



Interview with Gail Jones from Kerry's Place Autism Services

I recently had the privilege of interviewing Gail Jones from Kerry's Place Autism Services on their efforts to achieve a high standard of protection. Individuals with disabilities have a 7-10% greater chance of being abused than those without disabilities. I appreciate the priority Kerry's Place is placing on protecting their clients. I believe Gail's insights will be an encouragement and inspiration to us all!

Melodie: Gail can you tell us about the vulnerable sector that you serve, including the type of programs you offer?

Gail: Kerry's Place Autism Services provides supports and services for children, youth, and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families. In our Community Services department we offer a wide range of family supports. For children we provide various respite and social opportunities such as social groups, camps, respite for children experiencing a significant life transition, and overnight respite homes. Additionally we provide clinical intervention through Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI), and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). We also provide a range of supports to assist adults in pursuing their employment, social, and leisure goals. Kerry's Place also provides a significant focus on assisting families and community agencies through provision of Family Resource Centre supports, Family Groups, Sibling Groups, and educational workshops.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental disability. Over recent years the prevalence rate of ASD has increased dramatically to 1 in 68 children being affected. Children with ASD have difficulties in the areas of social interaction, communication, and often experience restricted / repetitive behaviours. ASD occurs in all socio-economic situations throughout the world and while a wide range of research is occurring, the cause of ASD has not yet been identified. It is known that it is in no way the cause of parents / caregivers.

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder can experience a much greater vulnerability to abuse and neglect. Conservative estimates indicate that 90% of people with a developmental disability will experience abuse at some point in their lifetime. Due to the inherent communication challenges that can be associated with ASD, this vulnerability is additionally compounded with difficulty in reporting situations of risk and abuse.

M: What is Kerry's Place doing to achieve a high standard of protection?

G: Kerry's Place is embarking on a comprehensive plan to increase the safety for the children, youth, and adults we serve. In creating this safety plan we wanted to first research best practices from other organizations and groups working towards similar goals. Thus we have had four senior staff attend the Winning Kids Train the Trainer course and have had two senior staff attend the Admin Leader course. Additionally we have been interviewing various agencies serving children with disabilities to learn about their practices in this area. The plan we are outlining addresses safety needs in the areas of;

- Staff training and increased awareness
- Review of and upgrading of existing Kerry's Place policies and procedures and development of new procedures where required
- Identification of best practices in supporting children with ASD with maximum safety considerations
- Increased documentation and accountability practices
- Review of architectural needs as relating to increased safety
- Education of children and adults with ASD on their rights to be free from abuse / neglect.

M: What is your biggest challenge in achieving this standard? How are you overcoming it?

G: Due to the nature of Autism Spectrum Disorder some individuals of all ages require support in the area of personal care. Meeting this support need must be done in a manner that is private and respects the individual's dignity and yet at the same time ensures the maximum safety and accountability possible. We are addressing this need through a variety of documentation and accountability procedures such as having clear written support outlines and protocols from parents / guardians for the areas of support required, in addition to adapting our daily logs to ensure additional accountability.

M: Why do you think this is important?

G: With the incredibly high statistics on the rate of abuse of children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities, it is essential that we first do everything within our power to increase safety and decrease the risk of abuse or neglect. While Kerry's Place offers a wide variety of very helpful supports for children and adults with ASD and their families, we must first ensure our programs and service locations are places where all individuals are safe and free to develop to their fullest potential. This level of safety must be a foundation for the delivery of our services in order for the supports to be the most effective. We at Kerry's Place feel it is our legal and ethical responsibility to provide services which are safe for children and adults with ASD, their families, and our employees.

M: How has Plan to Protect and WKI been able to help you achieve this standard of protection?

G: Winning Kids Inc. / Plan to Protect have been instrumental in our pursuit of a high standard of protection. Through the Admin Leader certification process we were able to engage in thoughtful dialogue on how our policies and procedures could be improved and the identification of areas of procedures which we needed to address. Through the Train the Trainer course we again were able to reflect specifically on how we need to train our staff on the new procedures and with the aim of also increasing overall staff and volunteer awareness about the issues of abuse and neglect. The team from WKI were very supportive throughout the process often encouraging us to reflect deeper on how we can take our supports to a higher level of increased safety.

Gail Jones

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40 years ago, 1 in 5,000 people had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Today, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states the rate is 1 in 68.](#)

Celebrating our 40th Anniversary this year, Kerry's Place Autism Services invites you to get involved.

Visit kerrysplace.org or [subscribe](#) to learn more about Kerry's Place and the many ways you can help us make a difference.