

ADWA

Alberta Disability Workers Association

Building a Valued, Proud and Professional Workforce

Web: www.ADWA.ca

Tel: 587-288-0909

Email: disabilityworkers@gmail.com

Mail: 4637 - 45 Avenue

St. Paul, AB T0A 3A3

Alberta Disability Workers Association

Annual Report
2018 - 2019

Board of Directors

Alexander Stoye, President
Denise Young, Past President
Lindamarie Gossen, Vice-President (on leave)
Tracy Yaremko, Secretary-Treasurer
Darren Bennett
Jim DesRoches
Alyssa Deutscher
Janet Roy
Michelle Wolfe

Staff

Kathleen Biersdorff, Coordinator
Shauna Pilipchuk, Certification Coordinator

The work of the Alberta Disability Workers Association (ADWA) is carried out by three groups: the board, its committees and employees. Taken together, we have made great progress this year in moving ADWA forward and supporting our members' priorities. We are pleased to share this report on our activities with you.

Board Report

The board held a full-day retreat August 3, 2018 to set directions, establish priorities for the next few years and decide who will take on leadership roles for the coming year. ADWA thanks the Southern Alberta Community Living Association (SACLA) for hosting our retreat. The retreat is often the only time that the board meets face-to-face and it is an important opportunity for board and staff members to get to know one another better so as to build on each other's strengths. All other monthly board meetings are held using Skype.

At the retreat, building strong relationships, membership size and opportunities, and certification were identified as top priorities. However, organizational infrastructure was identified as key to meeting the other priorities effectively. The board identified having the right staff, sustainable resources and technology supports as needs to be addressed. As the original board members leave, it's also important to have a succession plan for the board and a way to orient new board members. Developing a board manual was assigned to the Governance Committee. The board has now discussed and approved the manual information and board policies.

We approached Ignitech, a company that helps not-for-profit organizations build effective computer technology supports, to develop a proposal for ADWA. Our coordinator gave her retirement notice, giving ADWA the perfect opportunity to look at what is needed in terms of staffing. She developed a job description based on what she does, which has been divided into an administrator role and a senior staff role, each with its own job description. A job posting was developed for the administrator role and the *ad hoc* Recruitment Committee is conducting interviews in the new fiscal year.

Finance Committee

This has been a busy year for the Finance Committee as we worked with the first new secretary-treasurer (Tracy Yaremko) since ADWA began. The committee finally set Terms of Reference and started

developing procedures that would give us more eyes on the financial documents that feed into our monthly reports to the board. As usual, this committee reviews the budget draft developed by staff before it is presented to the full board. As usual, there were lots of questions and discussion of key areas related to ADWA's plans for the upcoming year. As part of our year-end process, we reviewed what we need as an audit and hired a company that we have confidence in to do the review engagement report that is presented at this year's AGM. We look forward to getting sound advice that will help us as we develop our organization.

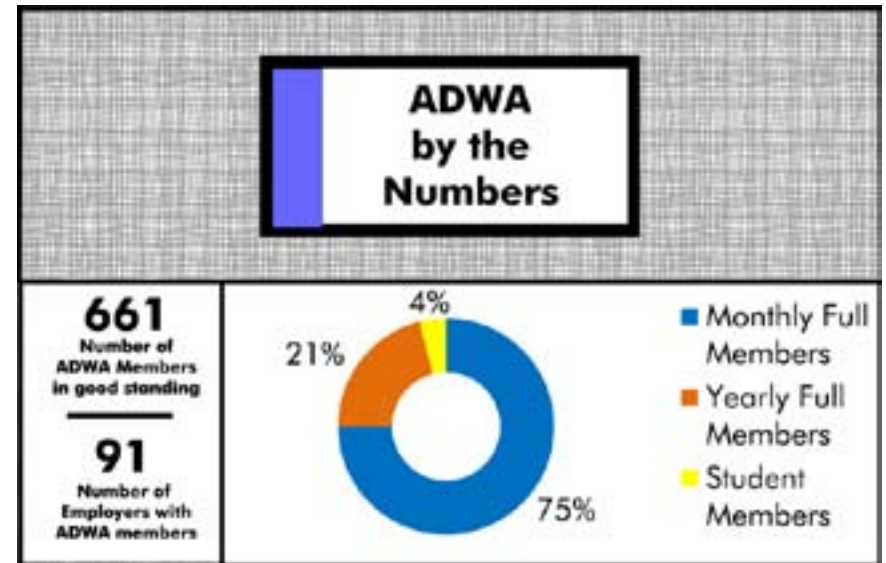
It's important to get the best use of our money, including using what we have to make more money. This year, we changed



banking institutions from ATB Financial, where we paid monthly fees and received no interest on our money, to Servus Credit Union, where we pay no monthly fees and get interest on our savings. We now have money in their higher-interest savings account and have opened a 1-year GIC for a portion of our money. Changing accounts meant that we had to change how we do our direct deposits from our members. We are now in the process of updating our signing authorities and getting a company credit card tied to our Servus account so that regular fees for phone, PayPal fees and other expenses are not paid by our staff and then reimbursed.

Membership Committee

The new Champions program has been a major focus of the Membership Committee this year. This program is designed to provide a local, knowledgeable, friendly face for ADWA at as many organizations as we have ADWA members. We find that when our members run into problems with our website or Perkopolis or have questions about ADWA, they often ask someone where they work rather than contact ADWA's staff. Sometimes the person they talk to is not even an ADWA member! Needless to say, this doesn't help ADWA learn about problems and doesn't give members (or potential members) accurate information. The ADWA Champions program can reduce the resulting frustration and give better support to our members. We recognize that being an ADWA Champion cannot take away time from employee's work. ADWA produced a 1-page summary of the value of membership, certification and having a Champion for Executive Directors to promote the program through the service provider councils.



The committee has been actively recruiting ADWA Champions with support from their agency leaders and so far we have 6 ADWA Champions at 4 agencies across Alberta. They have received folders of information about ADWA, its history, programs and activities, contacts and FAQs. Each month, our staff provides a brief update on the month's activities that they can share with people at meetings, in newsletters or in the hall.

The Membership Committee has taken a leading role in communication with members and agencies. We have developed a set of hashtags to support our key messages on Facebook and Twitter and worked with ADWA staff to develop some nice posts with quotes from our PDD Review surveys. Membership Committee members have also participated in several ADWA presentations this year at agencies and service provider councils to talk about the importance of



our professional association and recruit new members. This has resulted in several organizations supporting membership for their staff and an increase in member numbers over last year. Our staff have also provided ongoing updates for service provider councils to that they are more aware of ADWA's activities and partnership possibilities.

As ADWA develops its policy manual for board and staff, the Membership Committee took on the role of first review of member-related policies and procedures before the full board review.

External Relations Committee

As a result of discussions at our annual board and staff retreat, the Government Relations Committee expanded its mandate to become the External Relations Committee. The committee revised its Terms of Reference and developed a strategic workplan for the year.

The PDD Review was a major focus for this committee and the board as a whole. We advocated with the Minister to ensure that disability workers—not just their executive directors—had the opportunity to participate in the consultations. We then ensured that we could reinforce their messages by doing a sector survey and sharing what we heard with followers on Facebook and with our community on our website and E-Bulletins in a variety of formats. We produced an overall report, a report organized around the PDD Review Committee questions and a third report focusing on the high cost of low wages. We provided copies of all three reports to the PDD Review team. We also produced a briefer “key messages” document, which we and many others took to the community consultations to guide our contributions to the conversations and post-it notes, as well as our online survey answers. We were also invited to make a formal presentation to the PDD Review panel, which was well-received. Finally, when the government workers produced “What We Heard” summaries of each of the community conversations, and those conversations only mentioned worker wages once even though we knew that wages



were mentioned in every meeting, we wrote to the PDD Review Committee about it.

We had an introductory meeting with the new Disability Advocate in January. We also met with the Minister of Advanced



Education and his staff in December to discuss the challenges for disabilities workers related to education and training in our province. We included representatives of the Bow Valley College program in our meeting in order to give him a better idea of the issues created by the loss of 9 college programs for our sector between 2008 and 2016. We shared our work on certification and its role in evaluating competence. As Norquest College develops a new disability studies program for Fall 2019, we have offered our support in curriculum development related to our core competencies.

We have continued to develop partnerships with other organizations, such as the Alberta Council of Disability Services, regional service provider councils and Voice of Albertans with Disabilities/Alberta Disabilities Forum. We had a board-to-board meeting with ACDS at the last ACDS conference in May 2018 and have followed up since then to try to develop a process to support each other's efforts better at the board level. We sent a joint letter with ACDS to the Minister of Community and Social Services praising the move to tie AISH to cost of living and reminding him that our workforce also struggles to keep up with the cost of living and must often choose between poverty and overwork.

We were invited to be part of a VAD/ADF Government Relations working group to develop election materials that members could use in the provincial and federal elections, as well as plan post-election activities. Our staff met monthly with this group from December onward and helped develop materials related to poverty and an accessibility act. Using the same format, she developed a handout related to disability worker issues that ADWA and members of our sector could use to inform parties and candidates of the challenges we face and ask about their platform or planned method to address these challenges. We sent the handout to all of the party leaders and posted the responses of the three parties

Disability Worker Questions for Alberta Election Candidates



Unskilled Wages for Skilled Work	Added Costs for Underpaid Workers	Impacts of Burnout & Turnover	Lack of Educational Opportunities	Approximate Wages
<p>Alberta disability workers apply multidisciplinary skills (e.g., teacher, coach, social worker, advocate, employment counselor, community developer, researcher, personal care attendant) to successfully support individuals with intellectual, physical and/or emotional disabilities to be fully part of their communities.</p> <p>The community disability workers earned an average of \$18.70/hour in 2016, \$18.20/hour less than disability workers in government.</p> <p>Government contracts with agencies and families have not included any increase in worker compensation since 2014, while the complexity of individuals' needs continues to increase.</p> <p>Starting wages for disability workers (2016 median = \$20.05/hr) now equal those of fast food workers who have less skill and responsibility.</p>	<p>In addition to low wages, disability workers are often expected to pay expenses associated with carrying out services, either temporarily or permanently, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities with entry fees or meal costs that are not covered for compensation and are unaffordable for individuals with disabilities on limited incomes. • Transportation costs to appointments and community activities that prevent the individual from becoming isolated, particularly in smaller or busier areas without public transportation. • Mileage costs, if covered by the employer, often have monthly caps and/or low reimbursement rates that do not cover vehicle wear and tear. 	<p>A 2005 ADWA study showed that 25% of disability workers have 2 or more jobs in the field to make ends meet. The less time disability workers have for self-care and exercise, or for their families. This increases the risk of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service errors due to fatigue • Impaired problem solving and reduced creativity and effort on behalf of individuals • Stress and health issues • Burnout and turnover <p>Individuals with disabilities need consistency in their support to achieve their life goals and maintain a place in the community. Turnover rates have consistently averaged near 30% for many years. Those leaving say they cannot afford to stay in the field where less stressful work pays the same or better.</p>	<p>The most effective way to develop the multi-disciplinary skills and knowledge required for successful disability work is to complete relevant post-secondary education, supplemented by continuous professional development.</p> <p>Since 2008, some Alberta post-secondary programs preparing front-line disability workers have closed, leaving only Bow Valley College and a planned Nanquelt College program. Many private programs training disability workers have also closed.</p> <p>The number of seats in current programs cannot keep up with turnover. As well, wages in the sector are too low to pay back student loans, which is a disincentive to get an education in the field.</p> <p>Government contracts with agencies and families do not include staff training costs.</p>	<p>What will you do to raise the wages of skilled disability workers?</p> <p>What will you do to make sure that disability workers are no longer burdened with the hidden costs of providing services (e.g., transportation, entry fees, meal costs)?</p> <p>What will you do to fix the underlying causes of high burnout and turnover among disability workers?</p> <p>What will you do to make sure that disability workers are able to afford and access the education and training they need throughout their career to provide effective support to individuals with disabilities?</p>
				<p>11 E-Bulletins</p> <p>122 Tweets</p> <p>154 Facebook Posts</p> <p>3 Major Reports</p> <p>10+ Presentations</p> <p>4 New Web Pages</p>

who replied on the *Election 2019* page of our website. We produced an E-Bulletin inviting our members to get involved and become informed, as well as help those they support become informed and vote in the election. Our webpage provided lots of information on how to become informed and choose someone to vote for, as well as how to go about voting. We received feedback from members that they found the information on our website useful, and even heard that one of the candidates cited our 1-page handout on disability worker issues at a public forum. We are already starting to make plans, along with partner organizations, for post-election advocacy.

Governance Committee

The role of the Governance Committee is to ensure that the board carries out its work in an effective manner. This year, the committee developed its Terms of Reference and drafted a board manual with role descriptions, board policies and an oath of confidentiality. The committee has also identified policies that need to be developed for ADWA employees and substantial work has been done to develop staff policies. Governance engaged the other committees to review policies related to, for instance, finance and membership.

Communications



Engagement Outcomes



Risk assessment and management is an important and sometimes complex process for any organization. Our staff developed a template for risk assessment that will help the board and committees to assess the risks and benefits of the work they do for the organization.

The Governance Committee also has a role in annual general meetings. A Nominations Subcommittee manages the board recruitment and election process. All nominees are contacted before the slate of candidates goes to members to ensure that they understand our board's activities and responsibilities, and to discover the candidates' areas of strength. Governance also reviews our bylaws to ensure that they support board effectiveness. Last year's AGM included a proposed bylaw change which was debated and defeated.

Certification Committees

The board's Certification Committee met in November to review what has been learned from the pilot to date and plan for a meeting of ADWA's Certification Pilot Advisory Committee, which includes partners at ACDS, Inclusion Alberta, educational institutions and the Alberta government. At the advisory committee meeting, Certification Coordinator Shauna Pilipchuk updated the group on the actions that have been taken and learnings to date.

Certification Pilot

A total of 57 disability workers signed up to be part of the certification pilot with 17 substantially completing the process by March 31. Recruitment of candidates and support took more ADWA time than was anticipated. A number of candidates withdrew formally, citing reasons that included high or changing workloads and life events. We are gathering information from those who participated, regardless of whether they were able to complete the process or not, to help us understand the experiences of the candidates and their supervisors, the challenges they faced and their perspectives on the process and standards. Based on a preliminary review, we recognize that the piloted certification process would be complicated to have in our field as seen in some heavy workloads and funding considerations. We will bring what we learn from the pilot forward to our community stakeholders in the sector, including our members, ACDS, service providers, the government, self-advocates and their families. Movement forward will be based on what our stakeholders will support.

