

Provincial Parent Advisory Committee, Family Support for Children with Disabilities Annual Report 2017-2018



Ministry of Community and Social Services, Government of Alberta

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Reflections from the Co-Chair

The Provincial Parent Advisory Committee (PPAC) provides a forum for parents with children receiving supports from the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program to offer advice to government regarding ways the FSCD program and other government initiatives can positively affect children with disabilities and their families. The advice provided is based on experience and input reflecting the diverse perspectives of families who are receiving FSCD services across the province.

PPAC members are dedicated to promoting and championing family awareness and involvement in Regional Parent Advisory Committees (RPACs) that include families from indigenous and other cultural backgrounds and perspectives. RPAC members work within their own communities across Alberta to promote open communication and effective information sharing among families and between families and the government. They also bring forward perspectives from the families served by FSCD.

Each member of PPAC brings their own experience, wisdom and passion to the table ensuring children with disabilities are supported to live safely and inclusively in their communities.

During the past year, PPAC offered experiential advice to the Youth Suicide Prevention Project regarding the difficulty of accessing mental health supports for both children with disabilities and their families. PPAC also provided feedback on the Inclusive Education Committee to support children with disabilities in the classroom.

Each member of PPAC is determined to ensure that children with disabilities have every opportunity possible and that each family's unique needs are being met in the most appropriate and supportive way. These parents' dedication is reflected in this report.

Sincerely,
Stella Varvis



Outcome Reporting

This was the first year of the three-year term for current committee members. PPAC developed a three-year work plan identifying the following goals:

- Increasing PPAC's administrative efficiency
- Reviewing PPAC's Mandate and Roles
- Developing a communications strategy to expand PPAC's profile
- Strengthening RPACs to ensure the voices of parents are brought forward to PPAC and the FSCD program
- Ensuring PPAC's ability to proactively advise government regarding the changing needs of families in Alberta

Work to strengthen RPACs has led to more active committees across the province, for example, membership has increased and communication amongst families receiving FSCD supports has been enhanced.

The Year in Review

PPAC met five times in the 2017/2018 year. Members attended a variety of community events and participated in local RPAC meetings.

The committee provided advice and input to the following ministries and program areas:

- Ministry of Community and Social Services
 - FSCD parent satisfaction survey
 - FSCD online claims reporting system
 - FSCD post payment verification review process
 - FSCD welcome to the family resource and hiring a support worker booklet
 - Discussions on a leadership forum
 - Office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
- Ministry of Children's Services
 - Prevention and early intervention services
 - Regarding youth suicide prevention and mental health supports
 - Concerns for children and youth with disabilities and their families.
- Ministry of Education
 - Inclusive Education Committee

Financial Accountability

The remuneration of non-government members appointed to the committee is set according to Committee Remuneration Order 466/2007, Appendix 3, Schedule 1 Part B, and reimbursed for expenses as per the Alberta Public Service subsistence travel rates and allowances.

Remuneration rates and payments are disclosed by Community and Social Services to the public on an annual basis. All PPAC members' expenses are publicly disclosed quarterly at <http://alberta.ca/travelandexpensedisclosure.cfm>

Committee Member Biographies

Stella Varvis – Co-Chair, Edmonton Region



Stella Varvis is a lawyer, educator, and parent of two young children. Born and raised in Edmonton, she graduated from the University of Alberta's faculty of law in 2001, and was called to the Alberta bar in 2002. She currently works as legal counsel at the Alberta Law Reform Institute, which is dedicated to improving the laws of Alberta through independent research, analysis and consultation. Prior to her PPAC appointment in 2017, Stella served on numerous community boards and committees. She believes that all children, regardless of ability, have the right to be fully included in their schools and communities and be treated with dignity and respect on an equal basis with others.

Stacey Andrews – Member, Central Region



Stacey works for Inclusion Lloydminster and Inclusion Alberta as a co-director of family initiatives and advocacy. She is deeply committed to supporting children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families to lead healthy, inclusive lives. She works extensively in community development and community capacity building to maximize on creating communities that welcome and include all.

Stacey is a past board member and president with Inclusion Lloydminster and previous member with Midwest Family Connections that runs Parent Link Centre and early intervention programs. She has been a member and Co-Chair of the central RPAC since 2007 and a member of PPAC since 2010.

Stacey and her husband have two children, one of whom has developmental disabilities. Both are very committed to creating a fulfilling, inclusive life for their son with developmental disabilities and ensuring his life is rich with opportunities and of equal value to his older sister.

Katherine Germaine – Alternate, Calgary Region



Katherine grew up in the small town of Bon Accord, Alberta. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in environmental science from the University of Alberta. After graduation, she lived overseas and taught English for a few years, returning to Canada in 2005. She spent many years working in the environmental field, primarily in mining and oil and gas. Recently, Katherine has returned to school to pursue an education after degree.

Katherine, her two children, and husband currently reside in Calgary. In 2015, her youngest child was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Since then, she has been learning to navigate the different programs available to assist her son and their family.

Nicole Johnson – Alternate, Edmonton Region

Nicole lives in Edmonton with her husband and two sons. Her family has been receiving FSCD supports since January 2017.

Nicole received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Alberta in 2013. She's had the wonderful opportunity to support the Kitsao Xais Xais Nation in managing its Child and Family Resource Centre in 2014. In 2015, Nicole became the executive director of Thorncliff After School Care in Edmonton. In her role, Nicole oversees the organization's accredited childcare program and inclusive support childcare development program.

Diane Mitchell – Member, South Region

Born and raised in Southern Alberta, Diane completed the rehabilitation program at Lethbridge College. She went on to work in the human services field with persons with developmental disabilities. In partnership with Sik-Ooh-Kotoki and her agency, Diane developed a First Nations, Metis, and Inuit program to ensure the cultural needs of First Nations adults with disabilities were met. She has dedicated 25 years to the field of developmental disabilities.

Her experience and tenacious spirit have inspired many individuals and workers in the field. In 2008, her two granddaughters came to live with her, both of whom have disabilities. She later adopted the girls. The journey through a parent's eyes of advocacy has been one of the most enriching experiences of Diane's life. Her greatest joy is being of service to others.

Lisa Nicholson – Alternate, Central Region



Lisa lives in rural central Alberta with her husband and four children. She has two daughters (one adopted), who both have numerous developmental disabilities. Her one daughter with autism requires around the clock one-on-one care. She has worked with children with special needs for many years

She is the founder of a non-profit society that helps local families with children in medical need with expenses and equipment. Both of her daughters have very different FSCD contracts, so she has a broad knowledge of services available for different needs. In her mind, advocating is the key to change.

Allison Pike – Alternate, South Region

Allison lives in Lethbridge with her husband and three children, all of whom have disabilities. Her family has been involved with FSCD for more than 10 years. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Native American studies from the University of Lethbridge. She has worked as a social worker for Children's Services and other community organizations supporting children and adults with disabilities. She currently works on traffic safety with many community partners.

She is a former president of the Autism Society of Alberta. She has been involved with many other community organizations, including school councils, her local Autism society and the RPAC. She advocates for and works with many families as their children work toward or receive a new diagnosis.

Jingyi (Julia) Qiu – Member, Edmonton Region



Julia has served as public member of PPAC since 2014. As a single working parent with a terminally ill and severely disabled child, Julia has developed a deep understanding of the challenges and obstacles faced by families of children with special needs. She believes that FSCD plays an integral role in providing the financial support and essential services to enable families of children with special needs to live with dignity and hope.

Julia works as a plan board analyst with the Management Employees Pension Board. Julia has a bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Ottawa, with a major in marketing and minor in international management. She also holds an advanced trust management standards certificate and a business analysis certificate.

Tania Rizwan – Member, Calgary Region



Tania is the mother of two boys one of whom is living with autism. She has a PhD in mechanical engineering from the University of Alberta and is a professional engineer with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta. She has more than 15 years' experience in her field and currently works as a technology program manager for TransCanada Pipelines.

Tania is passionate about helping others, giving back to the community and being a strong advocate for her son and the special needs community. She is equally passionate about the meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities in our schools and community.

Laurel Sherret – Member, Calgary Region



Laurel was born and raised in Calgary. While attending the University of Calgary, she was actively involved with the non-profit community in youth mentoring, domestic violence initiatives and assisting immigrant and refugee families. She then spent more than a decade living in various cities in Canada and abroad, working with international human rights and criminal law, gender equality and refugee issues. She is now legal counsel with the federal government.

Laurel is the proud mother of two children. Her son's journey as a child with multiple disabilities inspired her efforts to ensure he and others have access to the appropriate supports and services that allow them all to lead fulfilling lives. Laurel has both lived and witnessed the challenges and opportunities families face when encountering disability-related issues. Since 2014, she has been a board member with Cerebral Palsy Kids and Families and is currently serving as president.

Stephanie Walker – Member, North Central Region



Stephanie was born on the west coast but has spent most of her life in rural Alberta. She attended King's University in Edmonton.

In between caring for her four children, Stephanie has spent time pursuing graduate studies and working for non-profits in the adult learning field. She and her family currently reside in Bruderheim.

Aura Willier – Member, South Region



Aura is an indigenous woman who has been living with a physical disability since she was 15. She was diagnosed with Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy and has been using leg braces instead of a wheelchair ever since. She is the mother of three children, one who has Down syndrome and a variety of complex needs. Aura has her bachelor of social work and is registered with the Alberta College of Social Workers. She has been employed as a family court counsellor for the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General since 2006.

Aura has lived more than half her life as a person with a disability and spent the last 12.5 years as a parent to a child with disabilities. She has become a strong voice and advocate for her son despite the barriers of living in a rural, northern community. She has held roles on a few boards in her community and has been a member of PPAC since 2013. Aura's personal growth, experience in parenting a child with a disability and her occupation allow her to provide important insight to the Committee.