

Innovating Education

Special education at KidsAbility School is at its finest today thanks in part to the advocacy, innovation and leadership Grace Skanes brought to the K-W Rotary Children's Centre between 1963 and 1995.

Grace saw an ad in the K-W Record for the need of a second teacher for the K-W Rotary Children's Centre and answered the call. She loved every minute working at the Centre. "We had the unique opportunity to provide exceptional service, working as a team for the children, parents and other professionals, not available anywhere in the community," says Grace. Even in retirement, Grace continued to give tours of the Waterloo site for about five years; she wanted to show as many people as possible what an amazing place the K-W Rotary Children's Centre was.

"I was most proud of the excellent rapport we had with The Waterloo County and Catholic School Boards," says Grace, who helped develop a process for transitioning the students at the Rotary Centre to their home schools. "It was very important to have a process that was second to none," she adds. When Grace started teaching at the Centre, there were just two classrooms; it only grew from there.

"Our school was honoured by a visit by Dr. Charles Bliss from Australia," remarks Grace. Dr. Bliss had developed a symbolic language called "Bliss Symbolics" that treatment Centre schools had begun using to help non-verbal children communicate. He also developed a handbook to help teachers use this system.

Over several years and with much support from Dr. Burton Borthwick, Principal of the Toronto Children's Centre and the Council for Exceptional Children, the treatment centres were able to sponsor two major conferences on special education. Both were great successes.

Grace was honoured with both the Award of Excellence in Special Education from the Council for Exceptional Children, and from The Waterloo County Board of Education with the Paul Evans Award for Exceptional Service to Exceptional Children.

Next time you pass by the portrait of Grace Skanes at KidsAbility's Waterloo site, silently thank her for everything she did to ensure special education was top notch for children with special needs at KidsAbility.



Grace Skanes

Principal -
KidsAbility School Authority
1963–1995