

# Help create a world for all to belong

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Issue 28

**HelpAge  
Canada**

**age helps**

*Loneliness and the feeling of  
being unloved or unwanted is  
the most terrible poverty.  
Mother Teresa*

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## A Word from the Executive Director

### Dear friends:

I can't express how excited I am to be serving as your Executive Director! Arriving on December 2nd, truly, I hit the ground running and have come to know a truly dedicated team of staff, volunteers, board members, generous donors and inspiring partners. I am amazed at the capacity of this small bunch to achieve so much. We have turned the corner into a new year with hope and energy.

I thought you might like to hear a little bit about what I am up to and where we are headed over the next few months.

As you will read below, our big headline is the launch of the Seniors Can! grant program. This exciting program, replacing the Seniors in Need project will provide seniors across Canada with mobility and communications equipment as well as social and well-being support. A 'holistic' model, we are grateful to our generous founding partner in making Seniors Can! a robust nation-wide program that will change the lives of seniors across Canada who are facing isolation and loneliness.

We are also exploring a relationship with HelpAge International in Ukraine who are serving on the ground in the volatile eastern part of the country. This area has the highest density of seniors of any conflict zone in the world and we will be assisting them in providing the most basic survival care for the most at risk. You will also discover in this newsletter the renewal of our work in India with cataract surgery – the greatest cause of blindness among seniors in the country. We will meet with our partners in India and assess how we can maximize our participation in supporting vulnerable seniors there.

We are engaging in a strategic planning process over the next three months and hope to refine a clear direction for our Canadian and International work. Seniors face so many challenges and as political, social, and ecological conditions intensify, creating disruption and uncertainty throughout the world, vulnerable seniors everywhere continue to be underrepresented and uncared for. Luckily, we belong to an international network engaging in humanitarian aid and advocacy all over the world. Where and how can we make the greatest impact with our partners



for seniors, in the world's most volatile areas, and create long-term change for seniors to live with dignity everywhere?

Currently we work internationally in India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Jamaica, Dominica and Haiti and soon Ukraine. How can we serve the needs of vulnerable seniors in these countries most effectively? For example,

could we help develop their emergency response capability in the wake of rising ecological and political disasters or work with other partners in Canada and abroad to expand capacity for providing better nutrition, medical services or community resources?

Our Sponsor-a-Grandparent program continues to flourish, we have many applications from seniors and the communities they live in face growing need for our support. The many relationships forged over all these years between Canadians and their adopted grandparents is nourishing for all and we need more sponsors. As economies change, we continue to seek out the best ways to support our grandparents and the communities they live in. Stay tuned for how we are enhancing and building this great program!

It seems to me that the most important part of this work, or just about anything we do, is relationships. Whether it be with our communities, our partners, the seniors we serve, or someone like you, the intention and openness towards relationship is always at the heart of the matter. Desmond Tutu quotes an African proverb: "My humanity is bound up in yours for we can only be human together." Truly, we need each other to belong, to be "whole", to be a person, and that is why HelpAge Canada is such an amazing community – because that's what we do. We make sure our seniors, who are so often left behind, come to know they are not alone, they belong, they are loved and that they are an integral part of that which makes all of us who we are.

Please feel free to contact me directly anytime, I will do my best to get back to you as soon as I can. I would love to hear from you!

Your friend,  
Gregor

# Seniors Can! Aînés Debout!

We are excited to announce the launch of Seniors Can! (Aînés Debout!)

After several years of successful Canadian programs like R.O.T.I.S. (Reaching Out To Isolated Seniors) and the RISE (Reaching Isolated Seniors Everywhere) Campaign, we are excited to launch a new national program addressing isolation and loneliness among low-income seniors in Canada. Thanks to the generosity of our Founding Program Partner and people like you, the former Seniors in Need Program, has been revitalized and expanded to become “Seniors Can!”

Seniors Can! is an initiative of HelpAge Canada, designed to help low-income seniors across Canada avoid isolation and loneliness and to engage more fully with their communities. The grant program provides financial assistance through partnering charitable agencies across Canada for mobility and communication enhancing equipment as well as funding for social and wellbeing-promoting activities, or programming, including transportation to these activities.

Specifically, Partner organizations may apply for individual seniors or for programming that serves a population of seniors. Individual seniors may receive up to \$2000 in a given year in support of a holistic approach in providing the senior with equipment and services, connecting them to their communities. Likewise, agencies may receive up to \$2000 in a given year to operate accessible programming for seniors in their community.



We are starting the program with agencies in Ontario and will be expanding throughout Canada over the coming months. Our goal is to be represented in agencies from coast to coast to coast by the end of the year. As we build the program and our funding base, we hope to expand the number of partner agencies to enable low-income seniors anywhere in Canada to participate.

We are thankful to all who responded to our call for support of the Seniors in Need program last year. [Canadian seniors need our help and we are proud to deliver.](#) Please continue to help us build this great program!

## Seniors Can! provides grants for:

### A. Mobility and communication-enhancing equipment such as:

- Crutches, canes, chair lifts
- Hand rails, grab bars and raised toilet seats
- Lifts or slings for chairs, beds, bathtubs, etc.
- Wheelchairs, batteries, cushions, safety belts, wheelchair ramps, scooters and transporters

### B. Social or wellbeing activities:

- Social meals for seniors through food banks or social service providers
- Food hamper visits and meals
- Social and well-being programming like arts, education and spirituality
- Rides to and from programs

### C. Partner agencies to deliver innovative and creative programming for seniors that addresses isolation and loneliness.

# The Regina Connection

It's December 2010. Walking through the Christmas Fiesta takes energy, slogging and weaving around hundreds of people who stop-and-go at the scores of tables stacked high with creations from all over the world. The air is a vibrating tonic: Christmas music mingles with the hum of excited voices, and smells of coffee and chocolate and scented candles tease our noses. The Fiesta, held every year in Courtenay on Vancouver Island, is billed as "Canada's Largest Fair-Trade World Craft Fair" and it lives up to the claim.



Linda McLean

Many wonderful and worthy nonprofit organizations and causes set up their booths at the Fiesta, with the hope that the generosity of gift-givers will float their way. Volunteers smile and nod as we pass by, offering brochures, door prizes, and even sweets to attract us to their displays. Raising funds is competitive: The number of donors in a small community is limited.

I wave to a neighbour I see behind one of these booths. Above Sue, tacked to the wall, is a banner—"HelpAge Canada"—and in front of her, on a table, pamphlets and donation forms and storyboards are displayed. Not an organization I've heard of, but there are so many. I maneuver out of the crowd and wind my way over to her spot against the far wall. To be honest, my intention in going over to see Sue isn't to find out more about her organization, it's simply to say a quick hi.

So, I ask about "HelpAge" to be polite. But I find Sue's pitch drawing me in. Her belief in its purpose, low administration costs, and their direct support for destitute elderly people in developing countries, as well as in Canada, is enthusiastic and sincere. I realize I was ignorant in my assumption that all seniors in my own country are supported with government pensions, social programs, and funding. They aren't.

Then my ears pick up *Adopt-a-Gran* (now called *Sponsor-A-Grandparent*), and those words spark something in me. This is a unique program that matches a donor with an older man or woman in a developing country who is living in a fatiguing, unhealthy, and difficult situation. For example, many grandmothers are raising their grandchildren because the parents have died of AIDS, or are widowed and left to fend on their own, or have no income to buy basic necessities. It strikes me how little they have and how much I have.

The Fiesta's crowds and chatter are reaching off-the-chart decibels and I'm saturated, so I grab one of Sue's brochures, tell her I'll think about donating, and head home. In the interest of full disclosure, I've used "I'll think about it" on more than one occasion to avoid charity solicitations (and my resulting feeling of guilt). But in this case, I really do think about it. And when I get home, I decide to sponsor a grandparent. My donation will be the cost of a couple of my regular Saturday morning treats of breakfast out and the *Globe & Mail* newspaper each month.

In January I receive a letter from HelpAge Canada introducing my new Gran: Regina Odongo from Kenya. She takes care of three of her grandchildren whose parents died of AIDS. I couldn't imagine what that must be like, but I know that many grandparents in many countries, including Canada, are raising their grandchildren. Regina has some health concerns but works very hard, focused on the wellbeing of and care for her grandchildren. She is the same age as I am, and her name is the capital city of my birth-province (although I'm guessing hers is pronounced 'Reh-geena') — so right away I feel a connection with her.

Regina's photo is included and although we are both tall and slim, in many ways we look so different: My skin is like white chocolate and hers like dark; my hair a short straight mix of gray and white, rarely covered in any type of hat, and hers black, tucked under a bright white scarf tied at the back with its long ends curling over her narrow shoulders; my usual outfit of jeans and a t-shirt a sharp contrast to her flowing caftan of bright yellow with a black diamond design and scalloped white collar. Her smile out beams mine by a mile, but her wrinkles are deeper too by a mile. We look different, and our lives are very different.

HelpAge Canada's letter is informative and explains how the *Sponsor-A-Grandparent* program is monitored and administered, what my Gran will receive with my sponsorship, and explains the process if I wish to write her: I send a letter to their Ottawa office, they pass it on to Sister Paul Anastasia of the Ahero Joot Social Services in Kenya (who is in partnership with HelpAge Canada and administers the programme in Africa), and lastly she forwards or delivers it to Regina. What a journey.

There is no obligation to write Regina, but I really want to, so I write her a short letter and attach a photo of myself. To my delight, a few months later HelpAge sends me a new photo of Regina and a report on how she's

*continued on page 5*

## The Regina Connection (continued from page 4)

doing, plus a message from her. This was special, to receive a note from someone in Africa and to know how significant my donation is. Since then I have written Regina a note about once a year, sometimes including a picture of myself (I don't send any pictures of my home as it is in such contrast to her living conditions that it would make me uncomfortable to do that). And I receive updates about Regina from HelpAge every year, which I appreciate.

HelpAge Canada also sends an annual newsletter to donors. In the first one I received I read about their "Income Generating Activity" via [Special Gifts](#), which include cows, chickens, and goats. The grannies then sell the animal's products for income and also use the food to provide better nutrition for their families. For example, a cow's milk can be made into cheese, yogurt, and ghee. That summer I buy Regina a cow. The cost is \$400 (less than what I would spend going to Victoria for a weekend).

A few months later Sister Paul sends a note from Regina who is so excited about the new cow: "Oh! My God, what a wonderful gift you have given me. I did not believe when I was told that this cow was mine. Thanks a million times for saving my life. I promise to take good care of her and that in a year's time I will be milking my cow, drinking its milk, and at the same time selling some as an income generating activity. I will also be making ghee and selling. I wish you very close so that I be making ghee and giving you a taste of what I have made for you. God bless." I immediately google "ghee" and discover it's clarified butter, easy to make, a treat to use in the kitchen, and is a healthy substitute for regular butter; I have made several batches since.

A few years later I was curious as to how the cow was doing and emailed HelpAge asking if they could find out. Sister Paul soon reported that the cow was doing really well, as was Regina. And... the cow had had a calf!

In HelpAge's "Gran" update to me this year, Sister Paul reported: "Regina has sold the cow to her mom and then bought a chicken coop and chickens to rear so they can both benefit: a very smart "business move"! They have milk, eggs, and enough of both to sell for extra means!"

There were two pictures with the note, both delightful. In them Regina is wearing a bright-red dress peppered with white polka dots; the belt is of the same fabric with a fancy buckle; the white scarf (that she wears in every picture) tucks around her head. In the first picture, she beams a wide smile and is holding a rope which is tied loosely around the huge neck of a patiently-posed white cow with some patches of tan splattered across its hide. It has a whisk-broom-like brush on the end of a long tail that seems to be swishing. In the second, she is standing like a proud mother hen in the middle of a brood of 14 chickens, throwing them seed from a blue bowl she is holding; the feathers of her "girls" are a medley of pewter gray, and white with brown speckles, and half-and-half black and brown. The chicken coop is nearby, a box standing on four legs, sided in uneven narrow slats of light brown wood and roofed with corrugated tin. Regina looks so happy. I am happy.

And just this morning, in the mail was HelpAge Canada's annual newsletter, Issue 27. And there on page 5 is Regina, with her brood and her cow.

I think it's time for me to write another letter.

## India: Cataract Eye Surgery

In India, cataracts are responsible for 66.2 per cent of blindness cases in people above the age of 50<sup>1</sup> and affects up to 62 % of all elderly.

12.5 million people are unable to access the simple 15 minute surgery required to remove cataracts due to lack of financial resources and support. Through our local partners, we help provide between 15,000-30,000 surgeries each year, allowing older persons to return to work and live lives of dignity.

**Consider supporting our India Cataract Eye Surgery Program! A small gift will change lives!**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/health/ataract-top-cause-of-blindness-in-india-finds-survey-67187>



# Spotlight on Ukraine

HelpAge Canada is assisting with humanitarian aid to displaced older women and men residing in the volatile area of Eastern Ukraine by providing home-based care, wood and coal, assistive devices, hygiene kits, diapers and underpads, winter clothing and multi-purpose cash assistance.

Ukraine has been facing the demographic challenge of ageing, well before the conflict broke out in Eastern Ukraine. The country is one of the 30 oldest nations in the world by the share of people aged 60+ years, in spite of life expectancy lagging far behind the European average. However, local and national infrastructure is yet to rise to the demographic challenge. Health and care sectors lack the resources and skills to cater to older people's needs. Pensions systems are eroded by high food inflation (second highest in the world in 2015) and soaring energy bills (+273%). Decades of inequitable economic development policies left rural areas under-resourced and ill-equipped. For many elderly residents, later life means poverty.

The conflict in Eastern Ukraine has forced 1.6 million people to flee their homes. Within 5 km of the line of contact there are up to 250,000 civilians, 80% over the age of 60. According to the UN, repeated and almost-daily ceasefire violations leave people in misery, grief, and isolation. The threat of escalation is ever-present, and civilian casualties nearly four years on are at their highest. The length, scale, and scope of the crisis makes it the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and represents the highest number of seniors in a conflict zone in the world. And yet the ongoing violence goes almost unnoticed now and older people are becoming the invisible victims of a forgotten conflict.

Life in times of conflict is one of isolation and loneliness. More than half of older people in Donetsk reported living alone, in a recent survey conducted by HelpAge International. Overall, 85% of older people were found to be significantly or severely vulnerable



and a similar proportion experience symptoms of trauma. Those who fled often found refuge in temporary shelters unfit for the harsh winters, like summer cabins and disused railways carriages and in areas of high land mine risk. In areas not controlled by the government, older people cannot access their pensions anymore as they are no longer eligible. In order to survive, the majority of older people on both sides of the contact line have to decrease their food intake, or stop buying their medicines.

Since November 2014, HelpAge International has been supporting vulnerable older people in Ukraine through the distribution of food, hygiene kits, assistive devices and multi-purpose cash assistance. Additionally, they have been providing winterization support to nursing homes and vulnerable

older people, establishing Community Safe Spaces and supporting Personal Social Service groups who conduct home visits to provide basic care and referrals to health and other services.

HelpAge Canada will engage in a soft [fundraising campaign](#) through digital platforms and social networks here in Canada through to the end of May. We are exploring further engagement with our partners in Ukraine and hope to expand our capacity for support.

# Because of you...

All throughout 2019, our dependable supporters sent HelpAge Canada donations for our partner caring organizations to purchase life-changing gifts for so many at risk elderly, with no means.

Through our holiday giving catalogue, our online donations and one-to-one giving from Sponsors to their sponsored Grans, we sent over 400 gifts! A small gesture can mean everything to someone in need. Having a restful sleep, somewhere to sit or a table to eat at can brighten someone's day.

Mr. Lazarus, of Kenya, received money to buy a bed frame and a new mattress from his kind Sponsors. Now able to sleep above the floor, when the rains come, he is dry and clean and better ready to face his day, which is often a struggle.



Dear Mrs. Ward & Mr. Sellors

*'Let me first take this great opportunity to greet you in the name of our Almighty God. I also take this wonderful chance to say thank you for this gift of a mattress and a nice bed. Now I will be sleeping comfortably; May you be granted abundant of peace and happiness.*

*Best regards, Mr. Lazarus'*

Gran Helena Bellot



Grannie Rosa and current one room home.

Shelter is a basic human right. Unfortunately, countless elderly persons have no place to call home. Grannie Rosa, also of Kenya, received money to have her condemned one room home replaced! Here she is now. We are looking forward to sharing news and photographs of her in her new home. Grannies Florence Stout and Helena Bellot, of Dominica, are so grateful when their sponsorship funds arrive. Gran Florence also received a radio from an anonymous donor. Radios offer company and a connection to the outside world for many elderly everywhere, often alleviating isolation. Florence had lost her radio during Hurricane Maria. As you can tell, she welcomed this gift.



Gran Florence Stout

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Because of you... (continued from page 7)

## News from some barnyards

Goats are always welcomed gifts. They are a valuable source of nutrition, are easily sustained and can jumpstart a Grannie or Grandad's small business, selling milk and homemade ghee. Goats can produce kids once a year and sometimes twice in 18 months.

A longtime sponsor and friend, Joan, of HelpAge Canada sends two goats with meaningful names to needy elderly in Kenya every year. This year she sent Mr. Sunshine and Miss Moonbeam. Shortly after I received her donation this year, I received a call for two more goats to be purchased, to be named Bonnie and Clyde! Her son and her daughter-in-law have now decided to join forces with Joan in this 'feel good giving'. Will you?



With strong community values, many start-up farmers breed their goats and share the offspring. Thanks to our sponsor Elaine, Grannie Dorfina's goat may have kids this year to pass on!

Thank you to all of you who sent funds for chickens, roosters, sheep, cows, goats and more!

## Thank you from DR Congo

Thanks to your generosity, we have supported many seniors in DR Congo, including the Pygmies of the TWA Community and recently victims of sexual violence and retired activists. Our work there has come to a close for the time being, yet we continue to seek ways to assist vulnerable seniors in Kenya and all of Africa.



## Gifts arrive in many forms

Gran Mariyamma Moozhiyanka lives in the Mercy Home for Destitute Elders in Thidanad, Kerala, with thanks to the support of a family who sponsors her. Maryamma enjoys her life at the home and is grateful for the kind hands and loving support from the Sisters and staff there. She has always missed her family though, who, impoverished themselves, have been unable to care for her since 2003. Many of her siblings and her son and daughters remain in India, though travel is expensive, and it had been years since she had seen them. We are so happy to share her news of the gift she received. The sponsoring family sent her the funds for a family reunion! As the saying goes, a picture can say a thousand words.



## BEQUESTS

### Have you planned your legacy?

HelpAge Canada needs your support in planning for the future. [Planning a gift in your will](#) can help us continue our work to empower older people. You can choose a program or cause that is close to your heart. Help us create a world for all to belong, where no one is left behind!

#### ***Did you know you can make a gift of securities or mutual funds?***

A donation of securities or mutual funds is the most efficient way to give charitably. Since capital gains taxes don't apply, our charity receives the full fair market value when the security is sold, and you get a tax receipt which reflects your larger contribution. This allows you to give more and get more. Check out our online [securities/mutual fund option](#) or let us know if you would like to learn more!

**For more information, please contact Beth Gordon:**

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