

Where are They Now?



Name: Sharron Anne Callahan

Previous name (if applicable): Sharron Anne Kelly

Class of: 1968 Bachelor of Arts: Major Social Welfare, Minor Psychology

First job after graduation: Social Worker in the field of Child Welfare, Harvey Road, St. John's. At that time, one was assigned a specific geographical location and was responsible for all child welfare matters in that location (mixed caseload). My initial work was in St. John's East Extern, which included the Torbay Road area, to Torbay, Middle Cove, Outer Cove, Flatrock, Pouch Cove, Cape St. Francis and all nooks and crannies in between. We worked from 8:30 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. I vividly recall one time doing house visits in Torbay in the middle of a snowstorm and being pressured by my taxi driver to head back to town, but I still had visits left to make and we stayed until all were done.

Subsequent jobs: I held the positions of Social Worker Supervisor (Social Services); Provincial Adoptions Coordinator (Social Services); Assistant Director of Juvenile Corrections (Social Services); Director of Juvenile Corrections (Social Services & Justice); Youth Justice Facility Manager (Justice); Program & Policy Specialist (Justice); and Senior Program Development & Policy Specialist (Justice).

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Current job status, title and brief description of what you do: I retired from the provincial public service in 2002, having had a wonderful, yet challenging career. I enjoyed every position that I held and hope that I contributed in some way to making the lives of people who were in some crisis a little less difficult for them.

What advice would you give to prospective students considering social work as a profession? Social work is a profession that becomes your soul and essence for being. If you look at it as a “daily job” it will wear you out and you will very likely not be happy with what you are doing. Remember that you are NOT the solution to the difficulties people have, but the instrument through which they can hopefully take control of their own lives.

Always laugh and enjoy time with your colleagues, and do not focus on the stresses of your profession, as they will surely wear you out if they become so absorbing that they are your constant conversation. Be creative, as social work is often about looking for the common sense in life’s challenges. In short, find balance between your personal life and your professional social work life. And, keep learning from the people you engage with, either from an adviser or a client, as everyone can gain a new perspective of an issue at any time.

Favourite memory of your ...

Class: Our class was small and that allowed us the opportunity to know each other, outside of the classroom. We shared each other’s successes and challenges, had fun together, studied together, and helped each other out whenever there was a need.

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Time at the School of Social Work: Not applicable, as the School of Social Work was not yet established.

Time at Memorial: My time at MUN was wonderful. Our class was small and as a result, we were able to know each other fairly well and establish lasting connections. I remember well the student marches of the time, food fights in the cafeteria, and the awesome Winter Carnivals. I lived in residence and our daily routines of studying, relaxing, dating, residence raids, working the switchboard, gatherings in the common rooms, sing-alongs, and house meetings are fond memories that I will always treasure. I think the best part of Memorial in those years was the small enrolment numbers and the smaller size of campus. You knew everyone, or at best who everyone was. It was a great time to be in university. Some of these relationships have continued to today.



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Any personal or professional highlights or milestones you'd like to share?

My greatest accomplishments in my life include my husband Doug, who is now retired from the RNC, my two children, Stevan (real estate in St. John's) and Jennifer (teacher in Nova Scotia); my four grandchildren: Brendan, 16, Hunter, 13, Phoebe, 11 and Oliver, 7; and my step-grandson, Austin, 20.

There is a lot to highlight in my life, especially in the area of children, youth, and more recently respecting seniors. I have been a member of the Girl Guides of Canada most of my life, and I have had remarkable opportunities: a unit leader for Sparks, Brownies, Guides and Pathfinders; district, division and area commissioners; the Provincial Commissioner for Newfoundland and Labrador from 2002-2007, before taking on the role of Deputy Chief Commissioner for Girl Guides of Canada until 2012 when I became Canada's 19th Chief Commissioner of the organization - the only woman from this Province to hold this position. I also served as the International Commissioner for Girl Guides of Canada from 2014-2017 (also the only woman from Newfoundland and Labrador to hold this position), and in this capacity had some rewarding opportunities to meet women from all over the world committed to the same ideals of equality, inclusion, and empowerment of girls and young women that I believe in. I continue to be a Guiding leader in a local women's shelter and a member of the Fireside Friends Trefoil Guild.

Since retirement, I have taken on a new, but additional, direction. Since I am committed to the fair treatment of seniors in the province, I have taken on a variety of leadership roles, such as President with the NL Public Sector Pensioners Association and the Canadian

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Association of Retired Persons (CARP), the latter position I hold to this day. I am also a member of the Seniors' Advisory Committee for the City of St. John's and the Chair of the Seniors & Pensioners Coalition, which advocates in a unified voice on behalf of 14 member organizations on quality of life issues impacting aging persons and their families. I have been humbly honoured as well. I was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals, the St. John's Senior of the Year in 2013, Honourary Life Membership in Girl Guides of Canada in 2017, the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers in 2018, and most recently the MUN Alumni Award for Outstanding Community Service. None of these honours could have come my way without the love, support, and dedication of those who stood with me over the years: my family, my friends, and those committed to the same ideals.

All of the above are positives in my life for which I am humbly appreciative. However, I would be remiss if I did not mention some dark days during my career as a social worker. I was one of the key witnesses at the Mount Cashel Inquiry and even though that Inquiry is nearly 30 years gone, the history and fallout is still being felt. I, and a few of my colleagues of the time who were also similarly engaged in this investigation, struggled to understand "why", "why did we not know", "why could we not have done something", "what was stopping us" - we blamed ourselves, and got little or no help or support from those who should have helped us. While I did eventually find an answer that I could live with (from a most unbelievable source), I take comfort that the training, support, and mentoring of social workers today has advanced that they are better prepared to recognize and deal with issues with which they could be confronted.

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Did you take on subsequent education? If so, what and where?

1989: Public Service Commission of Newfoundland, Certificate in Personnel Management

1990: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Certificate in Criminology

1999: Recruitment and Selection, Centre for Management Development, Faculty of Business Management, Memorial University

1993-2005: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Division of Continuing Studies – many computer courses.

2013: Institute Corporate Directors/Rotman School of Business/Gardiner Centre, Completion of Governance Essentials Program for Boards of Directors of Not for Profit Organizations