



Kids These Days – In Praise of Social Workers

By Dr. David Rideout

Written in neat purple handwriting on a whiteboard in one of our Child and Family Services offices are a number of motivational quotes, including this one by Whoopi Goldberg: “We’re here for a reason. I believe a bit of the reason is to throw little torches out and lead people through the dark.”

These words of inspiration are intended not just for visitors to the office, but also for the front line workers who help lead children and families to brighter days. It's a job that sometimes asks a lot from them, both personally and professionally. They need to be compassionate, empathetic, knowledgeable, kind-hearted, considerate, respectful, and skilled at building relationships. At times they must also be able to demonstrate courage, professionalism, and calm in the midst of family chaos or crisis.

Each year we celebrate their important work during Social Work Week. It takes place this year from March 1-7 with the theme “The Art of Cultivating Communities.” It's a fitting theme because good social work comes from strong, healthy communities that pull together to address local challenges and opportunities. Social workers are an important part of cultivating their community by working with volunteers, schools, non-profits and other organizations. They make a positive difference by connecting families with resources in the community like FCSS, ParentLink, childcare, disability services, child protection, or employment and income support.

Our social workers engage with a wide range of communities, defined by cultures and need. This includes First Nations, Metis and Francophone cultures; new Canadians; persons impacted by a FASD or experiencing mental health difficulties; or those dealing with family and parenting concerns. Social Workers help by reaffirming connections and building relationships within and across those communities. When vulnerable Albertans find their way through difficult times and go on to lead better lives, our communities all benefit too.

Recently, we produced a series of videos featuring Albertans who had received child protection services.* These real life testimonials from people whose lives were changed by social workers are perhaps the most motivational words of all.

From Tammy Lee, rescued from physical and sexual abuse and taken into care when she was eleven years old: “Throughout my whole life I couldn’t trust anybody. But my social workers, they kept their word. I knew I could trust them to do what they said they would do.”

From Cathy, whose parents were killed by a drunk driver when she was three years old: “When I was a little girl, I believed my social worker was the only person in my life who loved me.”

From Candace, who was taken into care when she was a teenager and became inspired by two social workers, Isabel and Susan: “They listened. They asked questions. They broke the silence and allowed

me to have a voice. When I grew up, I wanted to be just like them.”

Those stories, along with countless others, remind us of the important work social workers do to restore lives and shape futures. Please join me in tipping our hats to the dedicated professionals who are making a difference for children and families in our communities.

*To view the video series, please visit humanservices.alberta.ca and click on the Social Media/YouTube link. Then scroll through “Created Playlists” to *How Far You’ve Come: Profiles of Former Children in Care*. Or you can go to it directly here: <http://bit.ly/1DZXEgN>.

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