

Complex Service Needs Newsletter

Issue 3

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The Impact of Stories

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By Sandy Marcynuk

Some of you may remember looking forward to a very short radio segment, possibly listened to on your way home from work, called "The Rest of the Story". Paul Harvey, a very charismatic sounding gentleman, used the same formula during each segment as he told a story about someone inspiring, someone famous or someone who did something special. People like Helen Keller, Mahatma Gandhi or Josephine Cochrane, inventor of the automatic dishwasher, were introduced as everyday ordinary people and the fellow from the radio weaved a tale that pulled us into the story as it unfolded, all the while, we thought ahead to guess who he was talking about.

Hearing a clip of Paul Harvey the other day I realized how the impressions of these stories stand out for me even though I stopped hearing them daily 20 years ago. I remember many of the messages I took from these stories, not the stories themselves, but what they represented to me at the time. These often famous people became relatable, their motivations understandable and the feeling of hopefulness that many of the stories invoked was the powerful impact these stories had in my own life—I understood something beyond me and my own experience.

When working with people with complex service needs, it is important to look beyond the challenges we may experience in supporting someone. Both use and remember their stories to help ground our values and our work in the

fact that these are brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers....people with real lives which are so much more than their 'need'.

As the *Rest of the Story* demonstrates for me, the best stories teach lessons, are memorable, relatable, and could have happened to you or someone you know. When engaged in learning or teaching, stories can help people reconstruct and reflect on what was or currently is important about a person's experience. Learning to listen and to hear the core essence of a story, as well as to communicate orally and in writing, are critical skills for all us in the caring profession to acquire.

The use of stories while learning about the people we support offers exciting possibilities for meeting desired learning outcomes. Critical thinking skills are gained, as well as emphasizing human caring in a very person-centered way.

Tim Sheppard believes we have a profound need to tell and hear stories. It is how we share experience, understand each other, and create community. Every conversation is full of personal anecdotes; every effort to explain shared customs and values needs a tale; wisdom is best expressed by a story.

The very way our minds think is the essence of story. So to master powerful and effective communication, to engage people and ensure they remember facts, or to break down barriers of isolation within or between groups, telling stories in some form is essential.

www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/

Opening the Person Centered Planning process with a person's story will help discover what is truly important. Listening with an open ear will help you understand and respond to what is important to the person you support.

If you are interested in joining the Monthly Webinar Learning Series occurring third Wednesday of each month at 11am for one hour

please email us at: complexneeds@albertahealthservices.ca

You will receive an invitation to join the webinar each month.

The medium of storytelling allows you to narrate what you see as you see it, without trying to convince anyone of anything. Hearing a story allows the audience to pay attention to and take in only those aspects they find questionable, interesting, inspiring or worth further investigation.

- Shakti Gattego

Launching a webinar learning series

Complex Needs Learning Series is in development and will provide some additional learning opportunities for individuals interested in further developing their skills.

Free monthly, online webinars, will be one hour in length and will be offered every third Wednesday at 11 a.m. for one hour beginning in September.

A summary of a few of the planned webinars being considered are:

1. A year in review—presenting a few stories from individuals and families and the impact felt by them as they transitioned out of hospital to community.
- 2.

3. Things you should know before accessing Mental Health Services—Edmonton, Calgary and rural.
4. CAMH—sharing specialized knowledge of Dual Diagnosis
5. Cultural Competencies—presenting the work of Paul Holmes.
6. The Complex Needs Educational Framework
7. WIIFM—self-care, debriefing methods, creating joy within your workplace.

These are only a few of planned sessions. We want to hear from you to find out what you would be interested in.

Email: complexneeds@albertahealthservices.ca

Libraries: a community-based resource

Are you making use of your local library?

Here are some ways the library can be utilized by individuals, on their own terms.

- Library cards are free of charge and even without producing ID an Access Card can always be gained for immediate access,
- Community Librarians at most locations offer many types of outreach services— they may be able to provide person-centered off-site programming,
- Programs offered within branches can be delivered to accommodate the individual you support – be ready to describe what your client needs

and they will work with you,

- Newcomer settlement workers and outreach workers are accessible from branches around Edmonton and may be available at a branch near you,
- Within local branch locations, program rooms may be available for use. Talk to library staff for assistance in booking,
- Books are not the only way to use the library. Try an e-reader, book on CD, e-audiobook or use the computer at the branch. Library staff can help you and the individual you support become confident in using these formats.

We encourage you to contact or visit your community library. You may find your local library offers equal to these services or maybe even more.

To find a library in your area visit: www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/mc_public_library_directory.cfm

From the Front-Line



Increasing problems for a young lady named 'Sheila' had her family looking outside of their usual supports and turning to their Persons with Developmental Disability coordinator for help. COAST received a referral and a detailed assessment was completed. Sheila's story was one of ups and downs. The assessment revealed that not too long ago, Sheila had been very independent, with a driver's license, regularly visiting with a best friend and playing soccer.

A series of health and social setbacks had since resulted in a gradual and ever increasing withdrawal and isolation. This young lady was described as "being in crisis" and was struggling to manage her severe anxiety and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder symptoms.

At the time of PDD's referral, Sheila was rarely venturing out of her bedroom and her coping and life skills had regressed to the point where she was often dependent on her parents to meet basic needs. Sheila's anxiety and lack of self-confidence led to several incidents of self-harm and suicidal ideation.

COAST involvement included behavioural consultation, occupational therapy, and psychological supports as well as being referred to [Dreamcatcher Animal Assisted Therapy](#).

To make the most of COAST team involvement, it was essential to combine and coordinate counseling and therapy supports and include community staff supports to ensure all aspects of support were contributing to community based

treatment.

Sheila has now begun a long journey back to wellness through by taking small and extremely cautious steps forward.

Taking things slowly, Sheila is beginning to enjoy her time out in the community several times a week with staffing supports, is back to playing soccer, and enjoying time spent with Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy.

At this time her needs require ongoing support from family, COAST, Animal Assisted Therapy and a Community Agency to help resume social and community access skills. The treatment plan includes a comprehensive neurological assessment to evaluate for other health or social supports that may help Sheila further.

In looking back on the last eight months, a healthier young lady is emerging. She has evolving interests and a desire to make connections to move forward in her own life.

Supports that may be news to you...



August 15—1pm-4pm

Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy is hosting an open-house on their 40-acre ranch near Ardrossan and welcomes the public to help celebrate their 11th birthday. Spend time with animals, crafts and nature. This is a cool opportunity to find out more about this unique service. Lunch will be served as well.

[Dreamcatcher Animal Assisted Therapy](#)



Tetra Society is a non-profit agency dedicated to providing free assistive devices to those who are in need. They have 45 chapters in Canada & the US, with in Alberta. Each chapter has volunteers to assess need and provide needed products. Visit their website for more information.

[Tetra Society](#)



The simplicity of a rhythm circle achieved through drumming serves as an incredible tool to explore music and each other. Whether it's drumming alongside individuals you support or creating a cohesive team, working together to build music is often a therapeutic experience. Visit their website for more information about this Edmonton based organization.

[Rhythmrhythmrhythm](#)

Websites of interest...

Each edition of the Complex Service Needs newsletter a collection of online resources and websites will be shared. These are just a sampling of sites you may find useful.

ACHIEVE Training Centre

This collection of training topics and instructors is a division of the [Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute Inc.](#) The primary focus is on providing training and services that promote leadership and enhance organizational performance.

<http://www.achievecentre.com/>

Volunteer Alberta

Since its foundation in 1990, Volunteer Alberta has worked to promote, celebrate and enable volunteerism in Alberta. The cornerstone of its mission is to empower Alberta's nonprofit sector organizations through knowledge exchange and strategic connections. Over the years, Volunteer Alberta has become a provincial capacity builder for the nonprofit/voluntary sector.

<http://volunteer.alberta.ab.ca/about-us>

Open Future Learning

Open Future Learning calls itself, "*Inspirational training for the intellectual disability workforce*". Take a look at the website and decide for yourself if you gain inspiration after spending some time with the content. It offers something for many areas of the workforce who work with individuals with developmental disabilities—employment, person centered thinking, autism, challenging behaviours, building friendships and community...the list goes on. Check out this very cost effective on-line learning resource: www.openfuturelearning.org

Conversations that Matter

Norman Kunc and Emma Van Der Klift have travelled across North America to interview researchers, consultants and families about best practices in Community Living.

They have posted these interviews to a website called Conversations that Matter and have structured them as a conference program – listed by topic and by speaker – so that you can browse for topics that interest you.

www.conversationthatmatter.org

The conversations are short – up to 22 minutes long – and are followed with some questions for reflection.

Check out the website and browse the offerings. They have 18 conversations with 10 different leaders from across North America for your viewing pleasure. PDD agencies have been allotted many memberships to the Conversations that Matter resource—check with your local PDD contact if the agency you work with has access.

Raising awareness and understanding...one day at a time

Throughout the year many organizations support a variety of initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of human services issues around the world. Awareness days, weeks and months engage the public in important human services or health information. Below are two approaching awareness days that may be meaningful to your work.

FASD Awareness Day—September 9

More than 36,000 Albertans are affected by FASD, which directly or indirectly affect Albertans. Reducing the incidence of FASD is a priority for Alberta and FASD Day is an important opportunity to share with family and friends that FASD can be prevented.

<http://www.fasworld.com/> or <http://fasd.alberta.ca/>

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

December 3 has been proclaimed by the United Nations as International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Recognition of this day aims to increase awareness and understanding of persons with disabilities and the issues that affect their lives.

Premier's Council promotes International Day of Persons with Disabilities in Alberta. Support and funding is available to promote International Day of Persons with Disabilities events. [Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Awards](#) are often presented at these events.

More information about International Day of Persons with Disabilities is available on the [United Nations' website](#).