that impacted so many organizations and people and was excited to follow the person who was responsible for me becoming a CEO and who successfully led the organization for so many years. She still lives in this place. Her name is brought up often. My approach to the work is very much aligned with how she did this job. She remains a mentor for this organization.

If Barb hadn't chaired the poverty reduction committee, I don't know that there would've been a committee. The city needed somebody to lead the committee who the sector respected and knew could get something done. It was Barb and her relationships in the community that gave it momentum and produced a strategy. It was an impressive work effort that still stands today.

11. Gordon Thiessen After serving the Bank of Canada for 30 years, Gordon was appointed the sixth governor in 1994. He received honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Saskatchewan and University of Ottawa and was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

I met Barb McInnes for the first time when I was the chair the Nominating Committee of the Community Foundation of Ottawa. In conjunction with the founders of the Community Foundation, one of my predecessors, Gerald Bouey, had committed Bank of Canada governors to carry out this role in perpetuity. I knew little about the Community Foundation and wondered how I could possibly ensure that the Nominating Committee would make good choices of board members. Barb McInnes, in her wonderful way, quickly put me at ease. She described the contribution of the Foundation to the Ottawa community and the role of the Board so clearly and passionately that I became an immediate convert. The candidates that Barb recruited and brought to the committee for consideration were so impressive that choices were not difficult.

Barb kept in touch with me after I retired from the Bank. At that point Gerry Bouey was the chair of the Foundation Investment Committee. As my longtime mentor, Gerry would often tell me about the Foundation and that I should consider it as an interesting and rewarding activity for my

retirement but it was not until 2008 that I agreed to join the Investment Committee and eventually become the chair.

I quickly realized how important the Investment Committee was to the success of the Foundation. As Barb and other board members and supporters attracted new donors, the resulting larger investment portfolio allowed the committee to include a wider range and more complex types of financial assets and become a stronger and more reliable generator of income to fund the Foundation's many grants to the Ottawa community.

I also learned just how important the Foundation was and how successful it had been. It was clear that the nomination process and Barb's recruitment of excellent board members had led to strong and effective board governance at the Foundation.