

# AA<sub>L</sub>Connections

A publication of the Alberta Association for Community Living



**Just magical** Haven Arnold of Lloydminster (right) and friends bask in the pure delight of bubbles and being together at the 15<sup>th</sup> AAAL Family Conference in Edmonton this spring. (Photo by Joey Podlubny)



Alberta Association for  
**Community Living**  
Changing Lives  
Changing Communities

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## From the editor

Welcome back! We're pleased with how well our first issue of AACL's *Connections* magazine was received



when it made its inaugural appearance in time for the Family Conference. The comments we've heard so far have inspired us to keep going! And so this next issue (there will be three each year) is a little bigger. AACL members and others can meet more of the people who are involved in and supported by the Association, and get useful information and news at their fingertips.

Aptly named, *Connections* is meant to be more than merely a presentation of issues, stories, news about initiatives, funding, resources, training events and conferences. We want you to connect with us, too. Alberta is full of the kind of stories we want to hear about: people with developmental disabilities making their way—in a better way that means being a significant part of their neighbourhood, school, workplace and community. There are stories out there about families and friends who are helping create rich, interesting and joyful lives for themselves and the people who matter to them. There are also sagas about the struggles that are still necessary and tales about injustice and the battles not yet won. Paul Longmore famously wrote, "When devaluation and discrimination happens to one person it is biography but when in all probability similar experiences happen to millions, it is social history." We want to hear about it all, and we want to be able to share our collective stories so that

others can be inspired, moved and motivated to create an inclusive social history. Send me a quick note or email and let us know what you'd like to see in upcoming issues of *Connections*: [Karin.schwier@mac.com](mailto:Karin.schwier@mac.com). I look forward to hearing from you.

Karin Melberg Schwier  
Editor, *Connections*  
<http://homepage.mac.com/karin.schwier/copestone.html>

## On the cover

There are many kinds of celebrations, big and small, that happen for every participant at the annual AACL Family Conference each spring. This year in March, Haven Arnold, Lloydminster, and her friends were among 724 people who attended the event at Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton and they reveled in the child and teen program. It was once again provided by Cartoonigans Family Entertainment for 131 children and youth attending this portion of the conference while their families took in a variety of sessions. Families came together to enjoy the Friday President's Reception and the Family Dance Celebration on Saturday. "A gathering like the Family Conference, or any of a number of opportunities AACL gives parents to come together, really can give you the sense that others are taking the same journey," says AACL President Wendy McDonald.

## Inclusive Education Summer Institute full

For more than 15 years, the University of Calgary's Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies and AACL have offered undergraduate, graduate and non-credit summer courses on inclusive education for teachers, administrators and parents. AACL offers bursaries to help with costs. Currently courses are full. For more information, go to [www.crdcs.org](http://www.crdcs.org) or [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org).

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# From Protection to Inclusion

by Bruce Uditsky and Anne Hughson

A little over 10 years ago AACL wanted to know what was happening to children with disabilities and their families who entered the child welfare system. We learned that no one knew how many children with disabilities were in the system, why they were there or what happened to them and their families.

With Alberta Family and Social Services we conducted a study of a representative sample of thousands of child welfare files. The study found that almost 70% of the approximately 12,000 children in care had special needs (developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, mental health problems, learning disabilities, etc.). Of this 70%, approximately 40% were Aboriginal children. We found thousands of children with disabilities in child welfare with little or no attention given to their disabilities and related needs.

While 'in care,' children with disabilities moved through many more foster homes than other children and were typically segregated. Strikingly, while their parents were entitled to family supports, given their children had special needs, only 5% of the families had access to assistance. They were not accessing support because they were either poor, unable to negotiate the system, uninformed, illiterate or had disabilities themselves. Colleen's story, featured in this issue of *Connections*, is one of thousands.

Family supports were available for middle class families but marginalized families, with far fewer resources, were often left to fend for themselves or provided with supports that did not take into account, for example, their disabilities. Without support and given the challenges they faced as their children got older, they often ended up with child welfare involvement. This is not because of abuse in many instances but because of the lack of support and understanding. There were and are few Aboriginal resources for Aboriginal families with children with disabilities. As a result of learning about these families and their children, AACL established the From Protection to Inclusion partnership with Alberta Child and Youth Services and the Edmonton and Calgary Child and Family Services Authorities, which

together serve the majority of the children in child welfare. Funding is provided by the Authorities with assistance from the Department to enable AACL to hire staff in Calgary and Edmonton as



well as provide coordination. These two staff work directly with child welfare staff to assist children with disabilities and their families, including parents with developmental disabilities. Wherever possible, AACL also works in collaboration with Authorities' staff to prevent children and their families from unnecessarily entering the child welfare system. We also engage lawyers and the justice system to ensure children and their parents have a fair and just hearing before the courts.

To date we have worked with over a thousand children and their families. We have reunited families where possible and supported others to maintain a positive relationship when they were unable to parent. We work with a growing number of parents with developmental disabilities and ensure Persons with Developmental Disabilities provides support for these parents as adults. We have made some limited progress in supporting Aboriginal families, but still have a very long way to go.

It is still a challenge to ensure children with disabilities in child welfare have access to an inclusive education and an inclusive life in the community but many successes have been achieved. And parents with developmental disabilities have been included in the AACL Family Leadership Series while others have shared their amazing stories of commitment and love as presenters at the AACL Family Conference.

It is critical that the thousands of families involved with AACL recognize and reach out to these invisible and marginalized families and their children. Inclusion needs to be lived and real on many fronts.

*Uditsky is AACL Chief Executive Officer; Hughson is a professor, University of Calgary, and consultant to AACL.*

## Advocacy networks enhance family voices

Alberta is divided into six regions—Northwest, Northeast, Edmonton, Central, Calgary and South. AACL has developed a network of families, known as Family Voices (FV), to advocate regionally on behalf of children and adults with developmental disabilities. These networks work with school districts to improve inclusive education, with Child and Family Services Authorities to improve supports to families and with Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Boards to improve supports to adults with developmental disabilities. Each network is supported by an AACL Family Voices Advocate: Northwest, TBA, ph: 780.832.7326; [familyvoicesnorthwest@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicesnorthwest@aacl.org); Edmonton, Sandy Thurston, ph: 780.451.3055, ext. 242 [familyvoicedmonton@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicedmonton@aacl.org); South, Tina Fowler, ph: 403.327.2911, [familyvoicessouth@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicessouth@aacl.org); Central, TBA, ph: 780.842.7303; [familyvoicecentral@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicecentral@aacl.org); Northeast, Lynn Thompson, ph: 780.451.3055, ext. 221, [familyvoicesnortheast@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicesnortheast@aacl.org); Calgary, Allison Pilon, ph: 403.717.0361, [familyvoicescalgary@aacl.org](mailto:familyvoicescalgary@aacl.org). In this issue, we visit the Calgary and Northeast regions.

**Calgary** A one day workshop with Darcy Elks on visioning an inclusive life for your son or daughter with developmental disabilities will be held Thursday, June 5, 9 a.m.– 4 p.m. at Rocky Mountain College, Room 202, 4039 Brentwood Road NW in Calgary. Where there is a strong vision of what should and can be for our family members, there is great passion—the kind of passion that will encourage and enable us to be creative and continue on the path of assisting our family members to have the good life. For more information, see page 10. To register, contact Allison Pilon (see contact information above).

Calgary FV is also beginning a research project, Proper Relationships: Measuring Successful Community Inclusion, with a number of family groups and service providers to explore what makes successful relationships between them.

Initial meetings are taking place to begin planning the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Summit which is hosted by Calgary FV and is planned and facilitated by a number of partners.

**Northeast** The network is co-chaired by Niki-Lou Mackin from Ft. McMurray and Donna Desjardins from St. Paul. Families are actively engaged in creating inclusive schools and employment opportunities throughout the region. Northeast FV has ongoing partnerships with the Northeast PDD Community Board and the Child and Family Services Authorities in the area to improve supports for adults and children with developmental disabilities.

## Inclusive summers need advance planning

The end of the school year looms as parents lift their eyes to a horizon of summer days meant to be full of fun, friendships and new experiences for their children and teens. For sons and daughters with developmental disabilities, making sure they're part of that takes some legwork and advance planning. For families who would like to receive financial support for inclusive summer experiences, it may be found through Family Supports for Children with Disabilities. The FSCD program is delivered by 10 Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs) across the province.

Mary-lou Sims of St. Albert, an AACL board member, says some simple reassurance for program and camp staff can ease some feelings of uncertainty about a child's needs. If they know they will be supported with information or a support person, it can make a huge difference.



Having a fun summer experience for many children and teens with developmental disabilities requires a little forward planning and support.

“Some organized groups might be initially afraid to have someone with a disability as part of their camp or program because they may not know how to include the child,” says Sims. Spending a little advance time easing anxieties can pave the way for a positive experience, Sims adds. “I found that as soon as they knew that I was providing the ‘staff’ support person, those worries disappeared. It’s important that whoever is with Carmen knows her and her needs and then that person can hopefully facilitate some nice interaction between Carmen and the others in the group.”

Peter Guay, 10, has been having fun, interesting summers in Edmonton for years now because his parents make their home a fun place for kids to be and they hire a university student. Kim Guay encourages the student to “just get to know Pete at first, hang out, shoot some hoops. We encourage them to scout out inclusive activities they both would have fun doing and to set their own schedule.”

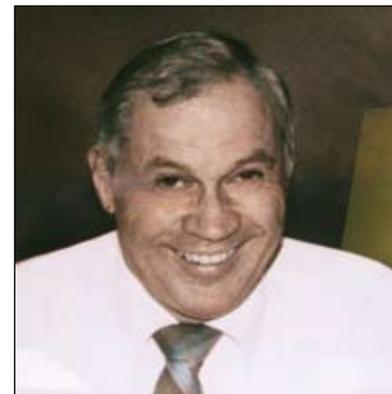
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# Reg Peters Library offers wealth of resources

Over the years, the Reg Peters Library has evolved into a vital community resource, offering a reference library of over 2000 items including books, reports, video tapes, journals, periodicals, newsletters, information packages, bibliographies, access to university and public library holdings and the Internet. It is located at the Alberta ACL, 11724 Kingsway Avenue in Edmonton. The Reg Peters Library loans resources free of charge for up to three weeks. It is open to the public Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. If you live outside of Edmonton or are unable to visit the library, we welcome requests for information by telephone, fax or email.

The library was named for Reg Peters, Executive Director of the AAACL for seven years. He also served as Assistant Director of the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI) in Calgary. Anne Hughson, AAACL consultant, knew him as “a gentle, caring person who always had

the needs of people with developmental disabilities and families in mind,” she says. “He mentored and supported younger staff. There was a spirit about him; he was never cynical, always open and interested in other people.”

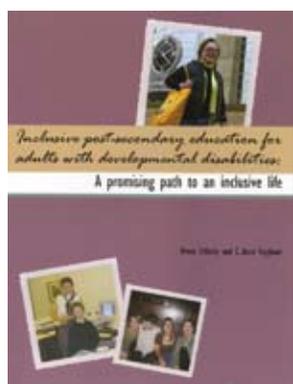


Reg Peters

Visit [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org) and view the catalogue on-line and search items in the Reg Peters Library, a list of publications available for purchase, and a list of video titles and subjects. For information, contact Lisa Snyder, ph: 780.451.3055, ext. 225 or email: [library@aacl.org](mailto:library@aacl.org). Watch this column for a featured resource in each issue.

## **Inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities: A promising path to an inclusive life. By Bruce Uditsky and E. Anne Hughson. Edmonton: AAACL, 2008.**

Today, students with developmental disabilities are being fully included in universities, colleges, and technical institutes. They attend regular classes in a wide variety of courses and faculties, make friends, belong to clubs and participate in the informal and formal social life of these tertiary education institutions and go on to be successfully employed. This book describes the value of inclusive post-secondary education, the responsiveness of colleges, universities and technical institutes and the difference this opportunity has made to the lives of many individuals with developmental disabilities. Information is provided on the principles and processes that guide the implementation and practice of successful inclusive post-secondary education



initiatives. Benefits of inclusive post-secondary education and its impact on students with and without disabilities, their instructors and professors and families are described. Many more adults with developmental disabilities deserve the opportunity to follow their dreams and to pursue an inclusive post-secondary education if they so desire. It is anticipated that this book will help open new possibilities to a more inclusive adult life.

The publication includes the DVD “Living the Dream” which profiles inclusive post-secondary education at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Grant MacEwan College, Red Deer College, Olds College and Lethbridge Community College. Faculty, administrators, students and parents share their experiences and discuss the benefits of inclusive post-secondary education.

*(To purchase this book, contact Barb Coble: [mail@aacl.org](mailto:mail@aacl.org) or 780.451.3055 ext #222 or to borrow a copy from the Reg Peters Library, contact Lisa Snyder: [library@aacl.org](mailto:library@aacl.org) or 780.451.3055 ext #225.)*

## Clear belief in inclusion means strong, values-based collective

Following another successful Family Conference where well over 700 people gathered, AACL President Wendy McDonald reflects on what is at the root of a strong and vibrant community of parents and people with developmental disabilities. It takes a lot of care and nurturing, but when you get right down to it, she says, the secret to a strong collective is clarity of purpose.

“During our Leadership Series, the Family Conference and other AACL events, people say that being part of a collective that is clear in its beliefs and actions helps you understand you are not the only one on this journey,” says McDonald, now in her second term. “To be with so many people who share the same values and vision for people with developmental disabilities helps when you do reach a stumbling block. Coming together at an event like our Family Conference re-ignites the passion and conviction that inclusion is the right path for their sons and daughters. We’re a values-based organization and the high order value is inclusion,” she says. “The power of families who believe in that and connect with each other is incredible.”



AACL President Wendy McDonald with her family, from left, Aaron, Kyle, and Blaine. (Photo courtesy Fred Katz Fine Art Photography)

A strong collective not only provides a clear values base, but also specific information and knowledge that supports parents in how they articulate what they want for their sons and daughters. The AACL does a very good job in offering a clear and unwavering philosophy and that sound sense of purpose is the basis for a strong organization, McDonald says. But it also gives parents and families the practical tools they need to express their needs.

“Being part of this organization has helped me give a voice to what is in my heart,” she says. “It has helped me very clearly explain what I know is right for Kyle and other people with developmental disabilities. The Family Conference is a place of hope where people celebrate their kids. A real highlight of the conference is the family banquet and dance. We were sold out at about 600 people. So we celebrate and we also have the sessions to give us the knowledge we need.”

McDonald, who consults on strategic planning, leadership development, and communications strategies for a variety of businesses and organizations, says the AACL offers a number of opportunities to empower families. The ongoing Leadership Series spans five weekends and is now in its ninth year, having produced over 200 individuals who have honed leadership skills. Family Voices is an opportunity for families to connect, reflecting a broad range of interests, needs and circumstances. The Association also offers educational training events throughout the year. Even the long-range fundraising strategy the Association has adopted “has given us a chance to really sharpen our message and helps us provide some clarity about what we do and whom we represent.”

The majority of the AACL board is made up of family members and people with developmental disabilities. There are no disagreements about the Association’s value and vision, says McDonald, who credits CEO Bruce Uditsky with providing very clear leadership on the organization’s purpose.

“Bruce is very clear about our values and he’s good at pointing out when something may be pulling us off track a little bit. It is very clear that our work is to support inclusion. I think an organization has to have its vision, values and actions line up,” says McDonald. “People need to know what they get when they come to us. If you believe in inclusion and you connect here, then the power of that is undeniable. I believe we are stronger with clarity of purpose, stronger as an organization and, more so, stronger as families.”

*(McDonald lives in Edmonton with her family. Watch Connections for an upcoming feature on her son Kyle and his football career.)*

## Project supports inclusion, access to respite

By Trish Feehely, AACL Project Staff

A 12-month project to explore innovative ways of increasing respite options for families living in Calgary and the Bow Corridor is underway by AACL in partnership with the Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority. Parents often say that their “best break” comes when their child participates in typical recreation activities and social clubs. This is especially the case during the long summer holiday with children out of school. A major part of the Supportive Communities Strengthening Families project is to increase access to the wide range of recreational, sports and cultural activities so readily available to children without disabilities. Families should have the same choices for their children with developmental disabilities as they have for their other children.

Too often families will experience barriers in registering their children with disabilities in typical community programs. Parents wonder if they will they be fully inclusive and provide a positive experience. AACL works with Calgary and region recreational, sports and cultural organizations to assist them in being inclusive. For example, AACL encourages City of Calgary recreation staff to develop more inclusive practices within their wide range of summer activities. The City of Calgary Summer 2008 Recreation Program Guide is available at [www.calgary.ca/recreation](http://www.calgary.ca/recreation). Parents should be able to register their children in the programs they choose with the assurance their inclusion will be supported.

Other summer programs AACL is involved with have different approaches to the inclusion of children with developmental and other disabilities. Connections have been made with child and youth program representatives in Banff, Canmore and Cochrane. AACL staff work closely with these agencies to facilitate inclusive summer programming opportunities for families in the Bow Corridor area. Registration for a child with disabilities may need to be negotiated in terms of what, if any, additional support will be needed to ensure a successful experience.

Contact Supportive Communities Strengthening Families staff if you run into any difficulties in registering your child and having him or her fully included. We also want to know about your positive experiences so we can acknowledge and support

## Nominations sought for 10<sup>th</sup> Leadership Series

AACL is inviting past participants, board and Association members and others to recommend parents, family members and self-advocates whom they think would like to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> annual AACL’s Family Leadership Series.

The Leadership Series begins this fall and involves a commitment of five weekends that begin Friday evening and end Sunday mid-afternoon, typically held in Edmonton. AACL covers all expenses; childcare, teen and adult support are available. Adults with developmental disabilities, particularly those who are parents, are also welcome to attend. Anne Hughson, AACL consultant, and Bruce Uditsky, CEO, lead the Series along with several experienced facilitators, all of whom are parents. Internationally recognized speakers will also participate on occasion. If you know someone who would benefit from this powerful experience, or would like more information for yourself, call Barb Coble, AACL Office Administrator, ph: 780.451.3055 ext 222 or 1.800.252.7556, ext 222 or email [mail@aacl.org](mailto:mail@aacl.org) for a nomination form.



At AACL’s Family Conference this spring, Dr. Richard Villa’s workshop *Creating Inclusive Schools for All: Practical strategies for differentiating instruction and accessing the regular curriculum* and his opening plenary *Designing Schools to Welcome and Value All Students: The Future of Education* were both well attended. (Photo by Joey Podlubny)

inclusive community programs. AACL staff can provide information, encouragement and resources. Contact Trish Feehely, [tfeehely@aacl.org](mailto:tfeehely@aacl.org); Arden Duncan, [aduncan@aacl.org](mailto:aduncan@aacl.org); or Laura Mooney for the Bow Corridor area, [lmooney@aacl.org](mailto:lmooney@aacl.org). If you are interested in inclusion in regular community recreational, sports and cultural activities for your child with developmental disabilities, call our Calgary office 403.717.0361 or email us.

# AACL support 'awesome' in getting daughter back, keeping life on track

When Colleen Campbell's daughter Ashley was apprehended by Child Welfare in 2001, she admits there was violence in her home and that the atmosphere was not good for eight-and-a-half-year-old Ashley. But instead of giving up, Colleen doggedly set about to do whatever was necessary to get her daughter back into a healthy, safe and loving environment.

She was "scared to death" when Ashley suddenly disappeared in December. Colleen, working in a daycare, had arranged for a friend to pick Ashley up from the babysitter and bring her to the daycare for a Christmas concert. Suddenly, Ashley was nowhere to be found and only after a frantic hour, she learned that Child Welfare had taken Ashley from school that afternoon. She clearly remembers when she was allowed to see Ashley, three months later. Child Welfare workers arrived with Ashley, who ran to her mother and "she stuck to me like glue. She got in my lap and they said she wasn't allowed to sit in my lap. I told her to sit next to me and she cried so I put her in my lap," recalls Colleen.

By the time Ashley was taken, Colleen had already parted ways with her abusive partner. With Ashley in care, Colleen dutifully immersed herself in doing what was asked of her, earnestly participating in parenting assessments, counseling and trying to get supervised visits with her daughter. On her own initiative, she took a life skills class to strengthen her resolve to stay out of abusive relationships. In fact, Colleen dedicated herself to following the direction of Child Welfare workers, and even agreed to change the subject when her daughter constantly asked when she could come home. Colleen had been advised not to answer, even though not being able to reassure her daughter about the future was heartbreaking.

During the next four and a half years, Ashley moved through six foster homes and one group home. Colleen's life became a series of court appearances, applications to see her daughter more often, pleas for unsupervised visits, and efforts to show evidence she was a good mother. Colleen, for whom childcare has been a prime focus in her life, was working

in daycare centres. She started taking child care classes; her ultimate goal is to run a day home for children. Ironically, Colleen was caring for other people's children but wasn't allowed to look after her own daughter. She was fighting Child Welfare on her own without support; her daughter was being shuffled from one foster home to the next and Ashley was in danger of reactive attachment disorder if she continued in care. The system seemed to keep dangling the possibility of a reunion. Nothing was ever concrete no matter what Colleen did to keep her end of the bargain. But Colleen recalls, "One judge told me that because of my special needs and Ashley's special needs, it would be impossible for us to ever live together full time. Ever."

A chance phone call led Colleen to AACL and its From Protection to Inclusion project. "It was a fluke," smiles Colleen. "I got a call asking if I had any clothes to donate and they were telling me what they raise money for. I asked if they could help me get my daughter back out of care. They gave me Maureen Reid's phone number. I called and that was that."



"She just kept going. She just wouldn't quit. She was going to do whatever she had to do to get her daughter back, even if that meant getting jerked around by the system," says Sandy Thurston, AAACL Advocate (background). After a five year separation, Colleen and Ashley live in their own apartment, and Colleen is taking child care classes with a goal to open a day home. As for the system that apprehended her daughter and kept her all those years, Colleen's opinion is very clear: "It sucks." (Story & photo by Karin Melberg Schwier)

The Association helped Colleen to have a voice and negotiated with her to secure unsupervised visits. AACL was able to reassure Child Welfare that Colleen was able to be a good parent and provided her with support and advocacy. Ironically, when Ashley's last foster home fell apart, Ashley was sent home to live with Colleen. But in a stunning example of heartbreaking cruelty, Child Welfare warned Colleen that they would remove Ashley again as soon as a new placement was found. For a month and a half, mom and daughter were a family again until the call came. Another foster placement was available so they were coming to get her daughter. Colleen felt that was the last straw. So did the AACL.

"I asked Child Welfare if Ashley could just stay with me and they said no," remembers Colleen. "I asked if there had been any complaints against me. They said no. I asked if they would meet with me and my advocate Maureen from AACL. They did and they commented on how healthy and happy Ashley was. Ashley told them she wanted to stay with her mom and they finally said okay."

In the three years since Colleen and Ashley have been reunited, Colleen has gone back to school for Level II Early Childhood at Career Development Institute (CDI). She'll be taking Level III in March

and maybe a Child and Youth Care course after that. AACL continues to support Colleen and today she and Ashley no longer have any Child Welfare involvement. Colleen says it was worth the long fight to have her daughter back free and clear. "Happy and satisfied now," Colleen calls Sandy Thurston, the AACL Family Advocate, if she needs help. "She's cool and really nice. All of them there are really cool and they help me with things like my resume. They don't make me feel bad if I need help. Sometimes you just need a little support."

Colleen was busy planning Ashley's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in early May. A Hannah Montana cake was on the menu for the party, with a visit to the wave pool and water slides. "We've already started planning for next year's Sweet Sixteen. We're thinking of having them dress up and take a limo to a nice restaurant for dinner. Of course, Ashley's already pushing it and wants to stay overnight at a hotel with all her girlfriends," she shrugs. "Teenagers!"

**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 the AACL and fill up to support people with developmental disabilities.



## Inclusive summers (continued from page 4)

"It took awhile for it to happen, but I made up an ad and posted it at the university and Grant MacEwan College. I didn't present Peter as a boy with disabilities, but someone who would need some help to participate and have fun. I tell all the students we hire that they're going to change and grow and learn just like Pete does. We encourage them to be active, to keep his endurance up, but they figure out how to be friends and what they're going to do."

The fact that Pete becomes known as the kid with the fun house with great parties and the kid who hangs around with fun, vivacious university students doesn't hurt a kid's reputation either. "I get some phone numbers from kids in school who like Peter and then I'll call over the summer to invite a friend along if Peter and the student are going to a museum camp or the zoo. Our main goal for the student is to get Peter involved with other peers his own age to facilitate positive social interactions."

About three years ago, Sims' daughter went to a YMCA day camp program with an aide. The experience was a good one. Two summers ago, a day church camp was very welcoming and, again, Carmen attended with an aide. But she didn't really enjoy it.

"She doesn't like loud, sudden noises. Those tend to make Carmen jump and she can break a bone so it's understandable why she's not so eager to try some group activities." Sims, who uses her Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) funds for Carmen's inclusive summer activities, says it's important to find a good fit between an accepting, welcoming program or camp and an experience that your son or daughter will enjoy.

*(The FSCD program is delivered by 10 Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs) across the province. Visit: [www.child.alberta.ca/home/591.cfm](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/591.cfm). For more information on inclusive summer experiences for children and youth, contact the AACL.)*

## What's new? Projects and partnerships

*Watch this column for details on projects and partnerships the AACL has underway. Watch future issues of Connections for more details.*

**Inclusive Post-Secondary Education: Development and Expansion** With support from Community Boards, Seniors and Community Supports, AACL is working to further develop and expand inclusive post-secondary education across Alberta. This includes support to strengthen our Inclusive Post-secondary Education Network and the development of a peer review process to ensure the provision of quality inclusive post-secondary education practices.

There are seventeen post-secondary institutions in the province including students with developmental disabilities: The University of Alberta, University of Calgary, Grant MacEwan College, Lethbridge College, Olds College, Red Deer College, Grande Prairie Regional College, Lakeland College, Norquest College, NAIT, The King's University College, Concordia University College, St. Mary's University, Mount Royal College, Athabasca University, Keyano College and Augustana Campus, University of Alberta.

Trish Bowman, Director, Community Development with AACL, notes that there may be as many as three more post-secondary institutions offering inclusive post-secondary education this fall. Promising discussions are underway with Bow Valley College and Rocky Mountain College in Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. These developments will provide adults with developmental disabilities who want to continue their education, a greater range of choices to match their career and learning aspirations.

**Community Navigator Project—Creating Inclusive Pathways** The Community Navigator Project is part of the Provincial Persons with Developmental Disabilities Achieving Better Outcomes Initiatives. Like the overall intent of the many initiatives across the province this project looks at new and innovative ways of supporting people with developmental disabilities to live more inclusive lives while tapping into the capacity and natural supports of the community.

For the most part, parents of children with

developmental disabilities raise their children at home, secure in managing needed supports and including them in school and regular community activities. In the transition to adult services, families are asked or directed to pick a service, a place, a program rather than support a transition into adulthood that is inclusive and community focused. The result, however unintended, is movement away from generic community resources and natural supports, a reduction in family responsibility and an increase in dependency on human services and government funding. This project is intended to work with families who have a child who is 16 or 17 years old and will be eligible for PDD funding and with individuals, and their families, already receiving PDD funded supports and looking to be included in more natural and meaningful ways.

The Navigator Project is comprised of two teams of community-based Navigators in two PDD regions (Calgary and South). Their primary roles are to assist with initial planning for an inclusive life. The Navigators help identify the appropriate balance between government-funded services and services available through generic community resources and natural community supports. Navigators next support families to locate and secure the community resources and supports that will be part of the inclusive pathway. This demonstration project will end March 31, 2009. If you know someone who might be interested in the Navigator project and wants to increase natural supports and community involvement, please contact Barbara Nish, Navigator Project Coordinator, AACL, 4112-4 St. NW, Calgary, AB T2K 1A2, ph: 403.717.0361.

## One-day family workshop

Where there is a strong vision of what should and can be for our family members, there is great passion—the kind of passion that will encourage and enable us to be creative and continue on the path of assisting our family members to have the good life. A one-day workshop with Darcy Elks, Now is The Time for Vision, will be held June 5, 9 a.m.–4 p.m., Rocky Mountain College, Room 202, 4039 Brentwood Road NW, Calgary. Darcy Elks has been working, and sharing her life, with persons who are societally devalued for more than 20 years. She is an advocate for persons with disabilities and is the mother of three children, one of whom has Down syndrome. Contact AACL, ph: 780.451.3055; toll free 1.800.252.7556.

# Changing lives, changing communities: Intimate forums touch hearts, dispel myths

Everything the Association believes and does is designed to improve the lives of families and individuals with developmental disabilities. When that happens, communities are strengthened and become more caring places. So it makes sense then to draw people who may not know much about the work of AACL to the Association in a very personal way, hopefully changing them for the better, too.

Each month, except for summer holidays, the AACL hosts an information session at lunch in both Edmonton and Calgary. It's just an hour, but during a powerful 60 minutes, invited guests learn a little bit about the Association and its work throughout the province. They hear from parents who dispel the myths about having a son or daughter with developmental disabilities, and self-advocates talk about their lives and what changes the Association has helped them make. It's an intimate get-together of perhaps 10 or 12 people who have been invited by staff, board members or others connected to AACL.

"We don't ask them for anything," says Matt Mandrusiak, AACL Communications Coordinator. "It's strictly a time for people to get to know a little bit about what we do and to have a few myths dispelled about people with developmental disabilities." The presentations by parents and individuals who have disabilities are often very eloquent and powerful and, says Mandrusiak, "people are often very moved by the stories they hear."

Of those people who attend a lunch session, invitations are extended to an annual Changing Lives, Changing Communities Breakfast hosted in both Calgary and Edmonton in October. That larger event draws between 200 and 300 guests. Table captains are recruited in advance to reach out to people in their own business and personal networks with an invitation to come and learn more about the Association and how lives have been changed for the better.

"We have raised over \$600,000 dollars in less than two years and now have 40 members in our Dream Maker society. Dream Makers are people who have committed to supporting AACL by donating either a \$1,000, \$5,000 or \$10,000 a year for five years, in addition two are sponsors who fund the Breakfast events. They now contribute to AACL because they have learned first hand about how their support

makes a difference in the lives of children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families," says Mandrusiak.

In Edmonton, the Changing Lives, Changing Communities information session at lunch will be held June 6, September 12, November 28, January 16, 2009 and February 13, 2009. In Calgary, the monthly lunch sessions will be held May 22 and June 25, with more to be announced.

On October 21 in Calgary, the Sheraton Cavalier will be the site of the Changing Lives, Changing Communities Breakfast. In Edmonton, it will be held at the Westin Hotel on October 28. For information and an invitation, contact Matt Mandrusiak, 780.451.3055, ext. 226.

## Awards recognize commitment to inclusion

In March, AACL honoured a few of the many individuals, businesses and organizations who are making inclusion a way of life in Alberta. Congratulations to the 2008 winners of the four major AACL awards. Watch for 2009 nomination details in the fall issue of *Connections*.

### National Inclusive Education Award

Kikino Elementary School, Kikino Metis Settlement  
University Elementary School, Calgary

### Community Inclusion Award

The Driving Force

### Community Living Awards

Beaumont Youth Centre, Beaumont  
École Father Jan, St. Albert

### Col. Eric W. & Dr. Barbra V. Cormack Award

Henry Wierenga, Neerlandia



**Family focus** Living the good life at the Family Conference, clockwise from left: Dwayne Douglas of Cartoonigans with an admirer; Sharon Cobb, Calgary; Sam Holowaychuk, Smoky Lake; Matthew Gilker, Lethbridge; AACL board member Mary-lou Sims, St. Albert; and at the centre, Lethbridge brothers Andrew and Stuart Nish, with Emilie Nish.

(Photos by Joey Podlubny)

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