



KNOWLES CENTRE INC.

Helping Youth Find Their Path: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

INSIGHTS

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An inside look at the programs and services of Knowles Centre Inc.

Rik Skelton retires after 35-year career

This December, Rik Skelton, Director of Group Care, will retire after a rewarding 35-year career with Knowles Centre. Yet, for all his years with the agency, Rik says there was only one time – for a fleeting few minutes – that he ever thought about quitting.

It was about his third day of work and he was taking a breather from a hectic morning to nurse a few bruises from friendly rough-housing with the boys, Rik remembers. “As I sat outside the school looking at my car, I thought I could just drive away and hardly be missed.”



That was back in 1974. Knowles School for Boys had evolved from its roots as an orphanage, but still was not a treatment centre. It was just a place that social workers dropped off boys that

didn't fit in anywhere else, says Rik. As a new child care worker, his role was to keep the kids busy and out of trouble. There was no such thing as admission criteria or treatment plans. He says staff often flew by the seat of their pants when working with the kids.

Like today, young people at Knowles came with a variety of emotional and behavioural difficulties and troubled histories, although less influenced by drugs, violence and gang activity. For most, Knowles was a good place, Rik recalls. The boys attended school,

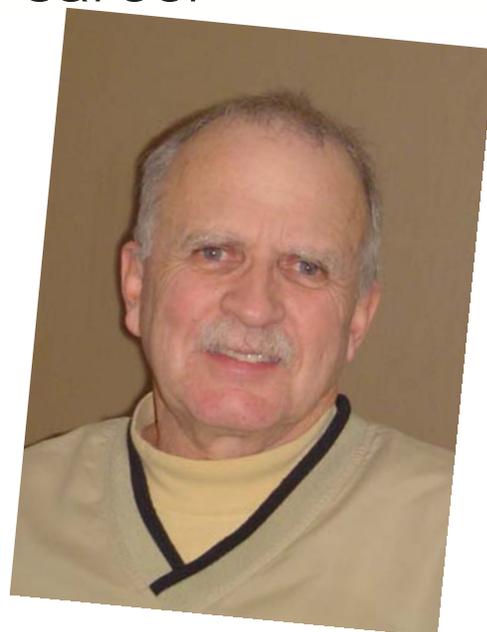
played sports, ate regular meals, and had a place to sleep.

While the kids could expect to stay a few months to several years, most staff stayed only a short time, using Knowles as a stopover to a future in social work or similar careers. But for Rik, Knowles became a place to build a life-long career and to make a difference.

Over the years, he was part of some major changes: Knowles embraced the growing child welfare movement to address clients' emotional and developmental needs in addition to providing residential care; it became co-ed in 1981 and was renamed Knowles Centre; and the first locked units were established, a move that helped to protect clients from their own bad decisions, not to punish.

It was always a great place to work, he said. Staff formed a close team and were always ready to help one another. Of course, times weren't always good, says Rik, recalling how the traumatic deaths of a few clients, due to their associations outside Knowles, deeply affected everyone. But, by far, the good times with the kids outweighed the bad. Recreation, camping and fishing were (and continue to be) one of the best ways to connect with kids. “We all tried very hard to provide the kids with a safe environment,” says Rik.

From his time as a youth care worker to director of group care, Rik has maintained the highest respect for the front-line staff who deal with the children and their multiple problems each day. Small problems can escalate



quickly and spark near-chaos in the unit if not for intervention from fast-thinking, caring staff.

“I have met and worked with some very amazing and dedicated people over my 35 years, both at the Centre and in the system – people who have truly made a difference in the kids' lives,” Rik says. “But I'm leaving on a good note. There is a young staff in place, all working together, to carry on the mission of Knowles Centre. It's truly an exciting place to be right now. The morale and energy are as high as I've ever seen it.”

Even after some reflection, Rik can't readily recall why he didn't walk away in 1974. Probably, he muses, a boy came out of school wanting to throw a ball around. Just as he was there for that boy, Rik has helped hundreds of young people find a better path in life.

He will surely be missed.

A Message from our Chief Executive Officer



I am pleased to provide an update on the progress at Knowles Centre since our Fall newsletter.

Our Treatment Foster Care Program continues to grow. Recently, we completed our second 10-week training session for potential foster parents, who may provide up to 40 new licensed spots for foster children. We have decided to postpone future sessions as we help these families become licensed and to place children in their homes.

Development continues on our independent living program, and we hope to enroll our first group of clients in early 2009. At present, we have over a dozen clients aged 16 or 17 who could be candidates for the program as they look toward living on their own in the next few years.

I also must recognize the accomplishments of our clients at John G. Stewart School. Principal Kevin Mackay reports that students set attendance records in September, and over the past 10 weeks in which 129 awards were given to students surpassing 85% attendance.

On a bittersweet closing note, Rik Skelton, Director of Group Care, is retiring in December after 35 years. Always a steady presence, Rik played a significant role in helping Knowles Centre meet its mandate: to provide effective treatment, to manage resources efficiently, and to advocate for staff, as appropriate. On behalf of everyone at Knowles Centre, I thank Rik for his loyal and dedicated service to our agency and clients. May his retirement be blessed with good health and happiness.

Best wishes at this special time of year,

Michael Burdz, Ph.D., C.Psych.
Chief Executive Officer

Manito Ahbee Festival creates excitement and awareness for Aboriginal culture

Knowles Centre clients along with some of their family members and staff celebrated and shared all that is positive about the Aboriginal way of life at the *Manito Ahbee Festival—A Festival for All Nations*.

The third annual *Manito Ahbee Festival* was held in Winnipeg Oct. 31 to Nov. 9. Its mission is to educate, entertain, inspire and unify all people through events like the Education Conference at the Convention Centre, the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards and the International PowWow at the MTS Centre.

In total 26 people from Knowles Centre were able to participate thanks to the complimentary tickets from the *Manito Ahbee Festival* and support from the Graham C. Lount Family Foundation to purchase



additional tickets.

Attending the *Manito Ahbee Festival* has become an annual tradition of the Biimautaziiwin Program. It is an effective way to create excitement and awareness around learning more about Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Contributed by Troy Fontaine, Aboriginal Cultural Coordinator and Spiritual Advisor

Youth Care staff participate in national conference



Knowles Centre Youth Care Workers Cynthia Brown (*above left*) and Carol May Watson (*above right*) attended the 15th National Child and Youth Care Conference in Charlottetown, PEI in October.

The conference opened with the Mayor of Charlottetown commending those who work with youth. He stated that youth care workers are valued for providing quality care to “our nation’s greatest resource.” Three days of keynote speakers, and educational workshops followed.

In addition to networking with colleagues from across Canada, participants enjoyed well-deserved sight seeing in the historic city, and walks along the waterfront.

Conferences are an ideal way for front-line staff, supervisors and educators from other organizations to share information from their unique perspectives and learn about the challenges faced by staff at every level.

“I strongly encourage all those in the field to attend a CYC Conference. In a profession that is stressful and has a high burn-out rate, conferences are valuable, memorable, and motivating,” says Carol.

The next International Conference is in Fort Lauderdale May 2009 (www.icycc2009.com). The next National Conference will be held in Winnipeg May 2010 (www.cycwam.ca).

Submitted by Carol May Watson, Youth Care Worker, Respect House

Thank you for caring!

We are grateful to the many wonderful individuals and organizations who helped make 2008 a better year for the boys and girls at Knowles Centre by sharing their support!

Air Canada – Dreams Take Flight
All Charities Campaign
Joyce Anderson
Assiniboine Park Zoo
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Karen Baker
Ronald A. Belanger
Belgian Veteran's Association
Ember & Wayne Benson
Frank & Marilyn Bissell
Marjorie Blankstein
Helen Bowen
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Walter Witowski
WOLF Billiard Table Mfg. Inc.
John Woodward
YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg
Edith Young

And many anonymous donors

Knowles Centre staff support United Way with largest-ever annual donation

The staff at Knowles Centre raised a remarkable \$4,070 for the United Way of Winnipeg this year – the most ever raised by the team of approx. 60 regular staff members.

While the majority of the funds came through generous pledges and pay-roll deduction, staff also held a 50/50 draw and a fun-filled GST (Goods, Services and Talents) Auction hosted by Chrissy Troy of HOT 103 FM. Staff bid against each other to win great prizes donated by local businesses, staff and our own board. Special thanks to the following donors for their support:

- 92 CITI FM
- Celebrations Dinner Theatre
- Elephant & Castle British Pub & Restaurant
- Fingers & Toes Day Spa
- Forget Me Not Day Spa
- Golf Dome
- Grace Café
- Journeys Travel & Leisure Super-centre
- La Radio Communautaire du Manitoba
- McGrath Diamonds
- MLCC
- Montana's Cookhouse Saloon
- Moxie's Classic Grill Restaurant
- Nicolino's Restaurant
- Original Pancake House
- Rae & Jerry's Steakhouse
- Roxy Lanes
- Sheron Miller
- Spa Lifestyle
- Speed World Indoor Kart Track
- Ten Spa & Fashion Boutique
- U-Putts Black Light Mini Golf
- Plus many valuable and interesting auction contributions from Knowles Centre staff and board members.

This year's United Way campaign at Knowles Centre was co-chaired by staff members Dave Purpur, and Kristi Venton, along with valuable efforts by committee members, Heather Chandler and Lauren Hershfield.

Staff News



Dave Purpur, BA, CYCD, will take on the position of Director of Group Care Treatment following Rik Skelton's retirement in December.

Dave joined Knowles Centre in 1992 as a youth care worker, and became Supervisor of Unit 2 for boys in 1999. He has a diverse background, including formal training in recreation, business and youth care along with experience serving on multiple in-house committees.



Lesley Gosselin, CYCD, has been selected as the new Supervisor of Unit 1, Knowles' on-site closed unit for girls. Lesley

joined Knowles Centre in 1999 and most recently served as a Youth Care Worker in Unit 2. Lesley was honoured to accompany clients in the Biimautaziiwin Aboriginal Cultural Program on a journey to Nova Scotia in May and continues to encourage participation in the program by clients.



Congratulations to **Dawn Vandal** on her selection as Coordinator for the new Supported Advancement to Independent Living Program currently in development. Dawn has

14 years experience working with youth in the Group Care Program. She began as a relief youth care worker, eventually moving to a full time position. In 2002, Dawn took on the role of Supervisor at Respect House for one year, and served as the Supervisor of Knowles Centre's Unit 1 for girls for the past six years.



Paul Clarke will take on the role of Supervisor of Unit 2, the on-site unit for boys. Paul joined Knowles Centre as a youth care worker

in 1992, and worked in Respect House, the community unit for girls, since it opened in 1996. He is looking forward to the new challenge of leading an all-boys unit and is committed to providing a positive environment for his clients.



A United Way
Funded Agency

Knowles Centre is proud to receive support from the United Way of Winnipeg for its Sexual Abuse Treatment Program.



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