

2017 NATIONAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AWARDS

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GOVERNMENT HOUSE
Fredericton, NB

Director at Kings Valley Education Centre honoured with national award

“Her heart has enough room for all of her children.”



“She fights hard, digs deep and values each and every family in her care.”

She’s **Jodi Hennessey**, Director of Education at Kings Valley Early Education Centre (KVEC), and those words of praise are from a peer, Heather Hamilton.

Jodi Hennessey was honoured today with a 2017 National Inclusive Education Award, presented by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) at a ceremony in Government House. The event was hosted by the Honourable Jocelyne Roy Vienneau, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick and the honorary patron of the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL). NBACL organizes the annual celebration on behalf of CACL, and this year chose six recipients from New Brunswick.

Jodi Hennessey was nominated for the award by a parent whose four-year-old son is enrolled at KVEC. According to Tammy Thompson, her son had been removed from three early learning and childcare centres before he was accepted by Mrs. Hennessey.

“In the past, a person would have given him a label and stayed clear,” said Mrs. Thompson. “Not Jodi. She did what other childcare providers wouldn’t do.”

Sarah Ansari, Early Learning Inclusion Facilitator with NBACL for the Saint John region, remembers the day she approached Jodi Hennessey about taking Alex Thompson into her care.

“Within minutes of my email being sent Jodi called me and without asking a single detail about the child said, ‘I’ll take him, when can we meet.’ Not only did she accept this child, she changed his life and the family’s life dramatically by providing a safe and welcoming place where he has the supports needed to be successful.

“I directly witnessed the impact [KVEC] has had on this child,” Ansari added. “His confidence level, independence, and social emotional development flourished, he started attaining his support goals, and most importantly, he developed quality peer relationships and developed a sense of belonging like he had never experienced before.”

Heather Hamilton, owner and director of Hamilton Homestyle Daycare and Club House in Saint John, wrote in her letter supporting Ms. Hennessey's nomination: "As our programming and inclusion policies struggle to keep up with social changes, there has been one steady force in the southern half of the province. . . Jodi is the best in the business at implementing functioning inclusive practices, [and] she is a resource for many in the field about how best to proceed in securing funds [and supports from] OTs and other agencies."

Ms. Hennessey is adept at using those supports to best effect for each child, too.

"She invites any professionals who are part of the child's support network for frequent team meetings where they work collaboratively on support plans," said Ansari. "In welcoming outside agencies into her centre, Jodi has been persistent and adamant that they follow the key principles and practices of inclusion."

The same goes for the educators working at KVEC with Ms. Hennessey.

"Jodi has high expectations for her educators and it's very clear when you visit KVEC that she has instilled in them that inclusion is a priority," said Sarah Ansari. Hennessey requires her staff, including herself, to participate in professional development opportunities on a consistent basis.

Ms. Thompson concluded in her nomination. "Tasks are measured by results. In the nine months that Jodi has touched his life, [my son] has grown from a child with a label to a wonderful, happy, excited five-year old who is thriving. She went above what was expected and, for that, my son Alex and I are now living a better quality of life."

In her remarks at the awards ceremony, Krista Carr, NBACL's Executive Director, said: "These are the stories we love to hear, when a child's, and a family's, life is so radically turned around for the better thanks to educators who embrace the inclusion philosophy and do everything to make it work in the centre, classroom or school.

"Helping every learner, every day, in every way. Jodi Hennessey is a shining example of this philosophy, to be held high for everyone involved in early education and child care – directors, educators, educational assistants, professional support personnel, agencies and parents – to see and admire, and hopefully emulate to their fullest capacity."

The Canadian Association for Community Living has been recognizing the outstanding inclusive practices of individuals working in Canada's education system annually since 2006, with local provincial and territorial community living associations charged with accepting nominations and selecting recipients.

The New Brunswick Association for Community Living has proudly organized the New Brunswick presentation of the awards since their inception. The awards ceremony has become the focal point for celebrations marking National Inclusive Education Month.

Founded in 1957 by parents whose children were not legally allowed an education in our public schools, NBACL has evolved and grown over the past 60 years and now works on initiatives that touch almost every aspect of the lives of people who have an intellectual disability.

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