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Series note: Karis Disability Services is clear about its role as a service provider – but we strive for these services to be experienced in specific ways. This Reflection is part of a series covering our Service Principles, the first of which is “We work to enhance relationships.”

38 years ago, I began working with Karis Disability Services (then Christian Horizons) in Ottawa. We were a much smaller organization then and were in the process of expanding to Eastern Ontario. Things moved quickly as we scrambled to respond to the needs of people moving out of institutions and into community settings. It was an exciting time! Much has changed since then as we became the largest provider of developmental services in Canada. Much has also stayed the same! The values that were at the heart of what we were doing remain strong. We remain committed to serving others and their unique needs because we value people as all created in image of God. People moving into community settings means they have opportunities to form new, deep, and meaningful relationships. We are still passionate about *enhancing relationships*, the first of our six Service Principles.

People with disabilities were at risk of being marginalized and excluded back when institutionalization was the default model, but they remain at risk of this today as well. That’s why Karis Disability Services works with people with disabilities to raise awareness and a supportive presence throughout our communities.

This principle of enhancing relationships makes me think back over my career. I am reminded of the importance of each interaction and the impact that comes through the reciprocity of the relationships built. What has brought us to this work is different for each of us, and we have served in this sector for different lengths of time, yet each of us make an impact and each of us have been impacted by the people we meet and the relationships we form.

As I journey through a phased retirement process, it has been a joy to visit with people supported and employees at many support locations throughout Ottawa and Kingston. Some I have known since my first day on the job! Others I have gotten to know more recently. I am struck by how each of these relationships has changed me or shaped me in some way, and my prayer is that I have also made a positive difference in the life of each person as well. We know how important healthy relationships are in the teams that we work in – and these relationships, in turn, have an impact on each person who uses our services!

A great example of how relationships have ripple effects is the way my daughter Samantha (Sam) first came on board with Karis Family Camps back in 2016. She hadn’t worked much with people with disabilities at that time, so in her second year of volunteering Sam was paired with Victoria Barfoot, who has family members with disabilities.

Sam and Victoria formed a meaningful bond that year and enjoyed sharing summer and winter camps together in the years that followed. In 2023, Victoria became a volunteer herself. It was so rewarding to see Sam and Victoria volunteering alongside each other at Elim Lodge, and to know that each will continue to impact their communities in powerful ways, encouraged and supported by these relationships that began at Family Camp. In turn, people with disabilities including Victoria’s brothers will find themselves a part of a more caring and compassionate society.



Left: Sam and Victoria at family camp in 2017.



Right: Sam and Victoria, both volunteers, in 2023

In the years to come, I’m excited to see Karis Disability Services expand from working to meet all of people’s needs directly to investing in families, communities, and advocacy groups who will continue to transform our society! Enhancing relationships will continue to be at the heart of everything we do – fostering belonging as we work towards a world that strengthens *choice and voice* for people with disabilities and their families.

I have much to be thankful for as I wind down my career with this wonderful organization that I’ve invested in for so many years. I trust that the friendships and relationships I’ve formed with people will continue to impact many others in the years to come.

Making the Connection

- How have you been shaped or changed by the relationships you have formed at Karis Disability Services? How do you think others have been shaped by their relationship with you?
- What examples of meaningful relationships have you seen in the lives of people who use Karis Disability Services, and how might we keep working to “enhance” these?