

Check Against Delivery

Winnifred Stewart Gala
October 17, 2014, Edmonton
Honourable Heather Klimchuk, Minister, Human Services
Honourable Naresh Bhardwaj, Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities

Minister Klimchuk: Good evening. It is an honour to be here as the new Minister of Human Services.

I am thrilled to be a part of the Inspiring Dreams Gala hosted by the Winnifred Stewart Association...

“Inspiring Dreams” brings to mind a quote by Wendy Stroeve [STROVE].

“Having a vision for the life of a person with a disability is really about claiming the right to ordinary dreams...and believing that they can happen.”

That is why we are all here tonight.

It is incredible to see people coming together in this way.

Associate Minister Bhardwaj: As Associate Minister of Persons with Disabilities, I have met with more than 450 people and organizations around the province to learn about the successes and challenges of individuals and families.

I've been honoured to hear many personal stories along the way, not unlike the story Peter Watson shared on the invitation for tonight's event.

Thank you Peter, and all of the board members, leadership and staff, for your openness and for your passion.

I'm sure that many of you here tonight have similar stories and successes that you could share.

That is why I am so grateful to have organizations such as the Winnifred Stewart Association here in our province.

Minister Klimchuk: Yes, I agree.

In my previous post as Minister of Culture... I also travelled across Alberta and got a sense of the multitude of challenges.

As a result... I believe in the strength of government... agency... and community working together to support Albertans in need.

When I received the honour of becoming Minister of Human Services this fall... I knew I wanted to continue to support community-based initiatives.

Initiatives that will benefit persons with disabilities and their loved ones.

My passion for improving the quality of life for Albertans has only grown stronger.

Helping others... especially Albertans with disabilities... makes our communities stronger and our province a more vibrant place.

The Winnifred Stewart Association is a perfect example of this.

And together... we truly can inspire dreams.

Starting with the GentleCare Centre of Excellence.

In the summer of 2013 I was honoured to meet with Larry Smook and Tony Roccia to learn about the vision behind the Centre.

I was excited about the project then and I continue to be as it moves forward and makes progress.

From what I've witnessed of the Winnifred Stewart Association's work and passion... this project can and will change lives.

The Government of Alberta is committed to supporting Albertans with developmental disabilities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

The Winnifred Stewart Association shares this vision and your attendance here tonight tells me that you do as well.

Every person with a disability should feel valued by... respected and connected to their community.

Associate Minister Bhardwaj: Last month, I met with a number of ministers from across Canada, and it was so wonderful to hear how they are looking to our province for new ideas and innovations in providing services and supports.

Helping Albertans with disabilities achieve their dreams can mean a multitude of things.

One of those dreams, especially in Alberta, is employment.

Our Employment First Strategy is helping make those dreams a reality for many Albertans and helping them realize their full potential.

The objective of this strategy is that if you want to work, you will have the opportunity to work.

We are supporting Albertans with disabilities to develop their job skills, find a job, and advance in their employment.

We are also working with employers to create more inclusive workplaces and improve career opportunities for persons with disabilities.

This is such an exciting time for our province as we continue to move forward with the Employment First Strategy.

It has inspired much hope for the future.

And when we talk about the future, like all Albertans, people with disabilities and their families need to think about planning for their needs as they grow older.

How do we age in a place, with the people we know and love is an important question to reflect on.

The GentleCare Centre of Excellence will help with that transition.

Minister Klimchuk: It is important for us to work together on initiatives such as this to strengthen and support our communities.

Alberta is a leader in our nation when it comes to supporting people with disabilities.

The GentleCare Centre will be the first of its kind in Western Canada.

It will accommodate 45 individuals who have Alzheimer's... chronic dementia... and complex medical issues that are above and beyond their developmental disability.

What I heard from Larry and Tony is that this model of care provides a calm and relaxing environment that is very unique.

This is something that is invaluable to those in need of these services.

Associate Minister Bhardwaj: For more than 60 years, the Winnifred Stewart Association has had great successes in providing quality supports for people with developmental disabilities.

And with every achievement, you are helping to create a province where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

I believe that even more great things are on the horizon and I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to build on this fine work.

Together, we can start building the future from the foundation up.

Minister Klimchuk: I am excited to see the difference that this Centre will make in the lives of those who choose to live there, and the impact it will have on their families.

I want to congratulate the leadership and staff of the Winnifred Stewart Association for their outstanding work and commitment.

Thank you also to the Winnifred Stewart Foundation board... and the volunteers... supporters... and donors who are giving of themselves to improve the lives of others.

The work you do and the support you give is what makes Alberta number one in providing services for persons with disabilities.

You have all made a great difference in supporting individuals with disabilities to live inclusive lives.

We are so grateful to have had the opportunity to be here with you tonight.

Our best wishes for a successful fundraiser and continued success in your future endeavours.

Thank you.