

AAACL Connections

A publication of Alberta Association for Community Living



Officially open: Jim Reid, AAACL Past President (left), lends a hand to Jocelyn Cook and The Honourable Mary Anne Jablonski, then Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, as Jeff Nish, Chair, Calgary PDD Board holds up his end of the proceedings. Devan and Sheilagh Cook look on. Jocelyn and Minister Jablonski did the ceremonial snip to officially open the Darrell Cook Family Managed Supports Resource Centre in Calgary.

(Photo by Wil Andruschak)

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Alberta Association for
Community Living

**Changing Lives
Changing Communities**

On the cover

In September, the Darrell Cook Family Managed Supports Resource Centre officially opened its doors in Calgary. A collaborative effort between AACL, Family Voices – Calgary and Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Calgary Region Community Board, the Centre assists families in learning about and utilizing Family Managed

Supports (FMS). FMS is Alberta's version of what is also known as individualized funding or direct payments. Bruce Uditsky, AACL CEO, says the Centre will help to ensure more families are able to "create and sustain meaningful and inclusive lives for their family members with developmental disabilities." See story page 6.

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2012 Summer Institute on Inclusive Education

Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, University of Calgary, in cooperation with AACL, is offering for credit or audit three undergraduate and graduate credit summer courses on inclusive education. These courses, which run during the first three weeks of July, will be of interest to teachers, administrators, parents and others committed to educating students with developmental disabilities in the regular classroom. AACL provides bursaries to teachers and administrators to attend the Summer Institute on Inclusive Education. For more information, contact: Beth Parrott, ph: 403.220.2271/403.220.8587 or parrott@ucalgary.ca. Watch for the next issue of *Connections* or visit www.aacl.org for more details.

Of note

Dr. June Downing passed away July 20, 2011. She was a professor at California State University, Northridge in the Department of Special Education, where she prepared teachers to work with students with moderate and severe disabilities. A national leader in the field of inclusive education with a focus on the needs of students with severe disabilities.

She was the author of *Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms: Practical Strategies for Teachers*. She was a keynote presenter at the AACL Family Conference in 2009 and connected with many parents and educators about meaningful inclusive education.

Fill up with Husky Every time you use your AACL Husky gas card, the Association receives 2% of the purchase price. A little adds up to a lot. Get your Husky card from AACL and fill up to support people with developmental disabilities.



The hope that advocacy provides

by Bruce Uditsky

Advocacy, although often negated or even demonized by those who are the object of its intent, is a public good. Its value is seen in the demonstrated courage it takes for a parent to stand up and call attention to injustice so we all might learn and be conscious of what must change to those who respond to injustice or exclusion by taking action. An example of the former would be the aging grandparents of a child with complex needs who assumed the necessary responsibility for their grandchild's care during a time of family crisis only to find out upon his entering adulthood that his life is once again put at risk because he is four IQ points above the absurd eligibility criteria imposed by an uncaring system. Examples of the latter might be a principal who provides the moral leadership for a school to welcome and include a child's desire to belong; or senior government officials, who possibly to the detriment of their own careers and because they do care, adjust bureaucratic rules just enough to enable needed supports to be provided.

While advocacy does call attention to what needs to change, it can also call out the best in people while fostering creative and collaborative responses in an era of increasing complexity (e.g., rules upon rules of how to administer and account for the provision of supports, multiple, overlapping and growing numbers of assessments, increasing and contradictory risk management procedures, etc.).

In a review of the last 20 plus years of individual advocacy, AACL has:

- *been successful in supporting families in every legal challenge of which we've been a part*
- *secured an inclusive education for every child but one and this student was only denied inclusion in his last year of high school limiting the possibility of continuing to challenge the decision*
- *been successful in supporting individuals or families in almost every appeal (except PDD eligibility appeals*

where Appeal Boards have no discretionary decision-making powers outside the regulations that bind them)

- *honed its skills such that the very vast majority of its advocacy efforts are collaborative not adversarial*
- *supported children and adults to be more fully embedded in their communities while pursuing an inclusive pathway over the lifespan*
- *demonstrated the capacity of community to be welcoming and inclusive from post-secondary institutions to recreation providers to Rotarians and the business community.*



Systemically AACL has demonstrated the capacity for change by building relationships with policymakers, harnessing the passion of its grassroots and staying the course over the long term. These successes are evident from the advocacy that contributed to the establishment of the *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act*, one of the most progressive legislative frameworks in Canada, to the launch of the Darrell Cook Family Managed Supports Resource Centre, the need for which I first publicly wrote about 12 years ago. This Centre is the first of its kind in Alberta.

The hope created by AACL's advocacy lies in the fact we are almost always successful in achieving a positive difference. We cannot do so at the pace everyone would like—it always takes more time and every day a family or individual is denied the possibility of a better life seems like an eternity. But it is my hope when families and individuals find themselves in crisis, feeling hopeless, frustrated, angry and anxious, they realize they are not alone. Change is almost always possible. To note the wisdom of the past, hope stands on the shoulders of anger and courage. I would like to think AACL is there to stand with families in sustaining and renewing their hope. ■

Meet our Dream Makers

In each issue of Connections, you will meet one of AACL's generous Dream Makers. This group of outstanding community-minded people from all walks of life have chosen to support the hopes and aspirations of Albertans with developmental disabilities and their families. AACL Dream Makers make a minimum five year financial contribution at one of three pledge levels to support: The Dreams of a Child or an Adult (\$1000+/yr), The Dreams of a Family (\$5000+/yr), or The Dreams of a Community

*(\$10,000+/yr). Because of these generous donors, AACL is able to make a difference in the lives of individuals and families, and change communities. In this issue, meet **Ken and Shauna Harrison** of Edmonton, owners, Apple Fitness Store, set to celebrate its 20th year in 2012. Apple Fitness, with stores in Edmonton and Calgary, is the preferred supplier of fitness equipment for the Edmonton Oilers, Edmonton Eskimos, Calgary Flames, Calgary Stampeders, and the Saskatchewan Roughriders.*

When Derek, Kendra and Braden Harrison were young, mom Shauna did a lot of the school parent duties for the household. As owners of Apple Fitness, Ken managed that end of the equation while Shauna worked with other parents on school activities. It was at Lymburn Elementary that Shauna met Wendy McDonald.

“Wendy is a really active parent and so is Shauna,” says Ken, “so there were fundraising activities, lunch programs, hot dog days, raising money for resources for Kyle (McDonald) and other kids who needed support, but the purpose of all the activity was to ensure all children in the school would benefit. They cared about the quality of education for all children, and worked together on making things better. That was our first grounding and it gave us a better appreciation for what it means to develop community.”

In 2005, son Derek became a “miniature big brother to Kyle” and that connection spawned a great relationship between the two families. The Harrisons gained an appreciation for the diversity in the school population and developed a strong commitment to ensuring inclusion and supporting the contribution of all children no matter what gender, nationality, economic standing, or disability.

“I think it's made our kids better people because they're more aware of the kinds of issues other people may face, and how others have to work at

accomplishing those things that may come easily for them. Everyone deserves the opportunity to try and be involved,” says Shauna. “Derek still gets tweets and emails from Kyle and they keep in touch. Derek was a real hardcore extrovert and into hockey and sports. As he really got to know Kyle and maybe even

spurred Kyle on to trying new things, I think he realized a compassionate side. It's humbling. You realize you're a piece of a big community, part of the grassroots puzzle and you become a piece of someone's life.”

Ken says getting to know someone with a developmental disability is “an eye opener for a lot of people. Children help ground us and make us more aware of the needs of each person,” he says.

“I know our kids have great memories of so many school years, seeing how everyone had a chance to be involved and participate. No one was going to be left out. Diversity in all the kids really brought the parents together so they worked for what all the kids needed.”

It seemed like a logical next step in “being one of the many puzzle pieces that make up a community” to become AACL Dream Makers. The Harrisons, who also donate funds, fitness equipment and time to the United Way, churches, schools and other community needs through their business's Apple Seed Program, are impressed by AACL's province-wide work. They have seen first hand how contributions from Dream Makers and other donors result in individuals with



Shauna, Braden, Derek, Kendra and Ken Harrison

The New to Canada Series

(Several families who have immigrated to Alberta from around the world describe how AACL has supported their dreams of inclusion since coming to Canada. In the fourth of this series, Lauren Luo from China, now of Edmonton, shares her family's story.)

In May 2006, we landed in Canada from China and my son Kai Ming was so sweet and happy during the whole trip. After we arrived in Canada, we learned that Canada was a multicultural country with peace, tolerance and equality. Despite all we have encountered with some language barriers and cultural differences, we have settled ourselves in Canada.

After arriving here, Kai Ming started showing behaviour like banging his head and throwing temper tantrums. We struggled to find any doctors or specialists to help us, while Kai Ming's behaviour was getting worse. Finally we were so lucky to meet a neighbour who introduced us to a church and some people we could talk to who helped us find an outreach program that helped us get Kai Ming assessed quickly. In April 2007, Kai Ming took a preschool assessment and was diagnosed with autism.

In Chinese culture, most parents put all their dreams on their children. When they realize that their dreams are not possible to come true, they feel hopeless and shame for their children. At that time, when we learned autism was not curable, our dream for Kai Ming became fragmented. Like many other Chinese parents I felt hopeless, even felt sorrow when we thought that our only son could not have a typical life, getting married and enjoying the life that God grants to everybody on earth. I didn't dare to think about his future to avoid the pain.

Despite sorrow and hopelessness, I have changed my thinking because of the people who surround

me with support. Eleanor Mui is a parent, and she selflessly contributes her time to organize a Chinese parent support group that helps families with children with autism and developmental disabilities. She tells families about AACL and how they support and advocate for families.

Hanna Ng, our pastor's wife, saw all the families' pain and struggle with finding the right therapy for our children so she quit her job to become a RDI (Relationship Development Intervention) consultant to help families and children. We appreciate her passion and what she did for us, for Chinese families who have children with disabilities.

Recently, we were having trouble with our service provider because they did not want to continue employing Hanna, Kai Ming's therapist and therapist for a number of other families. Our family and four other Chinese families were upset because Hanna understood our therapy program, culture and spoke our language. So we went to AACL and met with Bruce and Trina, and Bruce helped us understand that we had the right to hire our own therapists and choose the right people who fit with our philosophy. Bruce and Trina helped our group organize a plan to approach the Government funders. In the end, with the help of AACL, we will now have the ability to hire our own clinicians so we can manage and monitor the support we receive. We still have some things to work out, but we know we can turn to Bruce (Uditsky, AACL CEO) and Trina for help with the government.



Kai Ming and his father De Ji Wu.

With the help of AACL, support groups, the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative, an AACL partner and other outreach programs, we would not know where to go and how to get the best help for our son.

Since the fall, we participated in a leadership series for families, hosted by AACL and we thank Bruce and Anne for giving us the opportunity to learn how to advocate and have a vision for our son. We also thank AACL for providing the Family Conference and for giving us the chance to say thank you to all of the parents and staff that have helped our family since coming to Canada. Kai Ming has an inclusive education, and good therapists because of these supports. We now have a strong vision for Kai Ming and we work hard to help him have the best life.

(Trina Steed, an AACL Family Advocate, works with multi-cultural families through the federally-funded national Community Inclusion Initiative (CII) organized by the Canadian Association for Community Living. Anne Hughson is Director and Associate Professor, Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies Program, Community Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Calgary and a long-time AACL volunteer and co-developer of the AACL Family Leadership Series.)

New resource centre opens in Calgary

In September AACL, in partnership with Calgary Family Voices and Persons with Developmental Disabilities Calgary Region Community Board, opened the first family managed supports resource centre in Alberta and one of the first of its kind in the world. It's hoped this will be the first of similar efforts throughout the province.



At the official open house in September, Sharon Cobb, who uses Family Managed Supports for her daughter Brenda, spoke about her family's experiences while AACL Executive Director Lori Adamchick and Past President Jim Reid listen in.

(Photos by Wil Andruschak)

"This was a wonderful day with the launch of Alberta's first Family Managed Supports Resource Centre," says Jim Reid, AACL Past-President. Reid is also the parent of an adult daughter with developmental disabilities who is employed and living in her own apartment with FMS-funded supports. "The Centre will make a huge difference to families and is an excellent example of what can be achieved when government and families work together. The Centre connects experienced families with new families so they realize they're not alone and don't have to reinvent the wheel."

Sharon Cobb of Calgary uses FMS with her daughter Brenda. Sharon called the Centre "a vital resource assisting families with planning, negotiating funding and recruiting staff. It also offers training for staff and mentorship for families." The Centre is immediately responsive, she says, and is a relief since "I don't always know how to do everything to make sure Brenda gets what she needs."

Bruce Uditsky, AACL CEO, says the Centre will help to ensure more families are in a better position to

create and sustain meaningful and inclusive lives for their family members with developmental disabilities. His adult son benefits from FMS funding. "I look forward to the day," Bruce says, "when interested families and individuals all across Alberta have access to resources of this type which will enable them to better realize their dreams and hopes."

Family Managed Supports means that individuals and their families decide how supports will be provided, something very appealing to the Cobb family. Brenda determines how her family and support staff respond to her wishes.

"I love the flexibility of FMS," says Sharon. "Brenda's in the middle and she's directing things. Nothing is perfect and things can go wrong whether you have FMS or not, but the response with FMS is much quicker in our experience. You still need to tweak and change and fix things if they're not working. But the key is you can do that with FMS. You don't have to go through the layers of bureaucracy others might encounter." In the past Brenda had to fit in and adjust to what the service system dictated. Now that is no longer the case as her supports are more personalized and flexible, says Sharon.

"Brenda had shown us very clearly that what we had been doing wasn't working for her and in fact, she almost died twice," recalls Sharon. "We knew we had to do something different and FMS gives us that flexibility to respond to her needs right away. Her needs change, as they do with all of us. Some things need to change when they're not working any more. With FMS, we've been able to change things more quickly than in the past."

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Diane Reid, Sheena Small and Orvella Small enjoyed the festivities at the Centre open house.

Alberta's inclusive post-secondary opportunities unsurpassed, but not guaranteed

For more than 20 years, AACL has played an instrumental role in the development and expansion of inclusive post-secondary educational opportunities. Today Alberta offers more inclusive post-secondary options for adults with developmental disabilities than anywhere else in the world. However, this hasn't been without its challenges. In the last few years, funding to support inclusion at two northern colleges was withdrawn, although inclusive post-secondary initiatives at these colleges were successful. Through the advocacy of AACL and families, funding was reinstated and now young adults with developmental disabilities are once again being included with a greater promise of employment than is ordinarily the case.

"The students are doing really well and colleges such as Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC) have been very supportive," says Trish Bowman, Director, Community Development with AACL.

In an unsolicited email, parent Pam Moore describes her son

Rick's first year's experience at GPRC: "Rick left a couple of hours ago to start his second day of work. Ashley Young, his inclusion facilitator from Grande Prairie College, reported that, after a transition time, Rick actually worked for two hours straight on the job yesterday—a miracle! I know, without doubt, that these achievements that most people would take for granted would not be happening for Rick if it were not for his experiences as a student at GPRC and the efforts of AACL staff who developed and administer this program. Thank you."

"This summer," Moore continues, "we did a lot of travelling and visiting throughout Alberta and Saskatchewan. In years past, I would have to struggle and cajole to get Rick out of the truck if we were in a new place, meeting new people. This year Rick eagerly and easily met many people and even enjoyed himself. At a 60th birthday celebration for one of Keith's nieces—it was a huge, outdoor affair, more like a family reunion—I lost track of Rick. He was at the other end of the acreage involved

in a soccer game with the other kids; another ordinary situation that most people would take for granted. Anyone who knows our history of behaviour challenges with Rick knows that we do not take this for granted. The growth in Rick's self-confidence, willingness to try new things, maturity, communication, sense of responsibility, happiness and improved mood since his inclusive post-secondary education is extraordinary, amazing, outstanding, noteworthy, significant, incredible, astonishing! Thank you, thank you, thank you."

"For years we worked hard every morning to extricate Rick from the house, so averse was he to going to school. Shortly, a new college semester will begin. We know that Rick is looking forward to it, as he has been talking about going back to college since before we left on vacation. We can hardly wait to see what challenges and triumphs await Rick in the new semester. We can now look forward with optimism to a future for Rick where he, like other college students, can enjoy fulfillment of his personal potential. Thank you. Need to leave now and look for Kleenex as tears are filling my eyes, seeing how very, very far we have come. Once again, thank you."

It's not just parents who see the benefits of inclusive post-secondary education.

Dr. Harry Fernhout, President, The King's University College, recently wrote to AACL and shared the following: "Because students are fully integrated into all facets of

➔ "RESOURCE CENTRE", CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Mary Anne Jablonski, then Minister of Seniors and Community Supports cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the Centre. The family of the late Darrell Cook, for whom the Centre is named, Jim Reid and Jeff Nish, Chair, Calgary PDD Board, all assisted.

Jim hopes more similar centres will open in regions throughout Alberta. "Our daughter is 35 years old," he says, "so we've

been through various iterations of services and it's important to always look for better ways of doing things. Darrell Cook was such a passionate and compassionate man and he worked hard to get FMS underway in Calgary."

"The Centre," adds Sharon, "will help our family continue to support Brenda in her own home and make sure things are going well for her when I'm no longer here." ■

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College is where life can begin again

by Karin Melberg Schwier

Cassie Chaba had been included in regular education all through her school years in Edmonton. During school, she spent time with friends, some of whom she's known her whole life who "treated me like anybody else. We talked about boys, went to parties, and hung out on the weekends. The usual!" Cassie says using her foot-controlled Echo voice synthesizer.

Cassie and her family assumed her inclusion with friends would be a reflection of her adult life. But after the hubbub of high school graduation, complete with friends, a rented limo and all-night dancing, a chilling reality settled in. Options for a job or further education were at best limited, at worst non-existent. When September rolled around and Cassie still had no prospects, she got scared "because I didn't have anywhere else to go. It makes me sad to think about it. I literally did nothing but sit on my couch," she says. "I started to explore other options and all I could find was a day program and I still desperately wanted to be a university student. It was a very bad year. It was lonely and depressing."



College confidential: Before being supported to attend post-secondary school, "I was worried about my future." Between classes at Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton, Cassie Chaba, centre, says, "My life has changed in ways I would never think were possible."

(Photo by Karin Melberg Schwier)

It was a dream she held on to for a year while she waited, sitting at home, watching TV and reading, checked on by a neighbour to make sure she was safe. Sometimes she stayed with her grandmother. "Although I love spending time with my grandma," she adds, "I was worried about my future." As the months passed, worry turned to despair.

"I felt terrible. I could not believe that I had been so easily included my entire life, and now I was about to face a life where I was excluded and sitting on the sidelines. I cried a lot," Cassie remembers.

Cassie's mom, Dianne, kept searching and one day found AACL on the Internet. "When I connected with AACL, it was fantastic. There was no second question. They wanted to meet her. They kept saying she could go to college and it got to the point where my husband and I didn't believe them. We'd go, 'Really? Like are you serious?' It was almost surreal."

"My mom did not believe them at first when they said I would be a university student," Cassie says. "I had almost given up, but I felt hopeful, but still skeptical." After talking with AACL's Charmaine McIntyre, Cassie saw her life take a huge turn. "Because I was finally able to see a future ahead of me," she recalls. "It is hard to describe the immense relief I felt."

Norquest College is one of AACL's many inclusive post-secondary initiatives and this is where Cassie began her post-secondary education. There are 18 post-secondary institutions in Alberta that include students with developmental disabilities. "AACL saw the value I bring to the world," Cassie insists, "and knew it was possible for me to be included in post-secondary education on the path to a career."

After completing the two years of the therapeutic recreation program at Norquest and convocating with her peers, Cassie decided she'd need a broader understanding of office procedures to get a good job. In 2010, she entered the Administrative Assistant program at Grant MacEwan University. How's it going? "I love it!" Cassie's smile spreads across her face. "My life has changed in ways I would never think were possible. Every day I'm exposed to new ideas, people and ways of thinking. I have made close friends and I contribute to my classes in valuable and meaningful ways."

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Nathan Ip is the coordinator of Campus Connections, which facilitates the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities at MacEwan, another of AACL's inclusive post-secondary initiatives. Cassie is, he says, "a ray of sunshine. You can feel her energy. She's one of the most optimistic people I've ever met in my life. She loves admin assistant work, and that's where her heart is now. She loves working with people and likes the practical skills."

"It is really about the authentic and robust university student experience," he says. "When you look at the kind of school life that a lot of successful university students have, there are those who are very active and involved. They know where they're going. They have internships over the summer. They're on student council. Many will go on to become leaders in their community. We're really interested in supporting that kind of university experience for students with developmental disabilities. Students we support can become leaders in their community. They can dream big and it is possible to achieve their dreams."

Of course, there are university students who simply "go to class and then go play video games," he laughs, "but we're about supporting a much more active and involved experience."

At MacEwan, Campus Connections Educational Assistant Hilary Kirkpatrick provides support to Cassie. "She helps me outside class and with homework," Cassie says. Hilary works with Cassie and her instructors on course modifications if they are required. Eileen Matthews, Office Assistant Program Chair is Cassie's favourite teacher. "She is kind, understanding, and I know she wants all of her



At Cassie's graduation from Norquest, "Grandma was thrilled for me. She still is thrilled for me."

students to succeed. She is an excellent instructor."

"I think the key to post-secondary education, for any of us, is that we go through a 'coming of age' process," says Nathan. "Students we support go through that as well to better understand themselves, realize what might be possible and see a broadened series of possibilities."

AACL held a lunch-and-learn session at Stantec, an international engineering firm headquartered in Edmonton, attended by about 75 employees. Cassie was one of the presenters and shared her story, including her desire to work in office administration. Rick Prentice from the Edmonton Rotary Club and Vice-President, Export Sales and Marketing, with the support of Dave Kinders, Managing Senior Principal, Urban Land, and Keith Shillington, Vice-President and Regional Leader, Alberta, Edmonton

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Foundation supports AACL

The Alberta Community Living Foundation (ACLF) was created by AACL almost 30 years ago to generate funds to support individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. The Foundation operates a non-profit business which collects donated clothing and household goods, selling them to Value Village. No longer needed household goods and clothing are turned into resources that directly

support children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families across Alberta. All the funds raised from the sale of these goods goes to support the work of AACL.

Items can be donated by dropping them off at the AACL blue bins conveniently located throughout Calgary, Edmonton and the surrounding communities of both cities. ACLF will also pick

up donated items free of charge in those same areas. Donors can arrange for a pick up by simply calling the Donation Line at 403.531.3080 in Calgary and area, and 780.452.2121 in Edmonton and area.

(For a list of bin locations or to find out the bin nearest you, call the Donation Lines or visit www.aacl.org.)

Capital Region, were keen to see individuals with developmental disabilities having the opportunity to work at Stantec.

Stantec was impressed with Cassie and this past summer offered her an office assistant internship, in which Cassie reveled. "This summer my dreams came true of securing employment as an administrative assistant at Stantec...My job is mainly analyzing outdated documents and fixing or updating templates," she explains. "In the future, I'll be creating project profiles; these are pictures that depict in a nutshell the project that took place."

She worked close to full-time and when her studies resumed this fall Stantec offered her part-time employment which Cassie gladly accepted. Now, like most students, she is working to support her education while going to school.

Hilary accompanied Cassie in the beginning, but her support tapered off as Cassie became part of the Stantec staff. Because Cassie requires her Echo to communicate, "I had to help people feel comfortable and learn how to talk with me." Though she felt comfortable from the outset, Cassie really felt accepted "when my co-worker Caroline and I realized that we have a similar sense of humour and started spending time together outside of work," Cassie says. "Caroline has become a great friend of mine."

"I offered some minor support when she started, but it was all Cassie," says Hilary, who feels that inclusion in college and in the workplace has "amazing benefits" for classmates and co-workers. "How lucky for students taking those inclusive classes with a student who has a disability! Cassie tends to blow people out of the water. They'll remember her."

"David Kinders is fantastic. He is a great motivator and an excellent boss," says Cassie. "Stantec treats me with immense amounts of respect and I'm absolutely included and accepted as a contributing member of the team." Stantec has organized Cassie's office to maximize her interactions with co-workers and facilitate her work.

Stantec has now hired five individuals with developmental disabilities through AACL's Partnership with Rotary. Cassie has been formally offered a full-time job when she completes her studies this spring. "She gets very well paid and her office is way better than ours!" Nathan says as Cassie laughs.



Classmates and fellow Norquest graduates Gina Echevarria and Cassie Chaba. "I wanted to continue my education just like my friends. I didn't want to be told I had no options."

"There's a cappuccino machine."

Jokes subside and talk turns serious. Cassie is adamant in her advice to other people with disabilities who may feel isolated and lost after high school. "There is support out there," she insists. "It's possible."

Her brilliant smile evaporates when she thinks about what her life might have been like without college. As Cassie enters her answer into her Echo, Hilary elaborates. "Cassie and I have had long talks about that," says Hilary. "I think she was petrified about the trajectory of her life. The relief was immeasurable when she realized 'I not only can have the life I dreamed of, but also the life I expected to have.' To me, everyone deserves a life that's valued," Hilary adds.

About that life that might have been? Cassie replies, "Not good. I would be so bored. I didn't want to be in a workshop; I wanted to go to continue my education just like my friends. I wanted to pursue my passions like any other 18-year-old. I wanted to create a life for myself, not be told that I had no options."

When she knew it could be different, was she scared, excited, worried? Coming to university was "all the above," Cassie's smile returns full force. "Scary and exciting and 'what am I doing here?' I had almost lost hope, but I had faith."

Her life now? "Awesome!" ■

developmental disabilities and their families living significantly better lives.

"AACL will continue the work to make sure people all blend together, that no one is left out," Ken says. "Being part of this means you're breaking down barriers, you're putting smiles on people's faces. There are so many challenges people have and a lot of us have more than we realize. We live in such a 'have' society so being able to turn around and give back puts a smile on our faces, too."

The Harrisons' advice to others? "Don't take things for granted and if you're in a position to do something good, then do it." ■

(If you'd like to become an AACL Dream Maker or would like more information about AACL, contact Wendy McDonald, ph. 780.451.3055, ext. 222, toll free at 1.800.252.7556 or email: wmcDonald@aacl.org.)

Areas of study varied, diverse

Trish Bowman, Director, Community Development with AACL, says the Alberta inclusive post-secondary programs of study in which students with developmental disabilities are enrolled are varied. This partial list highlights the diversity of possible career paths and interest areas: Office and Records Management, Radio and Television, Personal Health and Fitness, Heating, Ventilation and Cooling Specialist, Animal Health Technology, Baking, Culinary Arts, Business, Nursing, Educational Assistant, Digital Arts and Media, Theatre Production, Office Assistant, Aboriginal Community Support Worker, Recreation Therapy, Arts/Sociology/Drama/Business, Arts/Music, Commerce, Education, Event Coordination, Design Studies, Criminology, Kinesiology, Early Learning and Childcare, Political Science, German, and Biology. ■

Reg Peters Resource Centre

The AACL Reg Peters Library has over 400 videos and DVDs, 2000 print materials, 45 journals and 70 newsletters. It is one of the most extensive holding of resources in Alberta on inclusion, community living and disability. Contact Lisa Snyder, ph. 780.451.3055, ext. 225 or email library@aacl.org.

What's new?

Watch this column for details on upcoming information sessions, new developments, projects and partnerships that AACL has underway of interest to people with developmental disabilities

All welcome at monthly AACL information sessions.

Each month, AACL hosts a number of free, one-hour information sessions to introduce more people to the organization and the difference it makes in the lives of families and individuals with developmental disabilities. Sessions are held over the noon hour and guests are provided with a free lunch. These are not fundraising sessions and are designed to give people a better understanding of the organization and the work AACL does. Sessions are held in Edmonton and Calgary but can be arranged in other communities and even for organizations, such as businesses, on request. Edmonton sessions are held at the main AACL office, 11724 Kingsway Avenue, and Calgary sessions are held at the new Calgary AACL office, Suite 212, 4014 Macleod Trail SE.

Upcoming Edmonton Information Sessions

January 20, 2012
February 17, 2012
March 23, 2012

Upcoming Calgary Information Sessions

January 17, 2012
February 14, 2012

(These sessions are open to everyone. We encourage those families familiar with AACL to invite friends, family members and colleagues to attend. If you'd like to attend one of these sessions, contact AACL with the date of interest. We ask that you confirm your attendance at least three days before any given sessions so that lunch can be provided. For more information, phone AACL in Edmonton, 780.451.3055; toll free 1.800.252.7556; or email: mail@aacl.org; in Calgary, phone 403.717.0361.)

A real tweet

Follow AACL on Twitter: Go to twitter.com/aaclorg

university life at King's we bear witness to the bonds of friendship that form in the classroom, at events, in our dining facility and in our residence halls," he says. "Students who come to King's through the work of AACL are heartily welcomed when they arrive and sorely missed when they leave."

There are 83 students currently being included in colleges, universities and one technical institute around the province. "Since 1987," Bowman adds, "we've had 154 graduates and our most recent research shows that about 107 of those are employed."

There are now 18 post-secondary education institutions offering opportunities for inclusion. They include: University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Grant MacEwan University, Lethbridge College, Red Deer College, Olds College, St. Mary's University, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), Mount Royal University, Grande Prairie Regional College, Norquest College, Concordia University College, Lakeland College, University of Alberta Augustana Campus, Athabasca University, Keyano College, The King's University College and Bow Valley College. Discussions are underway with a number of other colleges and universities.

Inclusive post-secondary education is an excellent example of how to maximize the benefits of community capacity. PDD funding provides the onsite inclusion facilitators, Advanced Education

supports the provincial coordination, students pay tuition and the post-secondary institutions provide the instructors/professors, classrooms and all the other learning and extra-curricular resources.

AACL sponsors an Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Network, which represents all of the inclusive post-secondary education initiatives. AACL also offers ongoing staff development activities and retreats for parents, students and staff. ■



Contact AACL for resources on inclusive post-secondary, including: *Inclusive Post-Secondary Education for Adults with Developmental Disabilities: A promising path to an inclusive life* by Bruce Uditsky and E. Anne Hughson (AACL, 2008) and *Measuring Quality in Post-Secondary Inclusive Education: An evaluation tool* by John O'Brien, Trish Bowman, Billie Chesley, E. Anne Hughson and Bruce Uditsky (2011).

Great expectations

Inclusion has far reaching effects, not just for the person included but it can also have an unexpected impact on people who come to know the person. This summer at Stantec, Cassie met another Stantec employee whose son has a disability. As this person came to know Cassie and Hilary, Cassie's educational assistant, it became clear this mom had never realized it might be possible for her son to go to university. "It was," says Hilary, "unfathomable to her." Hilary says that as she described inclusive post-secondary initiatives, the mom "looked at me like I was an alien, and then she was crying and had so many questions. I kept telling her that yes, this is possible; there are options for rewarding lives." Hilary has since developed a relationship with this mom and her son. "Because Cassie got a job at Stantec, this parent and her son are learning that you can have a fulfilling life and follow your passions. People with disabilities are often offered 'choices' but they're really only a couple of things disguised as choices and may have nothing to do with their interests or dreams."

Leisure can lead people into a passionate life

AACL, together with the Child and Family Services Authorities, both Calgary Area and Region 5 East Central Alberta, hosted two workshops recently to help families and community recreation programs look at ways to foster increased inclusion in recreation and leisure opportunities.

Judith McGill, Adult Educator and Executive Director of Families for a Secure Future, a family-governed organization in Toronto, is also the author of *Developing Leisure Identities: A Pilot Project*. With a background in social policy and leisure studies, Judith has long been interested in helping people develop a fuller appreciation for leisure and how it can create joy and balance in the lives of families and their sons and daughters with developmental disabilities.

In both Lloydminster and Calgary, Judith led over 30 participants through activities and discussions on how to enable individuals with developmental disabilities tap into their passions, interests and talents. Finding out what “lights someone up” requires some thoughtful digging and structured support. Recreation and leisure pursuits for people with developmental disabilities don’t always just happen and a workshop like Judith’s helps families to be more deliberate about how to create interesting and inclusive lives.

Stacey Andrews is a Community Development Advocate with AACL’s Supportive Communities: Strengthening Families in Lloydminster. She is also the parent of a son with a developmental disability.

“The Pursuing Inclusive Recreation and Leisure



workshops actually focused on creating a recreation and leisure identity,” she explains, “and how we as parents need to have this identity in order to help pull out all the strengths and passions that our children have.”

“This workshop showed participants how leisure is a critical part of having a full rich life,” says Adam Mann, AACL’s Community Development Facilitator in Calgary. “Leisure is a space where we can develop skills, meet new friends, and learn about who we are as individuals. People with developmental disabilities have a much more difficult time developing leisure identities because there they are often restricted to what others perceive they can or cannot do as individuals. This workshop was fantastic because it broke down these barriers and explored how we can be more active in creating interesting and inclusive lives either as parents or for those we support.”

A number of participants commented about this valuable experience and described how it helped to develop skills and allowed for reflection on what a leisure identity is and means for someone with a developmental disability.

- *Judith helped me see how leisure has been so important to my past, present and future. Now I can understand how it is equally important to my son’s life.*
- *Judith made me see that you have to express your thoughts to someone in order to make it real. This means for me as a mom to be a person that my son can express his passions, to.*
- *I enjoyed reflecting on the life cycles of leisure, what*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 →



Parents attending the workshops held in both Lloydminster and Calgary offered comments like these: “I learned the very deep role of leisure in our sense of ourselves and our connections with others throughout our lives and the ones we serve” and “Judith helped me see how leisure is a constantly changing dynamic life long process...we should be consciously looking for our children’s emerging leisure identities, interests, and passions and be intentional about developing them.”

has the potential to light someone up or what is their passion in their endeavors, how to harness those passions and help those we serve develop them at home in a plan.

- *I really learned how much leisure means to us individually and the challenges that people with disabilities may face when finding their sense of self without recreation or leisure.*
- *I learned how leisure should not be considered a luxury but rather an opportunity to find and explore identity.*
- *From this workshop I will take away the intention to create a workspace for my son to "tinker" and use tools.*
- *I intend to brainstorm with my husband about how we*

can help our son build and enrich his leisure time.

- *I took away from this workshop the intention to help develop and expand our son's passion as an artist.*
- *Judith helped me see the importance of getting more comfortable with the uncomfortable as a way to expand my daughter's horizons.*

(Judith's book, Developing Leisure Identities: A Pilot Project, is available for \$15 from AACL. Her new book, Riding the Tiger: Taking charge of hiring support workers, will be published soon. Contact Judith at LifePath Training and Consulting, jlmcgill@rogers.com.)

AACL seeks nominations to celebrate inclusion

AACL's Executive Committee invites nominations for the Community Inclusion, Community Living, the Cormack Memorial, and the National Inclusive Education Awards. These awards will be presented at the annual Family Conference April 13–14, 2012 in Edmonton at the Fantasyland Hotel.

The **Community Inclusion Award** is presented to individuals or groups whose efforts in enabling the complete and meaningful inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities into community life have been inspiring and outstanding.

The **Community Living Award** is given to individuals or organizations in Alberta who, on a day-to-day basis, promote the concept and spirit of inclusive community living.

The **Colonel Eric W. and Dr. Barbara V. Cormack Memorial Award** is given to an Alberta resident who has made an outstanding, long-term voluntary contribution to serving the interests of people with developmental disabilities and their

families. This award is sponsored by AACL in collaboration with the Robin Hood Association and is presented annually.

The **National Inclusive Education Award** is an initiative organized by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and its provincial and territorial member associations. The award for Alberta is jointly presented by CACL and AACL. It will honour a school or school district whose commitment to inclusive education is exemplary and deserving of recognition. Nominations can be made online at www.aacl.org or by requesting a nomination form from AACL. Forward the nomination form and letter to: AACL, Attention: National Inclusive Education Award, 11724 Kingsway, Edmonton, AB, T5G 0X5.

Nominations must be received at the AACL office by February 28, 2012 and must be accompanied by a recent biography and photo for each nominee. For more information on any of the awards, contact AACL, ph: 780.451.3055 or email: mail@aacl.org.

Don't miss it!

The 20th Annual Family Conference

Apr. 13-14
2012

Close to 700 individuals, professionals and family members attended our 19th annual Family Conference this year. The overwhelmingly positive feedback was much appreciated. Looking forward to seeing everyone again in 2012.

You're going to love these books!

Reviews by Dick Sobsey,
Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta

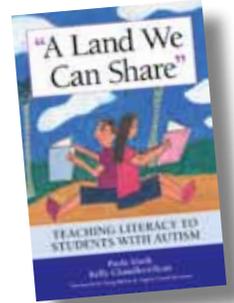
You're Going to Love This Kid (2003) and *Just Give Him the Whale* (2008, coauthored by Patrick Schwarz) are two books on inclusive education written by Paula Kluth. Although these books focus on students with autism, most of the concepts and practical suggestions apply to all students with disabilities. *You're Going to Love This Kid* is a comprehensive text on inclusive education, while *Just Give Him the Whale* provides a collection of 20 practical ideas to support students with autism in a regular classroom and detailed strategies for implementing each idea.



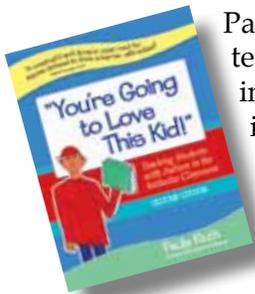
likewise. Fourth, she encourages us to open our eyes and ears to take direction from our students. These four attributes remain constant throughout the books and Kluth addresses a wide range of topics, such as positive behavioural supports, friendships, and connecting with families.

Her books are well written, full of great ideas, and enjoyable to read. I recommend them.

Look for Patrick Schwarz at the AACL Family Conference this spring. Patrick is also the author of *From Disability to Possibility: The power of inclusive classrooms* (2006). ■



(To borrow any of these or other Kluth or Schwarz books from the Reg Peters Library, including *A Land We Can Share: Teaching Literacy to Students with Autism* with Kelly Chandler-Olcott, Ed.D., contact Lisa Snyder, AACL's Library Technician, 11724 Kingsway Ave, Edmonton, AB, T5G 0X5 or ph: 780.451.3055, ext. 225 or call toll-free 1.800.252.7556, ext. 225, or email: library@aacl.org. To order Paula Kluth books, contact Customer Service, Brookes Publishing Co., Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285-0624 or visit: www.brookespublishing.com. Patrick Schwarz's book at be ordered from Amazon.com)



Paula has become a favourite of teachers, parents, and advocates for inclusive education for a number of important reasons, and these two books reflect the very heart of her work. Kluth's recipe for successful inclusion throughout all her work includes the same essential ingredients. First, she puts most

of the focus on student strengths rather than deficits. Second, she keeps things simple whenever possible. Third, she takes pleasure in working with students with disabilities and invites us all to do

Library database online

The complete database of AACL's Reg Peters Library is now available online. Books, videos, DVDs, journals, newsletters and other resources can be located and borrowed. AACL will mail resources anywhere in Canada to anyone who wishes to borrow them for a three week period. Patrons are responsible for the return of the materials. There are also publications available for purchase at www.aacl.org. The database also includes the resources available through the Darrell Cook Family Managed Supports Resource Centre.

Just click on the Resources menu, Reg Peters Library, and then Catalogue to be able to access the online searchable database of all our books and materials. For further help, contact Lisa Snyder, Library Technician, AACL, 1724 Kingsway Ave., Edmonton, AB T5G 0X5; email: library@aacl.org or call 780.451.3055, ext 225. ■

Are you the parent of a child looking for support staff in the Calgary or Lloydminster area?

AACL's online database has a list of potential staff who are available to provide in-home or community inclusion support to families who have children with disabilities in the Calgary region and Lloydminster area.

This service is part of the Supportive Communities: Strengthening Families partnership with Calgary and East Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authorities and is available to families in Lloydminster, Wainwright, Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, Canmore & Banff.

Contact one of our facilitators to register for access to the database at

www.aacl.org/Findstaffnow

or call/email

- Lloydminster, Wainwright and area: Stacey Andrews
306.825.5911; sandrews@aacl.org.
- Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, Canmore, Banff: Adam Mann
403.880.5951; amann@aacl.org.

Don't miss it!

Apr. 13-14 2012

The 20th Annual Family Conference Fantasyland Hotel and Conference Centre Edmonton, Alberta

Our featured speakers will offer full-day Friday workshops and Saturday sessions

Inclusive education Friday, April 13 workshop



Patrick Schwarz, Ph.D., will provide a workshop on "universal design, differentiation and curricular adaptations," and on Saturday will address "strategies for student collaboration and instructional effectiveness." Patrick will offer many practical ideas that teachers can readily implement in today's classrooms and those parents can utilize

at home to support their child's education. Patrick is a dynamic and engaging author, motivational speaker, leader in education, and a professor at National-Louis University, Chicago. He is co-author with Paula Kluth of *From Disability to Possibility, You're Welcome, Just Give Him the Whale*, and *Pedro's Whale*. His most recent book is entitled *From Disability to Possibility: The power of inclusive classrooms*. Visit: www.patrickschwarz.com.



Creating customized supports for individuals with complex needs Friday, April 13 workshop



Hope Leet Dittmeier and Anne Scott will share their knowledge and experience in working in partnerships with families and service providers to enable individuals with disabilities and complex needs to live good lives in the community. They will blend theory and practical applications using real life stories. Visit: realizationsllc.com.

Hope Leet Dittmeier is the founder and Executive Director, Realizations, an organization in Louisville, Kentucky, that has gained international recognition for working in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to create customized supports to enable people with complex challenges to pursue meaningful and inclusive lives.

Anne Scott has spent over forty years in a variety of professional settings across a broad spectrum (e.g., state government, an investment firm, United Way, one of the world's largest insurance companies, and non-profit organizations). Through Citizen Advocacy, Anne became the friend and guardian of Freida, a woman with disabilities and will share how their partnership with Realizations is resulting in a good life.

Watch www.aacl.org for emerging details about the Family Conference and registration information coming soon!

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