



Vol. 3 Issue 2 Spring 2008

Alberta Home Visitation Network Association



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

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AHVNA
9321 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 3T7

Phone: (780) 429.4787

Fax: (780) 429.4784

Email: info@ahvna.org

Website: www.ahvna.org

A life of our own design

Piecing together visions and strategies for living

This issue of *Connections* focuses on Health and Wellness. As you can imagine this is a huge topic and so we have touched on only a few aspects of health and wellness.

Check out the article by Kathleen Johnston for a moment to reflect on how as a caregiver you are able to fill up your "tank" so that you can keep up the great work that you do. Wellness coach Claudette Pelletier-Hannah touches upon on the busy-ness of our lives. In this issue we hope to pique your interest and plant a few seeds on taking care of yourself.

The association has also been taking care of business with the AHVNA board diligently working hard this past year. A visioning session was held in September 2007, a board development workshop in October 2007 with Alberta Community Development, and a strategic planning workshop with Kim Bater in December. Another workshop with Kim clarified board governance and roles. The board has also revisited the vision, mission and guiding principles for the association. Look for them in this issue. If you would like a copy of the strategic plan presented at the April network meeting for approval, contact the AHVNA office. Congratulations to the board for all of the work they have completed this year and appreciation for their commitment and dedication to AHVNA.

Recently, I attended a workshop on Stress by Sonja Lupien from the Centre for Studies on Human Stress with the Douglas Hospital Research Centre. It seemed like a timely topic with the fiscal year-end duties before me. Dr Lupien's article is one of many that can be found on the website www.douglas.qc.ca/stress. I encourage you take a look and perhaps reflect on your own stress level and how you are dealing with it in your life.

One of the ways that I deal with stress is by quilting. I started quilting about three years ago and have found it to be quite meditative. It gives me time to think as well as exercises my brain by accessing both left and right sides. Perhaps you have an activity that will take you away from the workplace or the family for a few minutes to help you re-focus and regenerate. There is something about being able to create something besides a report that is very satisfying. In one quilt class someone asked the instructor what we were going to do. Her reply was that we were going to do what we always do—"Take a piece of fabric and cut it into small pieces and then put it back together to create a masterpiece." In many ways this is a metaphor for the work that we do with families. I hope that as the spring arrives you will take this time to think about what you can do for yourself to "create" and refresh yourself.

—Lavonne Roloff, Provincial Director

In the past year the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association's board of directors has revisited the vision, mission and guiding principles for the organization. They are as follows:

Vision

Families in Alberta receive the support necessary to raise their children to be healthy, safe and secure.

Mission

To support the provision of quality, voluntary, home visitation services in Alberta that promotes best possible outcomes for vulnerable families

Guiding Principles

- We believe in providing an inclusive, collaborative organization to which all programs in the province that offer or support home visitation services may belong.
- We believe that it is essential to strive for autonomy and self-direction in order to effectively advocate for programs that provide home visitation services.
- We believe that home visitation services should be available to all vulnerable families, in Alberta, in order to strengthen families.
- We believe that all families benefit from the support that home visitation services offer parents by promoting healthy parent-child relationships and early childhood development.
- We believe that community collaboration enhances services to families.
- We believe a centralized organization for research, information, training and networking benefits home visitation programs in Alberta.

Busy! The new normal

By Claudette Pelletier-Hannah

Do you know anyone who isn't busy? Someone who also has a pulse, that is. It doesn't matter if you have six kids or an empty nest, if you're a CEO or Joe Blow. You tend to fill the time you have.

The sad truth is that for a vast majority of people, busy is the new normal. The sooner we accept that and make it work for us, the better off we will be. P. Silas of Phillips Petroleum said, "We can't wait for the storm (of change) to pass. We'll all have to learn to work in the rain."

Clients and would-be clients often tell me, "As soon as I get over this ____, I can get serious about working out/coaching, etc."

If you're waiting for the perfect time to make your health and wellness a priority, you will never get past waiting. You will always be too busy to do what you want to do. If you work in the rain, it means you're able to live in the present, storm clouds and all. Look around and you will see people who are indeed very busy, who manage to fit in a workout.

AHVNA board members came together in the fall for a board development workshop, and to update the association's vision and mission. The working group included, (from front, left): Tobi Kemp, Marianne Symons (chairperson), Nicole Whitton; (middle row, from left): Kathy Crothers, Betty Miller, Linda West, and (back from left) Sandra Logan, Lori Prediger, Dawn Boustead and Lavonne Roloff.



Entrepreneur Linda Maul is a good example. Within a long workweek that includes travel and grandchildren, Linda manages a variety of activities from pool to pavement. "I absolutely love it when I commit to the time. I always feel energized afterwards. I couldn't be without exercise, as it really does alleviate the stress in my world. Consistency remains a challenge because of my travel schedule, but I adapt my program to fit the week."

Not only does physical activity build energy and make you more productive, so does eating right. Pay attention to how you feel and how effective you are when you don't eat well. You will probably find that eating low-quality foods contributes to your stress load by creating hills and valleys in your energy and appetite. Eating well does not take more time, it takes planning, which saves time. It's much like creating an agenda for a meeting. You know what happens when there isn't one.

You do have time to exercise and eat well. You can't afford not to. Of course there will be times when you just can't fit in the squash game and you need to wait for the storm to pass. Dry yourself off and start again. Most of the time it's best to stick to the agenda. Only you know for sure.

So how do you adapt to the new normal so you can sing in the rain? Accept that your life is busy and make it work. In other words, stop waiting for when you won't be busy. Create an agenda. In so doing, it's important to know yourself and just how much busy-ness you can and want to handle. If you are continually exhausted and overwhelmed you're trying to do too much. It's time to re-evaluate your priorities. Working from a hospital bed just isn't attractive. Meanwhile, check your pulse. If you have one, there is still time to make changes.

Claudette Pelletier-Hannah is a wellness coach. For more information check out her website www.weightandwellnesscoach.ca

Weight loss equals brain gain:

One home visitor walks the talk about setting goals and going after them

By Tracy Gustafson

I have a wonderful job, a very close relationship with my family, three beautiful children and a husband I have been married to for 18 years. Life should be great – but it wasn't. Inside I was drowning.

I was overweight and self conscious of how that made me look and feel. I poured my energy into meeting my family's needs and work to avoid facing a goal I thought I could never achieve. A few years ago, family events positioned me as the "strength – the one to count on". I took on this role proudly as it is "what I do". I support, I provide encouragement, resources and focus on the positives. This is my role as a home visitor and this is how I try to live my life. The problem was, I was forgetting about myself. The weight was still an issue, I had no energy and even when the events in my life were improving, my mental health was not.

Work was busy, kids and household routines were overwhelming. I work with families every day who have obstacles to overcome. I help them to set goals and offer suggestions on how to meet those goals. I am good at what I do, but, I felt like a hypocrite. Why could I not do this for myself?

My job requires a lot of travel, so this provides time to reflect. I was frustrated. I felt I was losing myself, my confidence, my control, to the point that I did not recognize the person I had become. I decided to view myself as a client. How would I support someone in my shoes? I had tried many diets, diet pills and programs with limited success. I needed to find something to help me improve and positively change my lifestyle. I began to research, make calls and scan the Internet for anything that could help to achieve my goals.

I decided on Weight Watchers. The tools they provide give me control to make the choices I want and the flexibility to fit it into

my lifestyle. I started Weight Watchers eight months ago and just this week, I reached a loss of 94 lbs. The plan has supported my personal goal to lose weight but I wasn't expecting what my accomplishments would do for my mental health.

I have energy now and exercising has become a part of my daily routine. I look forward to every day and the new challenges that arise. The other lesson that I discovered is that I was not alone. When I reached out and decided to "try", the support and encouragement from my family, friends and community was huge. I owe most of my success to this. Just a suggestion or a kind word of support helped me to get through the tough times when I just wanted to give in.

I always believed in my role as a home visitor and that positive support can make a huge difference in someone else's life, but to be on the receiving end? Wow!

My confidence is back. Yes, it is nice to lose the weight – but the feeling of accomplishment that I can achieve goals I have set for myself is overwhelming. I still have a way to go – but I will get there. I have made a lifestyle change. I am not on a diet. I can achieve my goals and a healthy life balance is now my focus. I am now mentoring others who want to achieve similar goals and my ability to support and focus on the strengths of the families I work with, is stronger than ever.

– Tracy Gustafson is a home visitor with Accredited Supports to the Community in Olds, Alberta.



Doing the Right Thing

By Duane Massing

Learning to “do” home visitation is a lot like learning to live in a new culture. Practising ethically is a critically important part of that culture. It is important to learn skills, legislation, policies and so on, but this knowledge has little meaning if it is not embedded in a base of values and ethics. Ethical decision-making is about deciding what is the right thing to do and then acting upon that decision. In home visitation the process may be complicated by the fact that you usually work with a family for a long period of time.

We process ethical decisions through what I would call our best ethical selves. This is a whole self that draws upon the resources of all its parts and approaches life with the humility of knowing it is not the centre of the universe. In coming to our best ethical selves, we draw consciously and purposively from all the life experiences and people we have known. We also draw from diverse ideas and traditions about ethics.

Deontological, absolutist or duty ethics claim that there are universal and unchanging rules or duties that each of us must follow. Utilitarian ethics claim that the aim of ethical action is to secure the greatest happiness and good. Utilitarian ethics can be focused on the greater happiness or good for an individual or for community or society. Teleological ethics claim that a good end justifies whatever means are necessary to reach it.

Relational ethics, as described by bioethicists Vangie Bergum and John Dossetor, “attend to the art of ethics, which is tied to attributes of love, compassion, and nurturance—subjective attributes of feeling. It is proper, we submit, to use intimate or ‘close up’ words such as love or nurturance, because [care] touches personal, complex, and profound joys and sorrows of life as lived. The love we speak of here is not intimate in a personal, self-serving, or

sentimental way, rather, relational love, which is made of understanding, is person-directed (to both self and other), deliberate, strong and intentional.”

Some will say it is dangerous to use words like “love” and “intimacy” to describe the work we do with families. But surely they are useful words to describe the essence of helping relationships. I like Kathy Weingarten’s simple definition of love as the “co-creating” of new life and a new reality. It may be unethical not to express our caring for clients in an intimate way within a relational space. If we offer important gifts of compassion, knowledge, skill and resources to our clients, they offer important gifts to us in return. It is important that we, and the families we serve, see each other as human beings. Their resilience is often an inspiration to us.

The ethics of boundaries

“One of my clients has invited me to her daughter’s second birthday party. We’ve been through a lot together. I wonder if I should go.”

– *Family Visitor*

The construction of boundaries or lines between us reflects a particular ideology—the Western pre-occupation with individualism, privacy, separation and identity, freedom and self-determination. People from other cultural traditions (including Canada’s first nations) are apt to bring quite different notions of the proper relationship between families and helping professionals. Indeed, in many cultures, “help” is what family, community members, and respected elders do. Some will say our preoccupation with boundaries is evidence of our alienation from one another. Some will say it reflects our fear of difference and fear of intimacy.



Whatever the merits of such arguments, our entire social structure in general—and our human service system in particular—demands that we work within clear boundaries. Boundaries are lines that divide the helping person from the one helped. They are intended to separate the helper's personal roles and interests from professional roles, and to create a productive and safe relationship and environment for service provision. We often think of our differences as being the challenge in a helping relationship, but it may be the similarities and common grounds that give us more trouble. Professional boundaries are built upon recognition of a power imbalance between helper and helped, and on the possibility of harm to the family if the helper uses such power inappropriately. Clear boundaries also protect the helper.

According to leading social work ethicist Frederick Reamer (2003), boundary issues can be placed in five categories: intimate and sexual relationships, pursuit of personal benefit to the helper, meeting of the professional's emotional and dependency needs, altruistic gestures, and responses to unanticipated circumstances. A professional enters into a dual relationship whenever he or she assumes a second role with a client, becoming (as well as helper) a friend, employer, teacher, business associate, family member, or sex partner. A practitioner can engage in a dual relationship whether the second relationship begins before, during, or after the (helping) relationship.

There are two kinds of boundary issue, according to Reamer. A boundary crossing "occurs when a (helper) is involved in a dual relationship with a client or colleague in a manner that is not intentionally exploitative, manipulative, deceptive, or coercive...the consequences of boundary crossings may be harmful, salutary, or neutral."

A boundary violation occurs when a (helper) engages in a dual relationship with a client or colleague that is exploitative, manipulative, deceptive or coercive. Not all dual relationships are negative. Some are unavoidable, especially in rural, remote or Aboriginal communities, just because of the activities of daily life. Some are unavoidable due to cultural traditions. Some boundary crossings may even be helpful or therapeutic for the client.

It is important, though, that as professionals we are always aware of dual relationships and that we manage them appropriately. Always be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest. Be aware of little red flags that signal a possible issue or problem. Discuss/process potential or actual conflicts of interest with clients where possible, exploring possible resolutions and possible consequences with them. Seek their informed consent where appropriate.

Consult with supervisor, team leader, colleagues, literature, code of ethics, agency policies. Secrecy is not an option. Develop a plan of action. Document all discussions,

consultations, supervision and other steps taken on an ongoing basis. Your records will always be your friend, even if your decision—made in good faith and carefully recorded—later proves not to be the best one. Monitor implementation of an action plan.

If you are a supervisor or team leader, you have both an ethical and a legal responsibility to ensure that staff who report to you are aware of these issues and of appropriate measures to deal with the challenges that arise. The best preventive measures are educating staff about ethical issues and creating a work climate that encourages open disclosure and discussion of ethical challenges.

– Duane Massing, Ph.D., RSW, is a social work instructor at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. A more complete version of this article including references may be obtained from the author at massingd@macewan.ca

Web links for working safe

Tannas Ward, Occupational Health and Safety Officer in Red Deer provides the following links on hazard assessments, and working alone, which appear on the Alberta government's Work Safe website.

http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_wa002.pdf

http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_workingalone.pdf

http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_wa001.pdf

http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_smb002.pdf

Helpers struggle with self care

By Kathleen Johnston



Most people in the role of “helper” have generous hearts. By their very nature they are caring and compassionate people; it’s a core part of who they are. That’s the good news. The not-so-good news is that compassionate helpers often have difficulty applying that caring nature to themselves.

Most of us in the helping professions know that to prevent burnout we must practice good self-care. Yet the relentlessness of our daily demands too often prevent us from taking the time to extend the gift of caring to ourselves. So what’s the answer? The reality is that there is no single answer. The problem is complex and the behavior we need to change is inherent to our care-giving natures. It takes intention along with persistence to implement self-care habits.

Here are some helpful suggestions:

- Identify the expectations you hold for yourself for each one of your current roles—both paid and unpaid. Remember that a role is a socially recognized comprehensive pattern of behavior—employee, mother, sister, community volunteer, friend. Then critically examine where you may be over-functioning. Be honest with yourself in this exercise.
- Choose your commitments carefully. Do you have a tendency to get more involved with people or tasks than you want to and then can’t back away? This may come from an over-developed sense of responsibility or from over-functioning as a caregiver. But it’s also a habit that can be changed by establishing and maintaining healthy personal boundaries. You can learn to say “no.” A helpful tip—do not say yes or no to a request for your time immediately. Learn to say, “I’ll need to check my schedule/calendar/commitments and get back to you.” Then only say “yes” if it fits your current priorities.
- Know your “satisfiers.” There is an interesting relationship between stress energy and satisfaction. When the amount of satisfaction you experience is greater than the stress energy you expended to achieve it, you are far less likely to experience stress overload. Do you know what truly satisfies you and what gives you that wonderful fulfilled feeling? A “satisfier” is an experience that you have had in the past and that you know you want to have again. It felt good; it made you feel happy. To discover your satisfiers, simply think about those things that you’ve experienced and that you look forward to doing again. Or think about something that, when you finished it, you said to yourself, “Yes! That was great!” Think about the things you love to do so much that you lose all track of time when you are engaged in them. Those are all satisfiers.
- Build in personal relaxation, meditation or spiritual ritual time into your life. Parker J. Palmer, author of *A Hidden Wholeness* writes, “We are born with a seed of selfhood that contains the spiritual DNA of our

uniqueness—an encoded birthright knowledge of who we are, why we are here and how we are related to others.”

- Our true self is a point of reference for our overall well being. The stress and business of our daily lives can too easily undermine this potential. Each one of us needs to be intentional about creating sacred time and sacred space to nurture our true selves.
- Scholar and scientist Joan Borysenko suggests building a “mini-Sabbath” into your week. Maybe it’s only two to three hours and simply involves a time for meditation or a hike or just sitting under the shade of a tree. The important thing is to create a ritual for real rest.
- Make self-care and personal health your #1 priority. Think about the last time you traveled anywhere by air and recall the words of the steward as he or she demonstrated the use of oxygen masks and said, “Remember to put your own mask on first.” Think about what you need to do right now to protect yourself—to build your health resiliency so that you can care for others. Do you eat healthily, exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight, get adequate rest? Examine your habits and make a commitment to yourself for self-care and health!

– Kathleen Johnston, MA, is a registered clinical counsellor and certified coach who specializes in helping people manage the stress of their demanding careers. Check out her website: www.kathleenjohnston.com

Reconstructing life WITH Stress

By Sonia J. Lupien

How do we cope with stress? Ah, the million dollar question. In reality, we have two options. Eliminate stress from our lives: IMPOSSIBLE. Learn to live with stress: POSSIBLE.

To manage stress, first keep in mind two principles: There are no easy solutions. There are no universal solutions. And then keep in mind two laws. The first is that a situation is only stressful if you interpret it as being stressful. For a situation to be stressful you must feel it comprises Novelty, Unpredictability, a Threat to your ego, and leaves you with a poor Sense of control (N. U. T. S.) This is why stress is an individual and highly personal phenomenon. What is novel to you may not be novel to another. Secondly, everyone deals with stress in a different way. Some become withdrawn, others lash out and still others thrive on stress! This is why there are no universal stress-management techniques.

While meditation or yoga can work for some, for others they would amount to torture and induce more stress. We each have to find our own personalized way to deal with stress. But we have a few tips to help you do so. First of all, forget the past! Let's work on stress as it hits you in the here and now and for the rest of your life. Your stress response system may not know

that we are in 2008 and still thinks we are hunting mammoths. It may not know the difference between a mammoth and a traffic jam. It secretes the same stress hormones whether you are stuck in traffic or being chased by an aggressive bear. Both scenarios have the same effect on your mind and body. Since you know this now, you can fool your stress system and decrease its response.

How? Listen to your body! When you feel your heart begin to race, you feel flushed, you begin to sweat and you start feeling edgy and angry, you are likely having a stress response. One way to fool our stress response system is to convince it that there are NO mammoths around. The trick is to get your brain to understand that the situation you are in is not so threatening. Then momentarily bring to mind an image, an event, or anything you find pleasant and soothing. You will see that it gets more effective with a little practice.

Don't stand there day dreaming for 10 minutes. Simply call the image to mind briefly a few times. The few minutes you will use to move and breathe will help to prevent the decreased productivity that often accompanies being tense, stressed and worried. After that, try to use up some of the energy that was mobilized during your stress response. This will help tide you over until you can use more long-lasting solutions for stress management.

—Sonia J. Lupien, Ph.D., is director of the Centre for Studies on Human Stress, Douglas Institute in Montreal. Check the website for more information: www.douglas.qc.ca/stress



On the home front:

A comment from a home visitor

It's important to be conscious of what we do. I try to pay attention to the inside—the feelings, the intuition and the cautions that are there. I am learning to live mindfully, to relish the happy times and to find the lesson in the tough times. If I do this for myself, I can also help facilitate this in the moms I work with. I also try to have a balanced life, paying attention to all parts of me, so that I can come to my families "filled up". For at least that one hour of the week, they can have my undivided attention and energy and I can be present for them. This is what I aim for, because we all know life gets away on us at times and we lose this for awhile. It's a process and as long as we keep going in the right direction, it will be good.

—Liz Wolfram, Grande Prairie
Healthy Families

Coming up

The next issue of *Connections* will focus on the theme of attachment. If you would like to submit an article or resource please contact the AHVNA office.

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 correspondence to: Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA Provincial Director, at 780-429-4787 or email: info@ahvna.org

Editor: Cheryl Moskaluk

Contributors: Lavonne Roloff, Claudette Pelletier-Hannah, Duane Massing, Tracy Gustafson, Kathleen Johnston, Sonia J. Lupien, Liz Wolfram, Tannas Ward.

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Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

AHVNA
9321 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 3T7

Phone: (780) 429.4787
Fax: (780) 429.4784
Email: info@ahvna.org
Website: www.ahvna.org

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Meet our board!

In each issue of *Connections*, we are proud to introduce you to some of the board members of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association.



Nicole Whitton

Nicole is married and has two children. She was born and raised in Edmonton. She graduated from the Child and Youth Care program in 1998.

Nicole Whitton has been involved in home visitation since it started in October 1998 in Edmonton. She was a family visitor with the Healthy Families program at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society for four years and has been the team leader/ program manager of the program for the last five years. Nicole has been an AHVNA member since it began and joined as a board member in June 2007.

Nicole is extremely proud to be part of the home visitation family. Her passion for it is reconfirmed every day through the families—the stories that are shared and the relationships that are built. Nicole does her best to pass along the words of her mentor Shauna Seneca, "Relationship is everything; relationship is a powerful thing. Always be gentle and kind to one another..."



Dawn Marie Boustead

Dawn is the Healthy Families program manager for the Children's Cottage Society in Calgary.

Dawn was born in Lynn Lake, Manitoba and moved to Calgary in 1987. Dawn has her diploma in Early Childhood Development, Social Work, and has completed the following certificates: Children's Mental Health, Indigenous Leadership, and Management in Early Childhood Programming. Her passion and knowledge is in the area of home visitation, training new home visitors and providing crisis support to families in need. Dawn is a trainer for Invest in Kids in the Calgary region and has also been a mentor for the Comfort, Play and Teach component of Invest in Kids. Dawn has been involved with AHVNA since 2002 and joined the board in 2006. Dawn is married and has two grown children and seven grandchildren.