



Name: Karen Wanda Alexander
Previous name: Karen Wanda Stead
Class of: 1975 - Bachelor of Arts
1986 - Bachelor of Social Work

I started my B.A. program at MUN in 1971 with a Department of Social Services (DOSS) bursary of \$400 per semester. This bursary grant (approved after you were interviewed by a psychologist and a three-member government panel), at the age of 16, guaranteed me permanent work upon graduation and summer employment from May-Sept. for three years.

During the summers, I worked as a Welfare Officer issuing Social Assistance in the communities of Wesleyville, Twillingate, Clarendville and Bonavista.

Although the School had introduced a five-year social work program, with the ability to earn income after four years, it was not until after I began my permanent position in St. Mary's as a Child Welfare Social Worker with responsibilities for protection, foster care and adoptions, that I realized the professional value of having the social work degree. I was appearing in court on behalf of vulnerable families and responsible for decisions which impacted the lives of many young children and felt the social work educational program and its designation upon graduation would help with my professional credentials within the judicial system.

In 1980, with the approval of a flexible work schedule and a salaried four-month work term from the Dept. of Social Services, I was able to return to Memorial on a part-time basis to complete my BSW. I thoroughly enjoyed my work term at Unified Family Court in the field of divorce mediation.

First job after graduation: On June 7, 1975 I was hired as a permanent Child Welfare Officer, Dept. of Social Services, St. Mary's, Nfld.

Responsibilities included foster care, child protection, and adoption, with a caseload of 150. In 1976, I initiated an agreement to spend one day per week within Enright Memorial School in order to have easy access to complete the necessary child progress reports – the first School Social Worker maybe? Much lower caseloads today!

Subsequent jobs:

1978-1990: Child Welfare Social Worker, Harvey Road, St. John's

1990-1993: Child Welfare Coordinator –St. John's (1st S.W. coordinator position in the province)

1993-2003: Management positions for DOSS District Offices of Kelligrews, Mount Pearl and St. John's

2003-2008: DOSS Provincial Emergency Social Services Manager

2008-2015: VP of kAp Consulting Inc. – an Emergency Management Consulting firm

2008-2018: Memorial University in fields of Emergency Management, Enterprise Risk and Security.

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

Certified Emergency Manager Designation from International Association of Emergency Managers, 2013 (1st designated CEM for the province)

Legacy Leadership certification 2011

Salvation Army Volunteer Disaster Courses - 2008

Critical Incident Stress Management Individual & Group Counselling - University of Baltimore, Maryland, 2007

Front Line Leadership Certification in 2000

Human Resource Management Certification in 1993

Incident Command System 100 & 200 - 1993

Favourite memory of your...

Class: As described above, I wasn't affiliated with any particular class as I completed my degree on a part-time basis.

Time at the School of Social Work:

Great mentors: Dr. Dennis Kimberley, Janice Parsons & Sharon Taylor

Time at Memorial: I came full circle – I started MUN on a learning/educational path and am now finishing my career here on Nov 2nd.



Where are you now?

Associate Director of Enterprise Risk Management, Office of Chief Risk Officer, Memorial University.

I initially came to Memorial for one year as the Emergency Management Coordinator. I performed strategic management oversight in the implementation and delivery of Enterprise Risk Management, Insurance and Emergency Management. I'm currently responsible for the Campus and Enforcement and Patrol Security. I, along with a team, have completed strategic operational reviews of both the Parking and Security programs.

Responsibilities included leading teams in the development of their H1N1 plan in 2009, and all-inclusive emergency plans. I chaired cross-sectional multi-campus teams which developed plans for the St. John's, Grenfell and Harlow campuses, as well as for the Marine Institute.

Project management, active listening, assessment, analytical thinking, and interpersonal skills – all go back to my initial social work training and I use them daily in this field of work.

What's your favourite part of being a social worker?

Interaction with people; the ability to affect change.

My social work training has given me career opportunities which have been challenging, interesting, stimulating, insightful, and has kept me energized and motivated. Let's hope retirement and future volunteer activities continue on this path!

What advice would you give to prospective students considering social work as a profession?

- 1.) Be passionate about your profession! Remember - you may at any time during your career, even in some small way, be impacting a program or someone's life.
- 2.) Engage in continuous learning opportunities - you never know which path your training in social work will take you in your career journey.

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

Board Member of the National Habitat for Canada Board -2000-2012; Chair of National Habitat for Humanity Canada Board 2005-2008. A rewarding and challenging volunteer experience working with a team of people with varied backgrounds and vulnerable families who assisted with the building of their homes. My social work training and skills were constantly “put to the test” but I loved every minute.

Co-planner with Royal NL Constabulary (RNC) in 2014. Proud to accept on behalf of Memorial, the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs/Motorola Award for Excellence in Emergency Preparedness – for Memorial’s Active Intruder Exercise.

Recipient of the National Habitat for Humanity Kenneth J. Meinert Award for Legacy Leadership in 2011. This award recognized many of my social work skills while chair of the Board. The award recommendation cited “collaboration, mediation, facilitation, advocacy and mentoring abilities which will have a long lasting impact on many Habitat families”. The award also recognized our efforts while I was chair leading house build programs following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the U.S.

Recipient of the YM/YMCA Woman of Distinction Award in 2002. Recognition for my management oversight and coordination of Emergency Social Services during our response to the World Trade Disaster of 911 at Mile One Stadium.

kAp Inc. is the business acronym for Know your Risk, Assess the Impact, and Prepare your Plan. This company has afforded me the opportunity to develop Emergency Management Plans for the City of Mount Pearl; Cambridge Estates and to develop a federal Emergency Personal Services Handbook.

Collaborated with Dept. of Justice and led the Income Support Act and Regulations under a two-year special assignment in 2000-2002.

Gold Merit Award and Maple Leaf Award – Girl Guides of Canada, 1990/93.

Mount Cashel – being involved in the initial investigation with the RNC of suspected abuse in 1982 and the subsequent Mount Cashel Inquiry is a milestone remembrance from the earlier days of my career. Considered to be an expert in the field of child welfare, I was questioned repeatedly on our social work assessment skill training and how we made our decisions to place children not only in that institution but foster care in general.

As a Parent Teacher Association volunteer, I introduced the first “Care Kit” at Newtown Elementary, Mt. Pearl in 1985 - a sexual abuse educational program for schools.