

# Alumni Panel

The alumni panel will be moderated by Cheryl Mallard, RSW, Manager of Field Education and Field Education Coordinator, School of Social Work, Memorial University.

## PANELISTS:

### Joan Davis Whelan, RSW



Joan is a graduate of Memorial University, completing her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1979, and her Bachelor of Social Work in 1981. She completed her Master of Social Work in 1992. She has certificates in Discharge Planning, Leadership Development, Quality Management and Ethics. Her clinical practice experience includes Adult and Child Mental Health and Addictions, Family Violence, Oncology, Palliative Care, Dermatology, Medicine, Nephrology, Surgery, Emergency/Trauma, Women's Health and Child, Youth and Family Services. She has worked in Quality and Risk and in Human Resources –Organizational Development. She was Professional Practice Consultant in Social Work for Eastern Health. She was a member of the provincial working group for the 2008

Child, Youth and Family Services Clinical Services Review. She was a Field Education Coordinator with the School of Social Work, Memorial University until 2023 and has been a sessional instructor in social work practice courses since 1995. Her areas of interest include social work competencies and education, leadership, clinical services, ethics and evaluation.

She is a member of the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW). She is past President of CASW, past Vice-President and President North American region of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). She is Past Vice-President Global of the IFSW. She was a member of the IFSW Interim Education Commission. She is a past president of the NLCSW and past Chair of the NLCSW Discipline Committee. Joan has been a member of Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Policy subcommittee and Approved Continuing Education Committee. She has been involved with numerous community boards and committees. In 2025 she was honoured by NLCSW to receive the National Social Work Month CASW Distinguished Service Award for her contribution to advancing the Social Work profession in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **Natasha Fennelly, RSW**

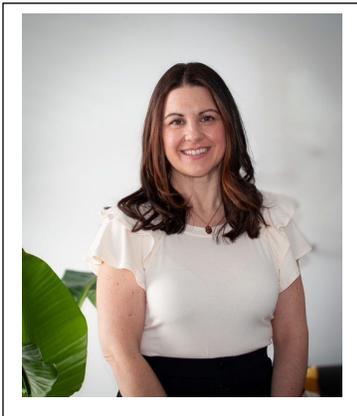


Natasha is a dedicated and proud social worker who is deeply committed to fostering professional growth, collaborative practice and strengthening service delivery. She graduated from Memorial University with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2009, followed by a Bachelor of Social Work in 2011.

Since graduating, Natasha has been employed with the Department of Social Supports and Well-Being in the Child and Youth Services Branch, where she has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting children, youth, and families. She was appointed Clinical Program Supervisor in 2019 and in May 2025, she advanced to the role of Zone Manager.

In recognition of her professionalism, leadership, and contributions to the field, Natasha was awarded the NLCSW Pride in the Profession Award in 2025.

## **Melanie Hickey, RSW**

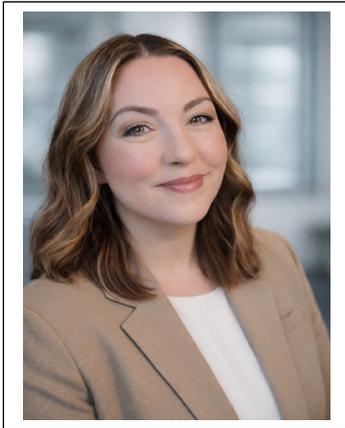


Melanie is a registered social worker with over 20 years of experience in mental health, addictions, and community-based care. A proud Memorial University alumna, Melanie holds a Master of Social Work from Memorial, where she was named a Fellow of the School of Graduate Studies for academic excellence.

She currently serves as Clinical Lead (Social Worker III) with NL Health Services within Primary Health Care, providing clinical leadership to social work teams addressing complex mental health, addiction, housing, and social determinants of health. Melanie spent 15 years at Stella's Circle in progressive roles as a social worker and later as Program Manager within Housing Services, contributing to the delivery and development of trauma-informed, Housing First programs and system-level service integration.

In addition to her public role, she maintains a private practice offering individual, couples, and family therapy. Melanie has also provided field instruction to many social work students over the years, supporting the next generation of social workers through hands-on mentorship and professional development. She remains deeply committed to mentorship, equity-based practice, and advancing the social work profession.

## Christina Murphy, RSW



Christina is a social worker and community impact strategist based in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. She currently works with SmartICE, supporting community-driven initiatives at the intersection of social work, technology, and Indigenous self-determination. As a settler working alongside Indigenous communities, Christina brings a reflective, relationship-centred approach to her practice, grounded in humility, accountability, and systems thinking. Her work focuses on employment readiness, youth engagement, and designing programs that are both socially responsive and community-led.

## Elizabeth Sheppard, RSW



Elizabeth is a Mi'kmaw clinical Social Worker from Corner Brook living in St John's. She completed her BSW (1992) and MSW (1998) from Memorial. Elizabeth's career has been primarily in health care, working in Corner Brook, St John's, Halifax, and Toronto within a variety of sub-specialties including nephrology, rehabilitative medicine, and psychiatry.

Elizabeth has always been deeply interested in research and clinical skill development and has spent much of career pursuing both. She became involved with the CASW national journal in 2011 and two years later became Co-editor with a goal of demystifying research and creating a publication that represented the needs of all social workers in Canada. In 2018 Elizabeth became the only EMDR

trained Social Worker in Eastern Health and championed hard for others to become trained at Social Work Research Symposiums, seeing the transformative power it was having within her caseload. Between 2018-21 she delivered National webinars through NLCSW and CASW on bereavement therapy technique and was honoured to receive the NLCSW Pride in the Profession Award in 2019. In 2021 her chapter "Differentiating Grief and Depression" was published in Bereavement Therapy Expert Dr Robert Neimeyer's newest release *New Techniques of Grief Therapy*.

In 2018 she opened ESH Counselling Inc., a part time private practice specializing in clinical anger, depression, grief and trauma with a special interest in working with indigenous populations and since 2023 has been working there full time. She feels this last chapter of her career working with indigenous populations in Labrador has her most personally fulfilling. She also fulfilled a long held dream to record her own music and was nominated in 2025 by Music NL for Indigenous Artist of the year. Her lyrics address the themes of love, loss and resilience and bridge the two parts of her identity as a social worker and musician.

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Elizabeth established the L'nu Sheppard Family Indigenous Student Scholarship at Memorial in 2024, to acknowledge the significance of three generations of Memorial trained Mi'kmaw Social Workers in her family - her father George Sheppard BSW (1973) MSW (1981) and her son Spencer Hewitt BSW (2024). She is delighted to participate in this event.

### **Rita-Anne Sheppard, RSW**



Rita-Anne Sheppard is a registered social worker with 13 years of experience working in Indigenous communities in Labrador. She has led programs in child welfare, family support, and community wellness, integrating culturally grounded practices and advocating for Indigenous-led approaches to social services. Rita-Anne holds a Bachelor's and Master's in Social Work from Memorial University. She was awarded the distinction of fellow of Graduate studies. In 2023, she has been recognized with the Pride in the Profession Award by the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers. She currently works in the position as Social Work Team Lead, working as an ally in prevention services for Innu children and families at the Innu Round Table Secretariat in Sheshatshiu, NL.