

Darlene MacDonald, MSW, Non-practicing MCSW Member

MCSW Member Representative

Region: Capital

Biography

With more than 30 years of experience in child welfare, Darlene MacDonald is a skilled and steady leader known for her professional, fair and collaborative approach to improving the lives of children, youth, and families. She has a proven track record of successful innovation and organizational change.

Darlene holds a Master of Social Work degree from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She started her Manitoba social work career at Winnipeg Child and Family Services in 1982 as a social worker in child welfare. Her early career at Winnipeg Child and Family Services included supervisory positions and led to the establishment of Manitoba's first Newcomers unit, providing specialized child welfare and community support services to refugee and immigrant families. This model has been replicated by other agencies and organizations. Beginning in 1992, Darlene moved through senior executive positions as a Director of Service, Area Director and Program Manager. In 2006, she became the Chief Executive Officer of Winnipeg Child and Family Services and remained in that position until the Manitoba Legislative Assembly selected her as Children's Advocate in 2011.

As Children's Advocate, an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, Darlene focused on the vital role of non-partisanship in achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable children and youth. The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) promoted the principles of administrative fairness as a demonstrated pathway to successful improvement of policies, standards and legislation. She completed her second and final term as Children's Advocate in April 2017 shortly after the announcement of improvements her Office had been seeking to the stand-alone legislation introduced in 2015. During her terms as Children's Advocate, Darlene was active on a number of Boards, both provincial and national, with a focus on the well-being of children and youth.

In addition to her busy work life, Darlene was an active Board member of the Manitoba Institute of Social Workers, precursor of the College, and the Canadian Association of Social Workers, previously filling executive positions on both boards. Her work on the CASW board resulted in the establishment of a Children's Issues Interest Group, of which she sat as founding Chairperson from 2005-2009. Darlene served as Vice President on both the MIRS and CASW

Boards. She served as President of CASW from 2009-2011, seeing the national organization through a challenging period of organizational change and renewal. In 2016, Darlene's impact on the profession was recognized when she received the CASW Distinguished Social Worker Award for Manitoba.

Darlene and her family live in Winnipeg. Her husband is a program manager in Manitoba's child welfare system and their daughter is pursuing a degree in social work. They share their home with Winston, a small but mighty dog.