



**United Way**  
Central & Northern  
Vancouver Island

## Being a United Way Loaned Rep is a chance to step out of the ordinary



### **An Interview with Toni O'Keeffe**

Vice-President and Chief of Communications and Public Relations, Island Health

Toni O'Keeffe started her professional career as a finance clerk for Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) in Vancouver over 30 years ago. But if you know anything about Toni – even if you've met her just once – you're probably wondering, "How in the world could a person with all of her energy sit at a desk all day?"

Her supervisor at the time might have picked up on that too and asked Toni if she wanted to be a Loaned Rep for United Way over the course of the annual campaign. "It was my first opportunity to step out of my cubicle and do something more related to my abilities and interest," remembers Toni. "I had always enjoyed making presentations in front of groups and meeting different people."

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Toni thrived as a United Way Loaned Rep. She presented to many local groups and met numerous people within HRDC, including the executives. Her enthusiasm was infectious and co-workers contributed so generously to United Way's campaign that they surpassed their previous years' donations. "After my experience as a Loaned Rep, I understood my organization in a way I never did before."

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Her presentation skills did not go unnoticed; the Director General of HRDC at the time promptly plucked her out of finance and placed her into the Public Relations Department. Toni never looked back. From that point on, she knew she had discovered her niche. It didn't take her long to learn the ropes and to assist the PR Department in developing their first formal communications plan.

A few years later, Toni was transferred to the Kootenays with HRDC where her volunteering with United Way, once again, proved to be a springboard to other fulfilling activities. Through her contacts at United Way, she joined the Rotary and participated on boards for other non-profits. She emphasized that she “had the privilege to work with the right people, with good people, along the way.” The local College of the Rockies recognized her community-oriented vigour and asked her to join them where, over the years, she evolved the communication practises of the College and created a robust and energized, full service communications team.

When Toni moved on to Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo (now Vancouver Island University), she stayed connected to United Way.

When President, Ralph Nilson, suggested partnering with United Way to introduce the Loaned Rep program to the institution, Toni was “on it.”

“The Loaned Rep program might seem like a simple opportunity but, sometimes, it allows people to grow into who they are meant to be. It’s an amazing opportunity for the individual but also for the organization.”

Today, in her work with Island Health, it seems fitting that Toni is helping with a transition to a more community-oriented

organization. “Island Health’s partnership with United Way is a symbiotic relationship in which both parties benefit.” She goes on to explain, “We have thousands of staff working on the ground every day in every corner of the Island and in surrounding communities. We see the clients served by United Way every day. Our relationship with United Way helps us to understand the rhythms of society –

housing, food, living conditions and quality of life – so that we can better understand the people we serve before they walk through our door.”

Toni’s last words for anyone considering the opportunity to be a United Way Loaned Rep: “As a Loaned Rep, you engage with your organization and your community in a way you’d never get to do otherwise. You meet so many people you would never get to meet.

*“I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for all the people I met who supported me.*

*And I connected with many of those people as a Loaned Rep and through my volunteer work with United Way.”*

“None of us achieve anything on our own. I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for all the people I met who supported me. And I connected with many of those people as a Loaned Rep and through my volunteer work with United Way.”

If your organization is interested in getting involved with the **United Way Loaned Rep Program**, visit the United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island website at [www.uwcncvi.ca/Campaign-Associates](http://www.uwcncvi.ca/Campaign-Associates).

**United Way Central & Northern Vancouver Island**

**Change starts here**

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