



**Meet Kalin McCluskey, the future of advocacy for those impacted by dementia in Canada.**

Kalin McCluskey is currently enrolled as a first year PhD student in the Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) program with a focus on aging and dementia at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton. Having previously worked with the Alzheimer Society of Canada and the Government of Canada in Ottawa she has seen firsthand the impact that the aging population will have on our society and particularly on fellow Canadians. Kalin wanted to make a difference in the lives of our aging population, with a focus on those living with dementia, which is what led her back to furthering her studies.

Through this program, she is hoping that this unique opportunity will enable her to pursue individualized and innovative interdisciplinary research outside the traditional boundaries of other graduate programs. The IDST program will inevitably prepare her for a career in creative thinking and develop innovative responses to the complex social, economic, scientific, and intellectual problems of the 21st century. This exciting new program is the first master and doctoral program to be offered in the province of New Brunswick in Aging and Dementia.

“It’s my hope that I can be a small part of an ongoing shift that is trying to show how normal and organic aging can be; and shift our policies and structures accordingly.”

Like many of us, Kalin wants to change the conversation. She has seen how the aging population is portrayed in the media, and how those perceptions can impact how they are treated in our communities. Half of those living with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia are still living in the community, there is that misconception that dementia is isolated to long term care facilities. That is why advocacy is so important for those who may not be able to advocate for themselves.

“I’m exploring federal policies related to seniors to examine how they can better serve the older adults for whom they’re designed. This will hopefully enable policy conversations about how seniors are served and treated by governments, and societies; and hopefully, beget some small changes in how we treat seniors.”

Despite the reach that dementia has on Canadians there is still so much stigma associated with this disease. Currently over 747,000 people are living with dementia today, just in Canada alone, and that number is expected to rise to 1.4 million people within the next 20 years. “I do hope through this work that the land of public policy that serves older adults can be demystified, and thus easier to interact with. Alzheimer’s disease doesn’t have to be scary.”

“The Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick was proud to be a part of the team who advocated for, and developed this exciting new Interdisciplinary program. The team also included the Atlantic Institute on Aging, the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation, the New Brunswick Social Policy Research Network, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Narrative at St. Thomas University, and was led largely by the tireless efforts of Dr. Dolores Furlong from the Faculty of Nursing at UNB. “If we are going to begin to change the conversation around dementia, we need to start by providing vehicles to inspire the young minds that will be our future leaders. This exciting new program represents one of the ways we can do this.” says Chandra MacBean, Executive Director of the Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick.

Anyone can make a lasting impact in their community, whether it’s through their studies or volunteering their time at our programs or joining us as we *‘make memories matter’* in the annual Walk for Alzheimer’s on Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>. Contact the Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick for more information.