

The Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education  
at Western's Faculty of Education and the Coaching to  
Inclusion Committee present:

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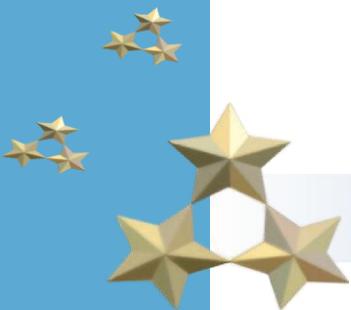
**2019**

**Champion of Inclusion  
Conference and Awards**

**Sharing our Best Practices:  
Overcoming Barriers**

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November 12, 2019





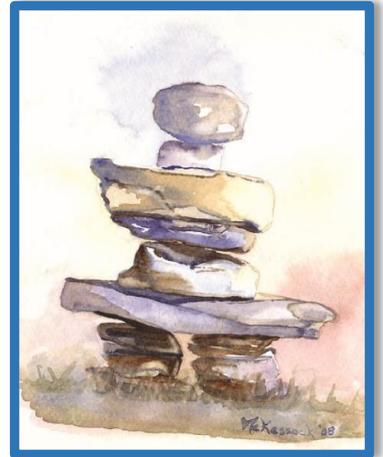
## About the Awards

### *The Philosophy of the Award*

The 'Champion of Inclusion' award was developed in 1999 to recognize, celebrate and highlight educators who live, breathe and implement Inclusive Education. They may be active in the inclusion movement but more importantly, their behaviour and the choices they make always reflect a positive attitude about the worth, value and ability of all students.

These educators use specific, authentic activities and roles to demonstrate to others the worth of inclusion and, as important - that the most significant ingredients for successful inclusion are effort and attitude. They celebrate all students attending their neighbourhood schools. They celebrate all students learning together with their age appropriate peers in regular classroom settings. They celebrate supporting all students to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.

Awards are presented annually to one recipient from each of the participating boards and community groups present at the annual 'Coaching to Inclusion' conference recognizing the efforts of these inspiring and deserving individuals.



### Why the Inukshuk?

What is true about the Inukshuk is true about people. Inukshuks in themselves are the product of cooperation. The hands and efforts of an entire group were required to build these massive stone sculptures. They are the result of a consensus of purpose, of focused action by a group united in its goal and labour. The Inukshuk reminds us that as good as our individual efforts may be, together we can do even greater things.

Thank-you to our aboriginal ancestors for this inspiration.

*Fiona Valiquette*  
*Applied Behaviour Analysis*

Avon Maitland DSB



The “sunshine” of Fiona Valiquette warms many of our Avon Maitland schools, as she brings her expertise, compassion and big smile to her role on the “Applied Behaviour Analysis Team”. Fiona supports our students and staff in countless ways. She listens attentively to concerns, then often comes up with a suggestion or solution before you can even finish your sentence! She often appears to preemptively put strategies in place so that students can more successfully meet and even exceed their set goals. She compassionately meets students where they are at and uses student voice to put plans in place that help students with autism navigate successfully through days that can be both challenging and rewarding. She recognizes student strengths and builds on them, and has been seen wiping away a proud tear when students celebrate both big and small wins. She is instrumental in making difficult transitions a little easier for kids. She brings together many voices in a team approach to making our schools more loving places, where everyone can find belonging. Fiona does not stop at only assisting the students who are assigned to her loving care. She would not hesitate to recognize a need in the halls or classrooms and jump in when assistance is needed. She is always encouraging, positive and hardworking, and for these reasons, should be considered deserving of the “Champion of Inclusion” title.

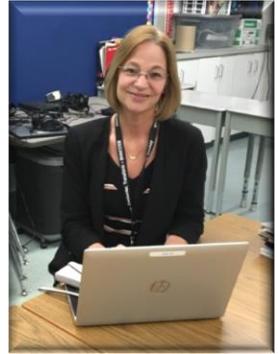


*Champion of Inclusion*

*Debbie Dignan*  
*Special Education Resource Teacher*  
Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

Debbie Dignan is a truly gifted and outstanding educator. Regardless of the many and varied portfolios she has held over the years, she has fully and passionately embraced each of them. Prior to entering the formal education system at Brant Haldimand Norfolk CDSB, she impacted learners of all ages as a preschool teacher for students with development disabilities, residential group home counsellor for adolescents and adults, respite worker, Montessori teacher, and Oxford Learning Centre education director. The knowledge and experience she gained from these roles has benefitted our system. In her roles as a school and system level SERT, she has excelled at building teacher capacity and promoting inclusionary practices. This has been achieved through the many PD resources she has designed, perfected and shared, which include the development of alternative programs for students with various exceptionalities, FASD brochure, multiple intelligences poster and flip chart, autism placemat, and self-advocacy tool for students with a learning disability.

Debbie has provided training and in-service on structured learning, autism, FASD, IEP development, assessment tools, multiple intelligences, alternative curriculums, and much more. Her dedication and commitment reach beyond our school board. Debbie served as a volunteer Board director for Contact Brant, and as a contributing member of the Ministry writing committee for alternative programming. She has sought out community partnerships to enhance student co-op placements that will lead to life-long opportunities, friendships, independence and an enriched quality of life. All of this demonstrates Debbie's many strengths as an educator, who has unselfishly made it her mission to promote inclusionary practices across our system.



## *Central Resource Team*

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board

This team of dedicated professionals service the entire system in all areas of special needs. Combined they offer students of the HWCDSB with over 300 years of experience.

This past year has been a shift from individual exceptionalities like ASD, Behaviour and DD teams to a Multi-Disciplinary team approach where each individual services all exceptionalities within their respective school communities. Together they work tirelessly with school-based Educational Assistants, Classroom Teachers, SERTs, Vice Principals, Principals, Senior Administrators, and Community Partners to ensure that all students belong in HWCDSB.



*Champion of Inclusion*



# Champion of Inclusion

*Andrea Longstaff, Teacher*  
*Megan Ritsma, Early Childhood Educator*  
Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board

Andrea and Megan are true examples of humble people who demonstrate inclusion naturally. For the past two years this team has acquired three very high needs students into their Kindergarten classroom. These students all required Educational Assistant support. Having numerous adults in their classroom daily, it was like running their own school with 28 students. Andrea and Megan continued to invite OT, PT, and SLP into their classroom, attended numerous team meetings before and after school hours, continuously advocating for their students in the most humble and respectful ways. Andrea and Megan navigate, co-plan, collect data and answer parent emails and inquiries daily with class and professionalism.



This team takes the time to order special busing for all class trips and masses and coordinates nursing services so all students are fully included in all aspects of learning. These needs do not deter either of them from implementing the Kindergarten program of experiential learning. Andrea and Megan advocate for and balance inclusion and safety of all of their students with precision.

These ladies show appreciation to their in-class team by checking in with them often. Andrea and Megan work together to share IEP goals and tracking for their students with their team and consistently know where each student is academically. They are faith-filled inclusive educators who always put the needs of their students first.

*Laurie Vereecken*  
*Educational Assistant*

London District Catholic School Board



Laurie Vereecken is the ultimate team member at Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School. She does not seek out individual attention or glory; instead she creates opportunities for the students, staff and community at large to work together more cohesively. In the 10+ years Laurie has been an Educational Assistant at HCC she has initiated many projects to improve the school community. Laurie has championed the “Best Buddies Champions” program. She has worked tirelessly with other staff and students on the committee to raise awareness and support for our students with intellectual disabilities. She helped to create “Minister of Inclusion” position for our Student Council. They ensure that all events and activities at our school are fully integrated and inclusive in nature.

Laurie works with our SCPP class in our Breakfast program and is a staff member with the Healthy Schools Committee. She works with the students to provide healthy meals for breakfast and lunch to the entire school community. All students are welcome to participate and socialize while they eat together and gather for meals. Laurie has also lead our annual Christmas Luncheon at Holy Cross since its inception.

Laurie is an imperative member of our Chaplaincy Committee. She is a Eucharistic Minister and serves as a mentor to both staff and students in celebrating our Catholic faith. She leads by example and demonstrates the Catholic Graduate expectations to our students in her daily interactions with them. In June, Laurie will be changing schools but continues to stay with our larger community. We know that HCC has been made a better place by her presence and influence on us. We wish her well in her future endeavors.



*Champion of Inclusion*

## *Allison O'Connor, Music Teacher*

Thames Valley District School Board



Allison O'Connor is an exceptional music teacher at Bonaventure Meadows PS in TVDSB. She has an incredible passion for music and ensures all students are included, valued participants in school concerts, trips, festivals and shows each year. Allison runs band practices and two choirs, all during nutrition breaks and has all students of all abilities perform. It is Allison's vision to create opportunities where people can experience the world of music in a fun, safe and supportive group environment. In this regard, she has created a "Dreams Come True Music Studio" in the community, welcoming children and young adults of all abilities to come together to sing, act, perform and form new friendships. She is inspired by her son, Cameron, who has unique abilities. Allison exemplifies the Champion of Inclusion award's philosophy.

*Champion of Inclusion*

