



pres@caslpa.ca

Opening message Judy Meintzer

CASLPA President

At CASLPA's annual general meeting in May, Judy Meintzer, S-LP(C) officially began her three-year term as CASLPA President. In the interest of helping CASLPA members get to know their new president, Krystle van Hoof, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, had a conversation with Judy about two months into her presidency – near the end of July – about her past, her present and her vision for CASLPA's future.

Q. Did you always want to be an S-LP?

A. No! Actually, I didn't even know what a speech pathologist was until I was in grade 9 and had to write a paper on what we wanted to be 'when we grew up'. I flipped through a book of career options and picked speech-language pathology to write about.

Q. What attracted you to the profession?

A. I wasn't totally convinced until my interview for the program at U of A. Answering the questions they asked me about why I would make a good S-LP made me realize that I was actually really well-suited to the profession. I also had to write an essay on the importance of communication and writing that made me realize that this was something I really believed in.

Q. In your work as an S-LP, what has been your professional focus?

A. I've worked in positions ranging from clinical practice to management to coordinator to adult educator; but my interest and my focus has mainly been on pre-school – specifically, birth to three. Outside of the clinical environment, I have also spent a large part of my career trying to influence policy and service-delivery models so that our limited resources can be used as effectively as possible.

Q. What do you currently do as your 'day job'?

A. I'm about to be seconded for a year and had my last day at my current job today, actually. So, in my 'current' job, I work for Alberta Health Services (AHS) as the Professional Practice Lead. I have been working to ensure that S-LPs have everything they need to succeed – best practices, resources, training, etc.

Recently, I've been working on a project to develop a phased-approach to make iPads part of the approved 'toolkit' for S-LPs.

Q. And your secondment? Where are you going and what will you be doing there?

A. Well, I haven't started yet, but here's what I do know: I am taking over for the Manager of Early Childhood in Population and Public Health in Alberta Health Services. Early childhood development is something that the Premier has indicated is a top priority for her government. I think they have seen the writing on the wall; when you look at high school completion rates, crime rates and many other social issues, the research shows a very clear correlation with early-childhood development.

Q. What would you say is your philosophy in approaching your work as an S-LP?

A. We, as S-LPs, can't do it alone. There's no way there will ever be enough S-LPs to work with every person who needs our help so we need to also work at being 'coaches' to others, helping to create communicative environments so that we can focus on those who really need our one-on-one attention.

My other philosophy – if I'm allowed to have two – would be 'focus on function'. It's important to ask ourselves what we can do to improve a client's ability to connect and participate throughout the day.

Q. How long have you been a member of CASLPA?

A. I'm not answering that. Let's just say: it wasn't called CASLPA back then...

Q. Why do you think it's important to be a member of CASLPA?

A. It's just so important to have a national voice. CASLPA is in the best position to ensure that our professions are ready to respond in a timely fashion to whatever arises; government budgets, legislation, stories in the news – if it's happening and its relevant to members, CASLPA is there, speaking on our behalf. There are plenty of other reasons to be a member, but – to me – that's the most important one because no one else can do that.

 continued on next page

I also have to point out that, as the provincial colleges are becoming more established, I've heard some members ask why we need our provincial and national associations. What I think everyone needs to reflect upon is that, while the colleges are essential for our professions because they enforce a minimum standard of practice – thereby safeguarding our reputation as professionals – when it comes down to it, they exist to protect the public. CASLPA and the provincial associations exist solely to advocate in the best interests of our members and those who benefit from our services.

We also need to consider the difference between the 'minimum standards' enforced by the regulatory bodies and the professional excellence, which CASLPA exists to support. CASLPA aims to 'raise the bar' and move our professions forward through certification, professional development, awards, research grants, scholarships, publications and the list goes on. It's really important that our members understand that they are getting very important but very different things from each group.

Q. What do you think of our new quarterly 'CASLPA-in-Action' newsletter?

A. It's great! It shows members exactly what I'm talking about in terms of CASLPA's value as our national voice. As a member, these updates help me to understand what CASLPA is doing to build relationships with MPs and ensure that we are at the table when an issue comes up that's relevant to us.

Q. For the benefit of members who might not know, could you tell us a little bit about what's involved in being CASLPA President?

A. Well, first of all, I want to clear up a few points that I've been asked recently: This is an unpaid, volunteer position and no, I will not be moving to Ottawa (though I do look forward to seeing my new grandchild whenever I'm there!) I also need to keep up with all of my regular 'day job' responsibilities.

My actual duties include chairing the CASLPA Board of Directors and the Executive Committee, serving on the Governance Review Task Force and representing CASLPA on several national committees including the Canadian Inter-organizational Steering Group for Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology, the Pan-Canadian Alliance and the Council for Accreditation of Canadian University Programs in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. I also act as CASLPA's

day-to-day connection with the Board of Directors. If CASLPA staff need input or a decision from the board, they come to me first. I then work with them to determine the best course of action and decide if the executive or the full board needs to be informed or brought in to make a decision. (And, I must add, what a pleasure it is to work with such an amazing group of committed people!)

Q. For our members who may not be familiar, could you explain the governance review process that we're currently engaged in?

A. In the fall of 2011, the Canada Corporations Act, the law that governs the internal affairs of federal not-for-profit corporations, was replaced with the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act. The primary objective of our recently-established Governance Review Task Force is to undertake a governance review and recommend changes to our by-laws so that we can make sure we're in compliance with the new act.

Because we already have to undertake this review, we're taking the opportunity to make sure that we have a governance model that best supports our members and is as fiscally responsible as possible, i.e. avoids duplication. A lot has changed in the last 50 years; so, we'll be looking at the structure of our board of directors, comparing it with other associations and researching best practices that ensure effectiveness, relevance and clarity.

Q. CASLPA staff are currently redesigning the CASLPA website and we are researching a brand refresh for CASLPA and the professions. Could you tell us a little bit about the value of these projects for our members?

A. This is huge. I don't think I'm giving away company secrets when I say that the CASLPA website is long overdue for an update. Our website needs to be a place where members, the public and policy-makers can go to find the information they need. We have a lot of valuable information and our website has to be designed in a way that makes that information really easy to find. If we can do that, then we'll be well-positioned to be the go-to hub of information for all things audiology and speech-language pathology related in Canada.

On the brand refresh, I know you'll be talking more about the details in another article in this issue, so all I want to say on this is that my long-term vision for



(From left) Past President, Gillian Barnes; Joanne Charlebois, Executive Director and President, Judy Meintzer at the 2012 CASLPA conference in St. John's, NL.

this project is to get to a place in time where everyone on the street, everyone with a speech, language, swallowing, hearing or balance disorder and everyone in government knows what audiologists do, what speech-language pathologists do and what supportive personnel do. I want everyone to understand the important impact we have on people's lives and know that CASLPA is the hub for accessing information about our professions. Tall orders, I know – but I have seen other professions do it; so I know it's possible and now is the time to do it.

Q. What would you say are the greatest challenges facing CASLPA's member professions right now?

A. As we all hear every day on the news, "we are in a time of economic uncertainty": code for tight budgets. Tight budgets usually mean cuts. If programs or services are being cut, you want to make sure that you make yourself indispensable. This is part of the whole 'brand refresh' piece we were just talking about. As you explained to the board at our May meeting, branding is not just about a logo, it's about figuring out who you are, what your best qualities are and going out and making sure that everybody knows. If

we can do that successfully, the hope is that next time budgets are being cut, speech-language pathology and audiology will be on the 'indispensable list' and not on the chopping block.

Q. What personal goals have you set yourself to achieve during your term as president?

A. Survive. (Just kidding!)

This is a really exciting time to be president, actually. I'm really lucky. There are a lot of changes happening very quickly right now and I think we're really moving in the right direction. We don't have the resources of an organization like ASHA, for instance, so we have to look at ways to collaborate and achieve as much as we can with limited resources. We also have amazing staff. [Ed. Note: I did not add that in.] So, that will really help us to do more with less. My goal is to do my best to make sure that, as an organization, we are nimble enough to respond quickly to timely issues and 'punch above our weight', so to speak, in serving our members.

Q. Any final thoughts you would like to share with members?

A. Just that, as times get tougher for our country and the health-care system struggles to be sustainable, it is increasingly clear that what we [speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel] do is not clearly understood by most people. I think members need to understand that, if what we bring to the table is not clear, we will not be at the table. CASLPA cannot do this alone – they can provide the platform, but we all need to share our stories about the value of what we do. Honestly, and I don't want to sound like I'm fear-mongering, but I worry that our professions are at-risk. As far as I'm concerned, when the chopping block comes out, the only 'givens' are doctors, dentists, teachers and nurses. If there are four dollars to spend, those four dollars go to them. What we need to do is make sure that, if there are six dollars to spend, audiology and speech-language pathology are getting those other two dollars. And to get to that point, we need to be top-of-mind. To get to a place where we're top-of-mind, we all need to do our part to raise the profile of our professions by telling our stories. I know that CASLPA staff have plans to gather these kinds of stories from members in the coming months and I would encourage all members to contribute. I know that it can feel like you're 'blowing your own horn', but if we don't, no one else will!