



Richmond Centre for Disability

“Promoting a new perspective on disability”

FRANCES CLARK – WINNER OF THE 2ND PRIME MINISTER’S VOLUNTEER AWARD FOR LIFELONG ACHIEVEMENT



WORK OF FRANCES CLARK IN RELATION TO WINNING THE PM AWARD

Frances Clark started volunteering in 1953; and 2013 marks the 60th anniversary of her lifelong contributions in the community.

She was diagnosed with Osteogenesis Imperfecta at 10 days of age when it was discovered that she had two broken legs. In all, she has experienced more than 34 fractures in her lifetime; this bone condition also caused her to lose her hearing by the age of 18. To this day she relies on a very strong hearing aid for assistance. However, Frances has never let her disability hold her back. Despite not going through typical schooling, she completed her education through Government Correspondence Course; her passion for reading made her very knowledgeable in all aspects of life. Now at the age of 78 and using a wheelchair, she is still actively involved in a number of charitable organizations, leading their fundraising initiatives and sitting on their Boards of Directors and various committees. Indeed, Frances was the driving force behind the founding of five charities, with wide spectrum of focuses on dog showing; to human-animal bond and responsible pet ownership; to civic affairs and social policies; to therapeutic equestrian; to Independent Living Philosophy of persons with disabilities.

Frances is not a person who would give up easily. When we look at Frances, we understand the essence of participation; she is the best example of how a person can live a full life, regardless having a disability or not. She has shown determination, courage and dignity in her life; what she has accomplished is beyond measure and touches the lives of people around her.

Frances successfully turned her hobby in breeding and showing dogs into a community initiative to address local priorities which focused on community services and public education relating to responsible pet ownership and the benefits of the human-animal bond. During her term as President at the Western Federation of Individuals and Dog Organizations in the 1970's, she identified the need to eliminate the "no pets allowed" policies in BC Social Housing and helped to develop their responsible pet ownership guidelines which are still in place today.

In 1979 Frances started to make visible social changes and build community capacity when asked by Richmond Chamber of Commerce to take on the position of Civic Affairs representative to the City of Richmond. Since then she worked closely to, with and within many grass root organizations, assisting various projects such as the Caring Place facility which houses more than 20 agencies under one roof; spearheaded a Social Principles Study which brought together representatives of a wide range of service providers, and covered essential and social services along with issues relating to accessibility, cultural diversity and quality of life.

When she started the Pacific Assistance Dogs Society in 1985, she brought people together from the deaf community, Dog Organizations, the SPCA and experienced dog fanciers; and she established an affiliation with the world recognized "Canine Companions for Independence" in California to ensure service dogs would be trained to the highest possible standards and trainers would receive certification. The organization still trains service dogs today.

In 1985 Frances also founded the now Richmond Centre for Disability (RCD) by bringing together representatives from the City of Richmond, United Way and individuals with disabilities from the community to address the need for a representative voice for persons with disabilities. The RCD won the 2012 Business Excellence Award as Association of the Year.

The entire Richmond population has been benefited from Frances' effort and contribution, including businesses and governments. Her work was a key factor bringing the City of Richmond national recognition in 1991 when it was presented with the 5-Star Award for Accessibility by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Secretary of State and the National Committee on Disabilities. Today, Richmond is considered by many to be the most "accessible" city in Canada.

Frances is a leader and achiever to fulfill community needs by being a catalyst, a pioneer and be an inspiration. She effectively brings stakeholders together, and puts the key in their hands to open doors. She is always the first one to gather people and sit down around the table; sometimes the first one to leave when things are on the right track. Frances is never held back despite being born with a disability, instead she uses her understanding of barriers and challenges to mobilize changes in the community. She is truly a brilliant leader, always working for social justice and equality.

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