Alan Ward: Fifty Years On

It is said that a journey starts with one step, for me, it was a plane ride in 1972, family in tow, leaving a high-tech job in the UK for the unknowns of Canada.

This journey has taken me from being a Teaching Assistant, supporting a group of Grade Six kids with "learning difficulties" (they all graduated the year), through various experiences at the Ontario Hospital School (later HRC) and on into community-based support services.

Starting with the M.R. Certificate course (forerunner to the College based DSW), I attended every seminar and training session that came my way and worked in a specialised Autism Support Unit at HRC for a number of years

In the mid 80's, out of Residential Services, I was working as a Research Assistant with unit Psychologists, and was gently(?) informed that I had moved as far along the path as I could without "that" piece of paper.

So, I applied for and was accepted at York University to do a double of Psychology and Sociology but, instead of going on to Grad school and despite having been recommended for an accelerated PhD program, I applied for a Developmental Opportunity in the HRC in-house Behavioural Unit.

And the journey took another road.

Within the year I transferred to the HRC Outreach Program at Simcoe Community Behavioural Services supporting families, Community Living Associations and Schools with a client base ranging from pre-schoolers to people supported in Adult Services.

There was a brief foray into Sexuality Services but, it was not my "thing". By now I was firmly entrenched in being part of various transdisciplinary teams across Simcoe County using a Person-Centred approach with Positive Behaviour Support strategies.

We even received a Millennium "Ontario Initiatives" award for this work and I got to keep the trophy, an Inuksuk (showing the way).

Another jog in the road and a second retirement took me to McKenzie Health at York Simcoe Behavioural Services and yet another retirement took me to operating a fishing charter, "Hook Line and Thinker" with a focus on providing a recreational opportunity for families with children with "special needs".

Health issues forced another retirement and then,18 years ago 2004, a chance meeting at the Mall led me to joining CLASS as an in-house Behaviour Consultant, fulfilling a promise made about eight years earlier.

And the journey continues

However, a journey, any journey, isn't just about where you have been and what you have done, it's about the people you have met, the experiences you have shared and the meanderings (bicycle paths) that you take to explore the surroundings.

In these 50 years, I have met and worked with an incredible array of people, top-notch clinicians, advocates, staff from every County support service, schools and families.

The families I have known and helped support are incredibly brave in trusting us, strangers, to enter their lives in the hope of improving the lives of their children.

These same families also entrust their children to the care of Community Living Associations with the same hopes and aspirations for us to help the person be the best that they can be and live a life of dignity and purpose within their community.

And that is the job that continues to make my journey worth while.

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