

## OASW 2017 INSPIRATIONAL LEADER AWARD – JOYCE HAMELIN



Joyce Hamelin loves life: “I love learning, I love to be busy, which is a good thing, because every Social Worker knows, there is never, ever enough time. I love to be able to smile, to have fun and to laugh from the bottom of my toes.” Joyce Hamelin, MSW, RSW, holds a community position with the Geriatric Assessment Outreach Team at the Queensway-Carleton Hospital (Ottawa), where she has worked since 2000. She brings a social work lens to a medical model while providing in-home assessments and supportive interventions to her older adult clients and their caregivers. She is also engaged in education in a variety of teaching and facilitation roles, including the Ottawa Pastoral Care Training Program, Algonquin College Social Sciences, OASW’s Online Certificate Course “Advanced Social Work Practice with Older Adults”, and presentations as an adoptive parent at adoption panels for the Children’s Aid Society. She is being recognized by OASW as an Inspirational Leader during Social Work Week, which is celebrated March 6-12, 2017, under the theme: "Social Workers: Real Expertise. Real Life. Real Impact."

For many years, Joyce Hamelin has balanced a career including direct practice, part-time teaching and community education. Her clinical practice is characterized by passion, creativity and innovation in both child welfare and gerontology, having worked in a variety of social work positions with individuals and families across the life span. She has been a tireless advocate for the elderly, but also someone who has identified gaps in our social service system and worked to address them. She is a champion of change and a solution-focused clinician who is known for her optimism and sense of humour. She says: “I think that using the gifts of joy and laughter are unique aspects that I bring to my work, and they weave a common thread through all of the work I have been engaged in over the 32 years of my career. Of course, one has to choose, carefully, when one uses humour, but there are always moments presented and I look for those moments and use them strategically.”

As a community Social Worker with Champlain Rehab Solutions where much of her work involves end-of-life counselling and support, Joyce explains: “I am more than privileged to be a part of one of the most difficult times of a person’s life. I have worked in addictions, mental health, dealing with family violence, child and spousal violence/abuse, health care, criminal and family law, and experienced a myriad of professional and life-changing experiences. I have worked with people from many different cultures, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientation and gender identity. I have learned that people are people and we all have a story to share. We like to be heard, respected, cared for and to belong. I feel privileged to be able to come alongside clients from all walks of life, from all over the world, who are dealing with all kinds of challenges.”

As an educator, Joyce Hamelin has been able to translate the nitty-gritty of day-to-day practice into concepts that students and experienced workers can understand: “To me, education is the most powerful tool we have. Not one of us has all the right answers, but each of us has something to offer. If we work together, we can develop expertise as a community and then, we do have a real impact on real lives.”

When asked about social workers’ expertise, Joyce responds: “Social workers are experts at looking at the facts, assessing the situation, and helping a person or group develop a plan of action. This common-

sense skill helps to assist clients to move toward making the changes that help them to function at their best, given their particular circumstances. Our clients are living “real lives” and our interventions have a “real impact” because we can engage them in authentic, supportive interactions which demonstrate that *they* are capable, competent and resilient. Our role is to empower the people we interact with, as they feel heard, acknowledged and valued. People need to know that someone believes in their abilities to make positive changes. Offering knowledge, information, access to services, etc., provides our most vulnerable clients with the tools they need to make changes that are right for them. Change is one of our universal truths. Change always happens, whether we like it to, or not. So, encouraging someone to face their real life challenges is a role that I take seriously.”

Joyce adds: “Being an active listener is one of the unique gifts that many social workers have. In our field of work, we must always see each individual, family, couple, as totally unique. There is never a “one size fits all” answer. Each person, family or couple had experienced life journeys, which only they can fully understand. A supervisor once taught me, “*Never do anything for someone that they can do themselves.*” This is such an important lesson. If we rush in as “the expert” and take over, we actually undermine our clients’ sense of competency and confidence. By encouraging them to do for themselves, we demonstrate our belief in their skills and we show that *we know they are able.*”

When asked how she stays inspired in her work, Joyce Hamelin replies: “I am continuously surprised, excited, inspired and in awe of the clients I work with. *They* inspire me. They are strong, creative, determined and just make me feel humbled. Every single person I have ever met has experienced challenges that often cause me to feel awe and admiration. If they can keep going against all odds, I can keep going right alongside of them to encourage and support.”

Joyce’s own words, excerpted from her published poem, *The Journey*, illustrate most profoundly, why she epitomizes “*Social Workers: Real Expertise. Real Life. Real Impact.*”

*I look in the mirror and I see the compassion in my eyes. I see the strength. I see the opportunities.  
I look in the mirror knowing today is another day when I will look in to the eyes of people, just like me.  
I take a breath knowing that they, like me, have qualities that only they know about.  
I take a breath knowing that they, like me, need someone to walk alongside of them.  
I take a breath knowing that they, like me, need to feel valued and heard.  
I take a breath knowing that because I am a Social Worker, they will know that  
I see them and will walk alongside as they journey, just like me.  
I am a Social Worker.*

Joyce Hamelin is an inspirational leader in the social work community - optimistic, creative, stimulating. During Social Work Week, March 6-12, 2017, and throughout the year, take the time to acknowledge social workers who make a difference.