

The Governor General's Caring Canadian Award



Elaine McGee

Saint-Colomban, Quebec

It isn't always easy to go back to school when raising a young family, particularly if you're a single parent. Elaine McGee found this out when she taught at an adult education centre, where up to 60 percent of students were living the experience.



Elaine and a colleague decided to help out where they could, starting one Christmas with gift baskets for single parent families with children. The project was such a success that Elaine decided to expand the idea into helping single parent families all year round.

In 2002, she founded "Marchant à tes côtés" (Walking by Your Side), a foundation that helps young single mothers finish their studies by providing support where needed. The idea was to break the cycle of poverty many of these women experienced. "We want to support and encourage parents, alleviating the difficulties that too often discourage them when torn between pursuing their dreams and the basic necessities for their children," wrote Elaine at the time.

As a way of raising funds, Elaine set up a network of donors and volunteers who work together to provide financial assistance in times of emergency or help with unforeseen expenses that could overtax a small family budget.

Elaine also helps with financial counselling, working with students who are in debt to re-establish their personal credit. She helps each one to make an assessment of expenses and income, including the repayment of all their debts.

The foundation also came up with creative ways to help young mothers with children. For example, two people can provide assistance by 'adopting' a student and her child until the mother has finished college. For these mothers, it can make all the

difference in pursuing their studies.

While the foundation is her major concern, Elaine also works as a volunteer with Operation Nez Rouge, organizes school visits by speakers on subjects such as multiple sclerosis, and even participates as a golf caddy in a tournament that raises funds

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Gilles Trudel, director of Project Prométhée

to combat the disease. Elaine has also acted as a counsellor for the Project "Prométhée", a Montreal organization which provides mentoring services to students at risk of dropping out of school.

"It gives me great pleasure to recommend Elaine for this award," says Prométhée director Gilles Trudel. "Her principal qualities are that of an active listener, helping young people to set goals and attain a high standard of scholarly success. A person of such value deserves special recognition."



The Caring Canadian Award was presented to Elaine McGee on April 17, 2012, at Rideau Hall. Sgt Ronald Duchesne 2012 © Rideau Hall