



# Saskatchewan Abilities Council Bulletin

## Strengthening Communities by Making Them More Inclusive

What is community? At the Yorkton Branch, answering this simple question has resulted in restructuring that will see the branch transition to a person-centred approach that focuses on community involvement. The most visible evidence of the shift is phasing out the Training Centre by the end of 2017 in favour of supporting individuals in community-based volunteer and employment opportunities.

"In recent years, we've been seeing a large decrease in people transitioning from high school to our Training Centre and a large increase in people enrolling in our Transitioning Youth to Employment (TYE) program," says Aleks Hoeber, Yorkton Branch Program Manager. "In speaking with young people, parents, teachers and schools, we found that expectations had changed. Parents today are looking for equal opportunities for community-based employment and other opportunities for their children."

Many clients had been at the Training Centre for 15 and 20 years, and some were approaching retirement age. When added to a decline in contracts, it became clear that it was time to do something different. In April 2015, the branch announced it would phase out the Training Centre. There were concerns, especially amongst participants. "We assured each participant that we were here to support them, and that we would only go as fast or as slow as they wanted," Aleks says. "We began by doing a person-centred plan with each individual in the Training Centre to identify their interests, strengths, goals and wishes."

To assist with the transition, the branch hired a Community Inclusion Specialist and an in-house Employment Specialist. The Community Inclusion Specialist is helping clients access supported volunteer opportunities in the community, with very encouraging results. Former Training Centre clients are now volunteering with over 18 community-based charities and non-profit organizations, from the Soup Haven Lunch Program and Meals on Wheels, to the MS Walk and SPCA Pet Adoption events, to the Salvation Army and United Way, to retirement homes and daycares.

"We find that clients enjoy volunteering because they like having a role and a job, but also being a part of the fun and excitement of an event," Aleks says. "They understand what it means to give to others, and I think there's a real connection with that feeling."

The Community Inclusion Specialist is also recruiting mutual mentors—community members interested in creating a friendship with an individual with disabilities. It's a reciprocal relationship based on mutual interests that enriches the lives of both participants.

The in-house Employment Specialist helps find part-time community-based work experiences, provides life and job skill development, and organizes job readiness and job maintenance clubs where clients can share their experiences. "When an individual finds community-based employment, we can provide support as long as the individual needs it, and that's helped us create more successes," Aleks says.

When the shift to community inclusion was announced in 2015, there were 21 participants in the Training Centre. Originally, the plan was to transition eight participants every

*"Communities are places or entities where each member can give something, where they can contribute something that they feel especially able to give, something they are good at. The gift from each member is valued by the whole community and all gifts are unique and individual. The gift that the community gives back to each member is that of a role and a connection." – Ed Margason*



*Clients – the regular cleaning crew at the Dream Centre in Yorkton*



*Raelynn – a regular volunteer at the Salvation Army in Yorkton*

three or four months until the end of 2017. Today, just a year after the new model was announced, only four clients remain.

"The transition has happened much more quickly than we originally thought," says John Denysek, Regional Director at the Yorkton Branch. He attributes this success to the focus on person-centred planning. "Supporting individuals in the community is our mantra. The person-centred plan is the key to giving individuals more choices, more control and more opportunities."

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# Council Chosen to Run Agriculture Pilot Program

In the spring of 2016, the Saskatoon Partners in Employment office of the Saskatchewan Abilities Council launched an innovative new Agriculture pilot program to help people with disabilities find jobs in the farm sector. The Council is working with Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC) to match people with disabilities with job opportunities in agriculture.

The national shortage of farm labour is not new, but in 2016 the CAHRC released the results of a two-year research study showing that the labour shortage was costing the Canadian economy over \$1.5 billion a year. In Saskatchewan alone, a shortage of 4,000 farm workers is costing the provincial economy over \$240 million a year.

At the same time, people with disabilities are under-represented in the farm sector. This is partly because employment agencies are not connected to the farm sector and partly because potential workers do not know what jobs are available or what skills are needed. These are some of the gaps the new pilot program hopes to fill.

"The farm sector is finding it difficult to find people to work in the industry, so we thought



this would be a great way to do a pilot project that tried to get people with varying abilities working in agriculture," says Janine Baumann, Program Manager. "It's a very broad industry, so there is likely a job to match an individual's interests and skill set."

The pilot launched in the spring and will run to end of October. The call went out to employers looking for workers. The initial target is to connect 12 potential workers with up to 20 different companies in need of employees.

"To date, six clients have found permanent jobs in the agriculture sector. We're also seeing a



lot of interest from employers. So far, we have connected with over 50 employers," Janine says. "Raising awareness among employers is one of our goals. The agriculture sector is very broad, but many companies haven't really thought about people with disabilities as potential employees—it's a labour pool many of them have not considered before."

The program is one of two pilot programs in western Canada that the CAHRC is hoping will eventually transform into an employment model to connect under-represented employees with agricultural producers and companies in need of workers across Canada.

## Community Inclusion at the Polls

Did you vote at the advance polls in this year's provincial election? If so, you might have been greeted by Wanda Friesen, a Swift Current Branch client hired by Elections Saskatchewan as an Information Officer.

"My job was to greet voters and direct them to the right place to vote. I was a little nervous at first, but I did it," Wanda says. Her election experience began in early March, when she participated in the evening training session along with other Elections Saskatchewan workers. She was accompanied by Kaitlyn Neustaeter, a Community Inclusion Specialist with the Saskatchewan Abilities Council.

"After Wanda successfully completed the training, I went with her to her first shift at the advance poll," Kaitlyn says. "She did such an

excellent job transitioning into the position that the next day I only stayed a short time and after that, I just checked in with her. She was able to complete her tasks without the assistance of a job coach."

The job was a good experience for Wanda. When asked what she liked best about the job, she replied, "Everything! I liked showing people where to go to vote, I liked helping people, I liked getting paid. Mostly, I liked working with other people."

"Wanda is very people-minded and always trying to lend a hand," Kaitlyn says. "She has excellent customer service skills. I believe she has the skills to eventually find long-term, meaningful employment."



*"I like volunteering. I like meeting people and getting out for a while."*  
— Wanda Friesen, Swift Current

The Returning Officer was impressed with Wanda's abilities and attitude, and said she would definitely hire her again. It's a good match, because Wanda would like to work for Elections Saskatchewan in future elections. In the meantime, she is busy doing volunteer work like selling 50/50 tickets at the local drag races, helping with the kids' games at Picnic in the Park, and helping out at the local Windscape Kite Festival.

## OUR MISSION

*The Saskatchewan Abilities Council works with people of varying abilities to enhance their independence and participation in the community through vocational, rehabilitation and recreational services.*

## OUR VALUES

*At the Council we treat people with:*

• Respect • Honesty • Compassion

*Our programs and services are:*

• Client-centred • Goal-oriented • Accountable

*We value:*

• Teamwork • Excellence • Innovation



# Regina Branch Introduces Skills Development Program

The new Skills Development Program at the Regina Branch is giving Training Centre clients an opportunity to develop the kind of work and personal skills they need to transition to community-based employment. "People in the program have employment as their goal, whether in the near future or in the long-term," says program supervisor Kim Kinnear.

Kim helps tailor the program to each individual participant. While some individuals are ready to try a work experience after only a short time in the program, others need to take smaller steps. "They might try a community-based volunteer opportunity and then a work experience before trying community-based employment," Kim says. "It's all based on a person-centred approach and individual person-centred plans."

The program helps individuals develop both hard and soft skills. Hard skills focus on specific tasks, such as learning to use a piece of equipment, and are usually learned through work experience. Soft skills focus on communication and interpersonal skills, and are usually learned in a classroom setting. According to Kim, course modules have been developed based on needs identified by clients, from professionalism and problem-solving, to dealing with change, emotional management and personal safety.

The program includes group and individual learning sessions, as well as both onsite and offsite volunteer opportunities. "Our goal is to get people out in the community, either volunteering or working, so they are making connections to the larger community. Everyone in the community benefits from these connections, but it especially benefits clients who get that feeling of being active, visible and valued members of their community," Kim says.



*A group of clients from the Skills Development Program planting seeds*



*Clients in the classroom engaged and learning*

## BUILDING A COMMUNITY WITHIN A COMMUNITY

The Skills Development Program is also having an impact within the branch. "Many people, both clients and staff, have known each other a long time. We have all kinds of life experiences here, but it wasn't always known or shared. Building interpersonal and communication skills is helping us get to know each other in new ways," Kim says. "In the short time since we launched the program, we've seen individuals—especially clients—develop leadership and mentorship skills they didn't even realize they had. That's building a sense of community within the branch."

### Join the Saskatchewan Abilities Council today!

# Yes!

I know my membership will help improve the quality of life for thousands of people living with disabilities in Saskatchewan.

Enclosed is my membership contribution of:

☐ \$25.00 ☐ \$75.00 ☐ \$150.00 ☐ surprise us! \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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EASTER  
SEALS  
DROP  
ZONE 2016

The Easter Seals Drop Zone is gearing up this year with some exciting news! There is a new inclusion in the Saskatchewan roster with Drop Zone Prince Albert. Superheroes in Prince Albert will be rappelling off the L.F. McIntosh Building on Wednesday, September 7th with the help of the Buckland Fire & Rescue team, TACTEN and many volunteers. This year marks the 10th anniversary for Drop Zone Regina as rappellers will once again scale down Hill Tower II downtown YQR on Saturday, August 20th. Drop Zone Saskatoon is being held Tuesday, August 23rd at Carlton Tower downtown YXE. The Drop Zone Saskatchewan organizing teams are once again excited to welcome any volunteers or interested superheroes. Please contact Provincial Services or the Regina Branch for more information or to learn how to get involved. [www.thedropzone.ca](http://www.thedropzone.ca)



BOSTON  
PIZZA  
DAY

The 4th Annual Boston Pizza Day for Camp Easter Seal Campaign launches June 13th lasting for one full month as customers will have the opportunity to purchase Camp Cards for \$2 in store. The official Boston Pizza Day is held July 13th when \$8 from every large pizza, \$6 from every medium and \$4 from every small pizza will be donated to Camp Easter Seal. Please make sure you support your local Boston Pizza throughout the campaign and on July 13th!

**FUTURE PROSPECTS**  
BOSTON PIZZA FOUNDATION  
ROLE MODELS FOR LIFE

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SASKATCHEWAN

# Abilities

COUNCIL

# Directors Corner – John Denysek

When John Denysek joined the Yorkton Branch as regional director in 1991, he thought he'd stay a few years, "until he got bored." Well, 25 years later, John is still here and still excited to come to work.

"This is an exciting time for the Yorkton Branch because we're going down a different path," he says. "We've worked through the initial fears and questions about moving towards a person-centred approach that focuses on community involvement, and we're seeing more and more people discovering the possibilities—that's creating tremendous momentum within the branch."

Moving to a focus on community has meant taking a good look at branch services and programs and reflecting on how they fit with the evolving expectations of clients, parents and the community at large. "This new approach is based on a person's inherent rights—our message is ensuring that individuals with disabilities have more choices, more control and more opportunities. We don't know what's best for each individual, so we use person-centred planning to help individuals find out what's best for them and then we structure activities and programs that enrich their lives," John says.

This level of engagement with each individual client is new. "It is amazing to see people blossom. Clients have discovered hidden talents and passions in themselves that they didn't know were there. That creates its own energy. Helping clients achieve their goals and



*John Denysek – Regional  
Director of the Yorkton Branch*

dreams is energizing for staff as well," John says.

Carving seven part-time jobs for former Training Centre clients, with four additional positions targeted for the future, is part of the new focus. The jobs provide a competitive wage and the clients are considered Council employees—but most of them also participate in other Council programs, so they remain clients. "It blurs the line

between client and employee a bit," John says, "but it also helps us realize that we all want our needs met and to focus on doing that in a respectful partnership."

Transitioning Training Centre clients to community-based employment and volunteer opportunities is a major step forward in the shift that is happening at the Yorkton Branch, but it is just the beginning. John hopes to see the branch evolve into a community centre, where community volunteers interact with clients in facility-based programs and where community groups gather for meetings and events.

"The Abilities Council has always enjoyed strong support as a charity in Yorkton, but I think the community will accept our shift towards community because the shift is being driven by changing expectations," John says. "As a community and as a branch, we want to provide opportunities for all our citizens, whatever their abilities. That's ultimately what we hope for as a community—greater tolerance and greater acceptance, so all members of the community are welcomed and included."

## Saskatchewan Abilities Council Programs & Services

### VOCATIONAL SERVICES

- Employment Opportunities
- Supported Employment
- Support Services
- Training

### REHABILITATION SERVICES

- Adaptive Technology
- Orthopaedics
- Parking Program for People with Disabilities
- Special Needs Equipment

### RECREATIONAL PROGRAMS

- Quality of Life Centres
- Camp Easter Seal
- Life Enrichment
- *SLYP-Out*
- *Summer Fun*
- Access Transit

