



A Healthier You

By Lavonne Roloff



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

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One of the ways that we can assist the staff in our programs and agencies is by considering workplace health and safety. Benefits

to your agency when you have a healthy work environment include: improved employee fitness and health, reduced illness and risk of injury, reduced stress and tension and improved morale, efficiency, energy, creativity and quality of work.

A study in Calgary indicated that it is easier for a small workplace (fewer than 100 employees) to have a positive workplace culture than a large workplace. Many of the measures can be economical. A couple of years ago, we decided to take a walk at lunch with staff that was available. In our building, the human resources department arranged for a yoga instructor to come in at lunchtime - this gave the tenants in the building a chance to get to know one another as well as try out yoga to see what it was like. One of the AHVNA members has a basket of fruit in her office to encourage having healthy snacks during the day. Other organizations ensure that staff has the opportunity for flexible schedules, while others have policies that promote a balance between work and personal life.

In the past, we distributed “A Fresh Look at Healthy Workplaces” publication to the AHVNA members. This publication is part of the Healthy U@work publications available through www.healthyalberta.com. On the website, you will find an array of

resources to assist in making your workplace a great place for staff. There are tip sheets as well as booklets that can be downloaded and used by groups or individuals.

We are just touching the tip of the iceberg with the information provided in this issue of Connections. We encourage you to explore with your staff ways to create a positive workplace within your agency. ■

Lavonne Roloff is the Provincial Director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.



WORKING ALONE Safely

By Lavonne Roloff

Employees who meet with clients away from the office may face an unfamiliar environment and unpredictable client behaviour. Individuals subject to these risks include home-care workers and nurses, social service workers and others. Risks in such situations may include assault, robbery and verbal abuse.

Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees, is an Alberta government publication which covers five working alone situations and provides best practices for those who work alone.

Use the following practices to reduce the risk of violence when you travel alone to client premises. Strategies include following a safety checklist and having a safe visit plan.

Safe work procedure checklist - Having a standard safety awareness checklist is recommended so that employees can evaluate their risk with regard to client behaviour, location, previous experiences and the presence of dangerous items (e.g., weapons, vicious dogs, drugs). A sample checklist is available in the *Working Alone* publication (p. 20).

Safe visit plan - A plan is advisable if employees are entering a potentially unsafe situation. To help the employer track the safety of employees working at a client's premises, the plan should outline control measures: using an active communication system, switching the meeting place to a safer and friendlier location or assigning two employees to eliminate working alone.



Sample working alone protocol

After meeting with a family for the first time, the employee will complete a “**safety awareness list form**” and show it to the supervisor. Each time a change is made to the form, the supervisor should be shown the form again.

Each employee will have a **work partner** to whom they provide their weekly schedule, which includes the name, time and day of where the visits are taking place.

Employees will check in with their work partner at the end of each day to advise they have completed visits for the day. If the partner is not available to call, the employee will do the check-in with another colleague. If the partner does not hear from the colleague at the end of the day, he or she will first try to call the employee on the cell phone. If there is no answer, the partner will call the home where the visit occurred. If there is no response at the family's home, or if the response is suspicious, the partner will call 911.

Each staff will have a cell phone, to be turned on at all times. If it is not possible to have the cell phone on, the staff member will advise all staff that the phone is not available and indicate when the phone will be back on.

If employees have information regarding personal safety risks, such as family violence or drug use, or if they believe the home is unsafe, they can either

- ask another staff member to go on the visit with them
- ask the family to meet them in a public place where it is appropriate for both parent and child

If an employee is unsure about the home (perhaps it is the first visit), but feels safe to go alone, arrange for another staff member do a check-in call a few minutes after the employee has arrived, to confirm that he or she feels safe, or to ask to be called again in a certain amount of time (e.g., in ten minutes). If the employee does not respond to the call, the staff doing the check-in will call 911.

If at any time during a visit employees do not feel safe, they will leave the family's home or situation immediately.

You can find more information and get a copy of *Working Alone Safely* at www.employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHIS/WHIS-PUB_workingalone.pdf. ■

Lavonne Roloff compiled the information with excerpts from the Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees, Government of Alberta. (2000). Lynn Lema, Director of Early Learning, E4C in Edmonton, provided information for the sample working alone protocol.

I Know I am Burning Out - NOW WHAT?

By Kathy Archer

The signs are there. You are irritable and overwhelmed, have trouble sleeping and feel anxious. You know that work is affecting your health and impacting the rest of your world. The problem is that you don't know what to do about it. It's not like you haven't tried; however, nothing seems to change. You're stuck.

Congratulations! You have just made the first step towards change. Awareness of burnout, like any challenge that you face (addictions, health problems or relationships), is the starting point for getting your life back in control: awareness that something is not quite right, that you are sinking, that something needs to change. To kick-start change, note the burnout signs that are specific to you. Keep a journal, or jot down notes, for about a week. During this time, don't try to change anything. Simply be more aware.

Heighten your awareness

By heightening this awareness, you will draw attention to the triggers and resulting body responses that are specific to you. Note the time of the day and what you are doing. Are you more aware of burnout in the morning when you are getting ready for work? Does your stomach start to churn when you realize it's only Tuesday? When you are in a meeting, do you feel the tension increase in the back of your head and neck? Do you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders as you realize there were so many interruptions today that you didn't get a single thing ticked off your to-do list?

As you do this, listen to your body speak to you.

- Is your breathing shallow?
- Is your heart palpitating?
- Are your fists clenched?
- Do your shoulders almost touch your ears?

These are all signs of your body telling you something has to change.

Commit to change

After observing how the stress is affecting you and your body, decide if you are really committed to change. This is a promise to yourself, based on an increased consciousness of how seriously your life is being impacted. Write a pledge to yourself that from this day onward, you will be more aware of what your body is telling you, and surrender to it. Communicate this to your peers, family and friends. Tell them you have become aware of burning out and the impact it's having on you and others, and about your firm vow to take better care of yourself.



illustration: George Peters

Ask for help

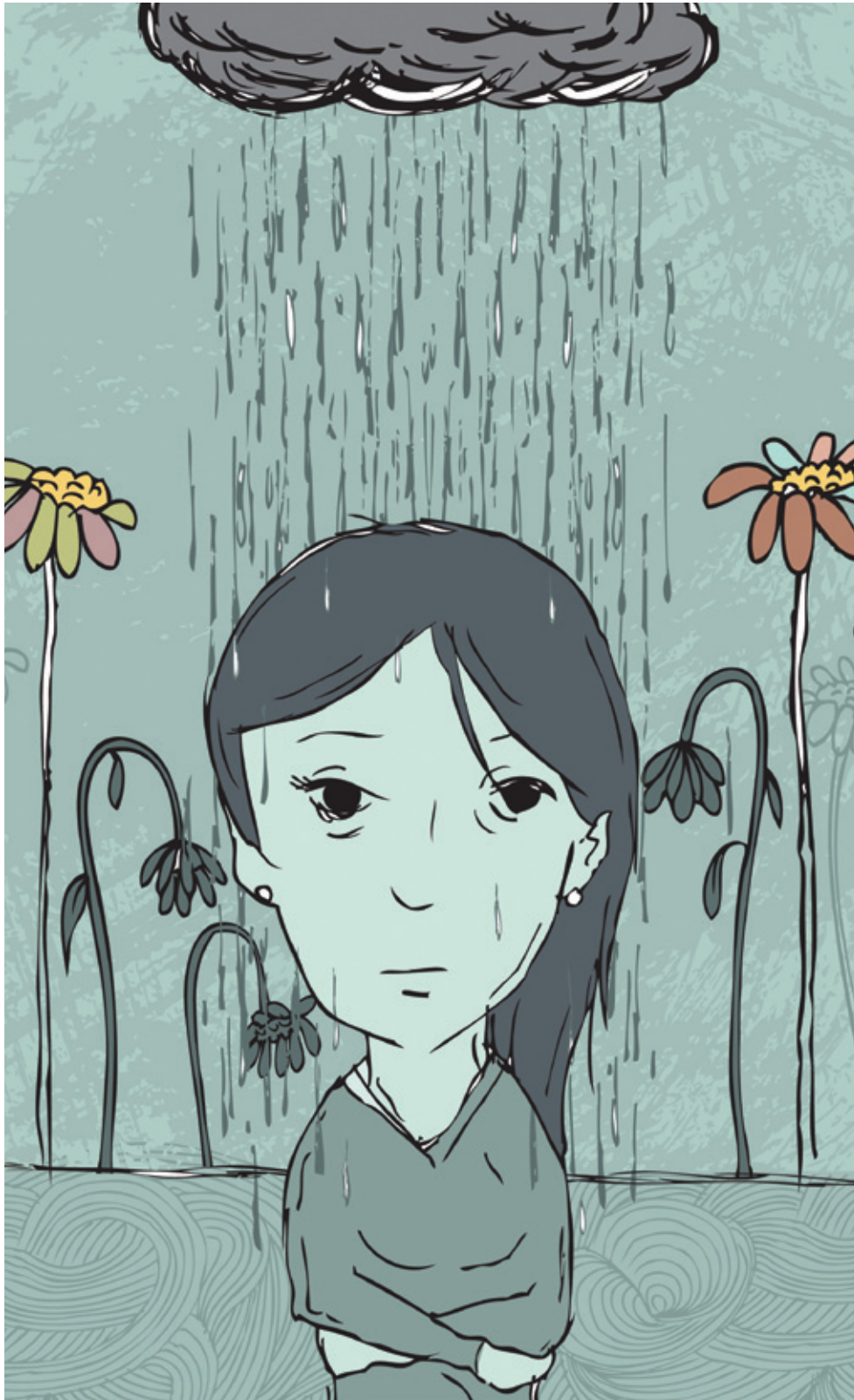
Then, it is time to ask for help. As a leader in organizations, families and communities, you may have the mistaken belief that you always have to be strong and resilient and appear capable. The truth is everyone needs assistance sometimes. By identifying that you need help, and clearly communicating what help you need, you will be more apt to be on top of your game and available to help others. Remember that help can come in a variety of forms:

- Delegate tasks at work and at home.
- Ask someone to cover for you while you take a mental health day.
- Request that your partner pick up groceries so that you can be more relaxed when cooking supper.
- Lean on your friend to watch the kids for a few hours so you can go out.
- Consider getting professional help. Talk to your doctor, health provider or yoga instructor. Hire a coach, counsellor or therapist.
- Use your organization's employee assistance program.

When you become aware of your body's response to stress, clearly communicate a commitment to making a change, and get help to make that change, you will be tackling burnout head on. By consciously living your life, you will begin to feel better and more connected to those around you, and you will find that you are smiling, laughing and enjoying each day more and more. ■

Kathy Archer, CPCC, is a certified leadership coach and owner of Silver River Coaching www.silverrivercoaching.com. She specializes in coaching leaders who have sacrificed their health, personal and family lives for the sake of their career and who are seeking a more balanced and fulfilled life.

Compassion Fatigue and Self-care for Home Visitors



By Michelle Hamilton

Home visitation workers across Alberta provide important support services to families intended to foster healthy child development and promote positive parent-child interaction. Many workers enjoy the good feelings that come from successfully building a trusting relationship with a family and seeing improvement resulting from their involvement. However, many families have encountered extensive stress, loss, conflict, trauma or other mental health issues. Dealing with families who have suffered is draining and a difficult aspect of a home visitor's work.

Research describes how helping professionals can be affected by exposure to other people's emotional pain and or trauma. **Compassion fatigue**, **secondary traumatic stress** (Figley, 1995) and **vicarious trauma** (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995) have been used to describe a range of adverse effects seen in helping professionals.

Compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue shares many features of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But, in compassion fatigue (secondary traumatic stress), the trauma is not experienced as a victim, but rather through secondary exposure to a victim's story or experience.

The signs of PTSD involve three symptom clusters: **intrusion** (intrusive thoughts, images and sensations), **avoidance** (of people, places, things and experiences that elicit memories of the traumatic event) and **negative arousal** (hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, irritability, startle reactions, anxiety) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Helpers suffering from compassion fatigue may begin to notice they

- are not emotionally available to themselves or to the important people in their personal lives, as though their compassion is all used up
- suffer from emotional numbness
- have increased fear and anxiety, or feelings of disconnection from themselves and others

Burnout

Burnout is a common term related to the concept of compassion fatigue, but refers specifically to a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, or dissatisfaction with one's work situation, usually emerging gradually under conditions of too many demands and inadequate resources (Valent, 2002). People who experience burnout may also suffer from compassion fatigue; however, the experience of burnout may have more to do with the external working conditions, while compassion fatigue may be a more permanent alteration existing within the individual. One's experience of burnout may be altered by a change in circumstances (i.e., quitting a job), whereas compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma do not disappear simply by changing circumstances (Figley, 2002).

Risk reduction

Although certain authors believe that compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma are the inevitable result of working closely with the emotional pain of others (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Yassen, 1995), many self-care strategies are helpful. It is important that self-care be the responsibility of the helping professional supported in various ways by the organization. Prevention begins with awareness: training staff to recognize the signs of occupational stress and developing professional and personal self-care strategies.

Professional self-care

Professional self-care means maintaining balance and healthy connections in one's work life. Workers can pace the work day to include breaks, connect with colleagues and being mindful to refocus on self (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Setting limits is an important aspect of professional self-care, as many helpers typically do not know how to say "no." As a result, they become overloaded with increasing activities.

Boundaries are another key aspect of professional self-care (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; Yassen, 1995). Setting time, personal and professional boundaries help ensure a healthy separation between counsellor

and client. Emotional boundaries are also important. Research shows that mirror neurons in the brain may transmit emotion between people and contribute to secondary traumatic stress. Individuals can learn ways to regulate their emotional boundaries when empathically 'connecting' with clients (Rothschild, 2006).

Research points to the need for peer support and clinical supervision as critical aspects of professional self-care (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Norcross, 2000).

Peer support occurs when counsellors have the opportunity to give and receive support from colleagues who are involved in similar work tasks (Monroe, 1999; Yassen, 1995).

Peer support networks should devote a portion of time focusing on the benefits of work, as a sense of purpose and meaning



may protect helpers from stress and burnout (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Taking inventory of the success stories in our efforts to enrich the lives of others is an important practice that can contribute to the resiliency of workers.

Clinical supervision is a structured set of activities focused on counsellor self-awareness and growth, skill enhancement, professional identity development, case conceptualization or other aspects of the role (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997).

Personal self-care

A well-developed system of personal self-care is critical for all people working in stressful situations. **Physical self-care** is comprised of proper exercise, nutrition and sufficient sleep, and may also include body work such as massage and other healing therapies. **Psychological self-care** strategies include self-nurturing activities, relaxation, creative expression, skill development and use of laughter (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Spirituality is another key aspect of personal self-care that may take many different forms: prayer, meditation, religion, contact with nature, and mindfulness through full engagement in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Personal self-care also includes the need for connection with others. This may include evaluating and improving one's personal support network, and perhaps most importantly, getting professional therapy when needed (Norcross, 2000; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Many counsellors enter the helping field with a history of trauma themselves, and those with a personal history are more at risk for negative effects from their work (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). Creating an atmosphere that views seeking counselling as a healthy sign, rather than a sign of weakness or incompetence, may improve the health of individuals and the wellness of the organization.

For many helping professionals, self-care does not come naturally. We must take active measures to overcome our tendencies to focus primarily on the needs of others, and to learn how to self-nurture and be more open to receiving care ourselves. ■

Michelle Hamilton, M. Ed., CCC, is a registered psychologist and a consultant offering workshops on compassion fatigue and self-care. Please visit www.beyond-balance.com for more information, or email michelle@beyond-balance.com.

References for this article are available on the AHVNA website at www.ahvna.org.

Hiring a Personal Coach

By Kathy Archer

Sometimes in life you get to a point where you are stuck. You can't move forward. You need help to get unstuck. One option is to hire a personal coach. Although coaching is quickly becoming the choice of many leaders and organizations as a solution, many people don't know where to find and hire a coach. Here are some tips to help you.

It is important first to understand what coaching is and isn't. Coaching is not mentoring, counselling, consulting or therapy. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) (www.coachfederation.org/clients/coaching-faqs) has the following definition of coaching:

“partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching honours the client as the expert in his/her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful and whole. The coach's responsibility is to

- discover, clarify and align with what the client wants to achieve
- encourage client self-discovery
- elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- hold the client responsible and accountable.”

Be aware of the various credentials of coaches, and be clear on what you are looking for. Coaching is not a regulated profession; however, the ICF is an international body that does accredit training institutes and has a rigorous credentialing process for coaches. Check out their online referral service to ensure you are getting a coach who has the credentials that meet your needs at www.coachfederation.org/clients/crs/.

Niche coaching

Coaches often have a niche that they serve. Find one that speaks to you. A coach's title offers a clue: a coach for business, life,

executives, career or leadership. Check out the coach's website and read testimonials to see who the coach is serving, such as women leaders, entrepreneurs, people wanting to get fit or people in transition. What are people saying about the coach? What feels right for you?

Coaching process

Another consideration is the coach's process for coaching. The majority of coaching is done over the phone or via Skype, although in-person coaching is also available. These choices offer a much broader selection of coaches and allow you to get coaching without taking up time traveling, leaving the office or being away from your family. Frequency of appointments varies, with some coaches preferring weekly calls, and others a couple of times a month. Choose a coach who meets your needs and schedule.

The right coaching fit

Finding the right fit is an important criteria in selecting a coach. The coach is there to serve you on this journey. You want to feel comfortable and confident meeting in a safe space where you can be open, honest and forthright. This relationship is about you! Most coaches offer a complimentary session for you to get a sense of what coaching can do for you and a feel for the coach's style. And, it also helps the coach to see if the relationship will work for him or her. With this trial, a coach might refer you to another coach—someone who might better understand your culture, or who has a similar background or a more fitting personality. Try complimentary sessions from two or three coaches to experience different styles and processes.

Coaching can have a powerful impact on your life. Take the time to find the right one for you. ■

Kathy Archer CPCC is a certified leadership coach and owner of Silver River Coaching. She specializes in coaching leaders who have sacrificed their health, personal and family lives for the sake of their career and who are seeking a more balanced and fulfilled life.

Personal Safety Planning Checklist

By Teresa O'Riordan



Home visitors who travel to their client's residence are advised to take precautions to ensure their own wellness and safety. This starts with self-care through adequate nourishment, understanding of self, relaxation, adequate sleep and exercise. And, equally important, home visitors should be familiar with the following tips for personal safety, using this checklist for planning safe travels and visits.



Driving

Ensure you are prepared for travel in all seasons by having the following equipment onboard, ensuring equipment and vehicles are in good working condition and being familiar with, or trained, in safety policies and emergency protocol:

- take a cell phone and leave it turned on; be sure to familiarize yourself with the
 - car charger
 - transmission booster
 - Bluetooth for hands-free driving
 - policy on sharing telephone numbers - office phone number only, cell phone number only, use *67 when using private landline

Leave the Bedbugs Behind

By Sandra Hamilton

- take maps and get clear directions
- use a GPS
- register for and use OnStar service (www.onstar.com/web/fmv/home)
- keep your vehicle well maintained
- carry a basic emergency kit in the vehicle
- carry a winter kit in the vehicle
- use a seat belt
- use appropriate car and booster seats
- schedule enough time between appointments
- follow policies on weather and road conditions
- get training on roadside emergency
- do not park in an isolated area, if possible. Ensure that your car is easily accessible to the front door of the home
- park so that you cannot be blocked in



Working alone

- have a digital photo of yourself, vehicle, licence plate and vehicle identification number (VIN)
- wear picture ID
- keep cell phone charged, on and programmed for emergency calls
- wear appropriate clothing and footwear
- sit where there is a clear exit available to all
- lock your purse and valuables in the vehicle when leaving the office
- be familiar with policy on visiting clients after hours and contact protocol (i.e., no visits in the home on weekends; no direct client work when either staff or clients are under influence of drugs/ alcohol)
- don't enter a home if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable ■

Bedbugs have made headlines over the last few years because of the increased numbers of reported infestations. Those with jobs that take them into homes fear that they may inadvertently offer a ride to a hitching bedbug.

Bedbugs are nasty little critters that have learned to live quite well and safely in the homes of people since the days of cave dwellers. They do not spread disease the way mosquitoes or common houseflies can, but still, none of us want them in our home.

Lifestyle of a bedbug

Bedbugs multiply by laying eggs which hatch into nymphs, and grow by molting or shedding their skin five times to become adults. They feed every three to five days, but can survive longer without feeding. Between feedings, they hide, or nest, in dark quiet places at room temperature. They shun light and are usually nocturnal, preferring to be active and feed in the hours before dawn. These bugs move by crawling rather than jumping or flying. Shaking a bedbug-infested item might fling the bugs through the air, but once landed, they crawl and hitch a ride in items such as furniture, fabric and bags. They will hide as close to a food source as they can (e.g., sleeping place of a person).

So how can we keep them out of our homes?

We need to be careful not to offer these bugs a chance to hitchhike home with us.

- Be careful where you sit. A chair that is not upholstered is a better choice than a sofa. My choice would be a kitchen chair.
- If you must take a bag into a home, choose one that is light-coloured with smooth shiny surfaces. Bedbugs do not like climbing on smooth shiny surfaces and prefer dark places.
- Wear light-coloured clothing and pants without cuffs. If a bedbug is knocked onto the floor near you during your visit, you don't want to offer it a nice dark hiding place in your pant cuff.

For me, the most important step is not to take them into my own home or spread them to other places. If I have been in a place where there might have been bedbugs, I take off my clothes as soon as I get home, right inside my front door, and put them into the washing machine. If I lived in an apartment, I would take off my clothes in the bathtub, a light-coloured, smooth and shiny surface which makes it hard for the bugs to get out. When I return from travel, I use similar precautions. I inspect the bed, but my main precaution is unpacking straight into my washing machine and not storing my suitcase near my bedroom.



Related information about bedbugs

Alberta Health Services - "Bedbug Tip Sheet"

www.albertahealthservices.ca/rl/hi-rl-bed-bug-tip-sheet.pdf

City of Edmonton - "Edmonton Guide to Preventing and Getting Rid of Bedbugs Safely"

- www.eaa.ab.ca/default.aspx?ID=Bed%20Bugs

Toronto Health - www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs/index.htm

Health Canada - www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/pest/pnotes/bedbugs-punaisses-lits/index-eng.php

Sandra Hamilton CPHI(C) is an Environmental Health Officer with Environmental Public Health, Alberta Health Services in Edmonton.

Coming up

The next issue of *Connections* will focus on **Postpartum Depression**. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by **January 15, 2012**.

Hearing from you

Connections is published three times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA Provincial Director, by phone at 780-429-4784 or by email to info@ahvna.org.

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Board News

The following people were elected to the AHVNA Board in June, 2011 at the Annual General Meeting held in Red Deer.

Chairperson	Marianne Symons	Calgary Healthy Families Collaborative
Vice Chairperson	Dawn Boustead	Children's Cottage Society (Calgary)
Treasurer	Betty Miller	Grande Prairie Family Education Society
Assistant Treasurer	Ruth Prill	Vermilion Brighter Beginnings Program
Secretary	Anne Boychuk	Strathcona County FCS
Director-at-Large	Heather Boonstra	Ft. Saskatchewan Families First Society
Director-at-Large	Marianne Dickson	Wild Rose Community Connections (High River)
Director-at-Large	Linda Orosco	Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Edmonton)

Anne Boychuk tells us...

I was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and yet, I am also very proud to be Canadian. I have had the opportunity to travel "home" many times and to share my roots with my husband and two adult sons. I love traveling, gardening, cooking and running in the river valley.

I have worked in the human services field for over 25 years, including work with both children and families. My education in early childhood development has provided me with many challenging and rewarding opportunities, including home visitation. My involvement with home visitation began with Strathcona County in 2002 and continues to be my passion because of the positive impact it has on both families and children. I have been a member of AHVNA for several years and joined the AHVNA Board in 2009. I am currently serving as the secretary. ■

