

Manitoba Business Profile:

A model for  
authentic business  
growth.

Defined by  
individual needs.

—  
N.E.E.D.S. Inc.  
(Newcomers Employment  
and Education Development  
Services Inc.)



Margaret Von Lau  
Executive Director

What can any business learn from this successful not-for-profit? Identify your clients' true needs and build your service entirely around them. "We designed all our programs based on our clients, not on moods and trends among government and funders," says Margaret Von Lau, Executive Director, Newcomers' Employment and Education Development Services (N.E.E.D.S. Inc).

The strategy was contrary to what many in their field were doing, but it proved to be the basis of all their success.

Margaret drew the inspiration to establish N.E.E.D.S. Inc. from her own experience emigrating alone from Europe to Winnipeg in 1990 without speaking English. Once she mastered the language and began volunteering to help other immigrants find employment, the gaps in service became clear. "We needed a change in the status quo of service providers for immigrants."

Today, N.E.E.D.S. Inc. serves over 800 children and youth, meeting the majority of them on their third day after arriving in Canada.

"Most of these children are coming from refugee camps and have language barriers and traumatic experiences to address. These families did not choose to leave their home country, they came to Canada to save their lives."

Initially, N.E.E.D.S. Inc. focused on employment for women, but for the last nine years they have operated a youth centre as well. They help prepare children for school, teaching everything from using technology to how to work a school locker; and since many children come from uni-cultural homelands, they teach about integration of cultures, as well. "We help them understand that it is not integration if you don't respect other cultures and

other nations. We teach and reinforce that each of us has something to contribute."

With 25 computers to help the children learn how to use technology, they rely on MTS for internet and telephone services. "It's extremely challenging for students to not know how to use computers. Everything we do is about education and self-sufficiency for the future."

The employment program helps older students who can't access post-secondary education, because their circumstances interrupted their education many years earlier. "We prepare older students for entry level positions in their chosen career path, then we work to find internships in the profession they are looking for. 85% of youth who have come through this program are hired."

Because MTS and N.E.E.D.S. Inc. share similar values, they have developed a long-standing relationship of trust.

"We have had a commitment with MTS for over 16 years and we are very happy with their customer service," adds Margaret, "We view them as loyal friends and trusted partners. They do much more than provide our internet and telephone systems. They

directly contribute to youth organizations across Manitoba through the MTS Future First Program, through sponsorships, donations, grants and scholarships, volunteerism and fundraising. We are aligned in our endeavors to create strong, vibrant communities and to welcome new Manitobans to this place we call home.

There are many challenges in our work and also great rewards," adds Margaret. "The challenges are always financial, there are never enough resources to do all you want to do. The rewards are working with our business partners and of course, the kids - seeing them learn about technology and social media; seeing them graduate, or get hired is the greatest reward.

It's particularly gratifying to see these programs come full circle. As Executive Director, I have to make sure that we have young staff and volunteers who identify with the needs of newcomers. When we hire past clients, or when they come to volunteer, we're showing young people that role models are right in front of them. They see the value of giving back. They see that everyone has something to contribute."