



Alberta Disability Workers Association

April 15, 2021

Hello Everyone,

I am very pleased to be writing to share with you a little bit of my personal history with you as I begin my new role with the Alberta Disability Workers Association (ADWA).

Many of you I have come to know over the years and some of us will be new to one another. But either way, I am confident that by sharing and working together we can accomplish so much!

SUE MANERY – MY STORY

I grew up in Toronto, Ontario in a house built by my dad in a new part of the city being developed on what had been a farmer's field. It was a unique neighbourhood with only 20 houses on our street with no sidewalks or fence barriers between our properties. There was a real sense of community.

When I was about four years old, my parents' best friends across the street had their second child J who had Down syndrome. The wonderful thing about where I lived (and the family I had) was that no one ever thought differently or expected less of him because of this "label." J took part in all of the neighbourhood happenings and often stayed with and travelled together with my family. His father died when J was only six and our two families became even closer and more supportive of one another.

I feel so fortunate to have had J as a part of my life from such a young age. It is because of my relationship with him that my career path was set. Once I was a teenager, I was employed in a number of different ways in support of people with a developmental disability – swimming instructor, frontline community disability worker and camp counsellor were just a few of my high school age positions. In 2020, following the death of his Mom, my sister and I became private guardians and trustees for J.

After graduating from the University of Waterloo in 1978, I moved to Lethbridge and was employed as a Children's Service Coordinator by the national demonstration project COM-SERV. When this project ended in 1980, I was offered the position of Citizen Advocacy Coordinator with the People First Association in Lethbridge (now Inclusion Lethbridge). In 1982, my husband returned to school to study architecture at the University of Waterloo so back to Ontario we went. While living in Waterloo I worked at Manager of Residential Services for the Elmira Association and did some private contract work as well.

In 1986 an amazing opportunity presented itself in Toronto and I began my new position as Executive Director of Extend-a-Family (CANADA). This was a newly formed nation-wide organization that supported children with developmental disabilities to spend time with and experience life with other families in their community. There was no "compensation" for the time they spent together. Just community supporting community.

1988 saw the birth of our first child Anne and in 1989 we decided to move back to Lethbridge - a great place to raise a family. From 1989-1991 I chose to do only volunteer work and took a break from full-time employment to be with Anne.

In 1991, when a Manager position became available with Southern Alberta Community Living Association (SACLA) I was eager to return to work. SACLA was established in October 1980 to carry on the "residential" aspect of COM-SERV, and it was an opportunity to work once again with people I knew and respected at COM-SERV.

I remained with SACLA from 1991 – 2020 working first as a Manager, then Executive Director and lastly as CEO. In November 2019, I made the decision to retire to have more time to spend with my first grandchild Abigail, to go exploring (+ escape some of Alberta's winter weather!) and to get to all those other "possibilities" in my life that I had not yet explored.

Who knew that COVID would require me to put many of my dreams on hold for the foreseeable future or that I could be enticed to exit from retirement!

I was honoured to be approached by ADWA and to now be working with this important provincial organization that focus on the Community Disability Workforce. The Board of Directors truly values and understands the important work of people employed in the disability sector and I look forward to assisting them in any way I can to make their vision of an Alberta where people with disabilities are supported by a valued, skilled and certified workforce a reality. I also look forward to collaborating with you and others across the province in this regard.

Take care everyone – I look forward to connecting with you!

Please feel free to contact me anytime at sue.m@adwa.ca.

Sue