



Marilyn Dolmage

*Inclusion Consultant &
Advocate, Toronto, Ontario*

Biography

Marilyn Dolmage works alongside disabled people, their families and communities to end segregation and create new supports and relationships. She communicates with a broad network of allies across Ontario, Canada concerning the law, provincial policies, educational practices, and advocacy strategies. Knowing disabled people and respecting their history of injustice, she sees that inclusive education and direct funding are keys in promoting better futures for people with developmental disabilities.

Marilyn began her social work career at Huronia Regional Centre, Canada's first and largest provincial institution, where her brother Robert had suffered and died as a child. She was Chief Social Worker to assist people to relocate and to close another such Ontario institution – Muskoka Centre. She has supported Huronia survivors in a class action against the Ontario government. Although financial compensation was frustratingly limited in a 2013 settlement, it led to an apology from the Premier of Ontario, and the documentation of historic harm and ongoing systemic ableism from the perspective of institution survivors.

Marilyn's family struggled to ensure that all three of their children attended school together and to assist her older son – who lived with significant strengths and disabilities - to have the education, medical treatment, employment, and community life that he wanted.

Matthew's sudden death at the age of 29 has heightened her resolve to improve policy, promote effective inclusion, and strengthen families, schools, and communities. Marilyn continues to help children and adults with developmental disabilities avoid segregated services by obtaining government funding, hiring their own employees and directing their own supports, to participate and contribute fully in their communities.

Since 1995, Marilyn has inspired schools across Ontario to work for change to welcome, accommodate and celebrate individual differences among their students. She assists families to raise expectations for their sons and daughters and advocate for the support they need to learn as members of regular classrooms in their neighborhood schools. She connects Special Education Advisory Committee representatives to promote effective inclusive education in their school boards. Her Master's thesis concerned the ethical responsibility of social workers to advocate politically for inclusive education. She has supported pre-school inclusion, gathered information from across Canada about innovative career development for students with disabilities, and led research into secondary school inclusion.

She has a BA from McMaster University, a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of British Columbia and Master of Social Work from York University in Toronto.

Marilyn is a valued member of Inclusive Education Canada's Network of Associates.

Marilyn is now completing a book that challenges ableism and encourages advocacy for inclusion - through poetry, personal stories and professional reflections about love and loss, care and connection.



Interests and Consultation

- Advocate & support families seeking inclusion in schools; strengthen teacher and school capacity; policy & funding that support inclusion; self-advocacy for individuals and families; community inclusion; strengths based planning; 'Aiming higher' – avoiding alternative lifeskills, behavioural and therapy goals

Contact **Email:** inclusion@sympatico.ca

Projects and Publications

Evidence of High School Inclusion: Research, Resources and Inspiration, Marilyn Dolmage, Jacqueline Specht, Janice Strickland, Heather Stuart and Gabrielle Young; Principal investigator analyzing how selected secondary schools develop and sustain their motivation and strategies to teach students with significant disabilities as members of regular classes.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279961938_Evidence_of_effective_high_school_inclusion_Research_resources_and_inspiration

The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education –a series of training podcasts for families and educators through The Inclusion Academy at <https://goodthingsinlife.mykajabi.com/inclusion>

Inclusion Action in Ontario

- Inclusive Education: From political correctness towards social justice – a film to support advocacy, dedicated to the memory of Matthew Dolmage at <https://inclusionactionontario.ca/why-inclusive-education/>
- Blog post honouring Orville Endicott to support family advocacy at <https://inclusionactionontario.ca/the-life-and-contributions-of-orville-endicott/>

Resources created with The Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education:

- History of the Coalition http://www.inclusive-education.ca/resources/documents/Coalition_summary_2005.pdf
- Definition of Inclusion
- A Tale about a Test: more questions than answers” – a parable challenging standardized testing http://www.inclusive-education.ca/resources/documents/tale_test.pl
- “Students Learning Together” - Marilyn Dolmage and Nancy Rother - from Accommodation to Universal Design



Projects and Publications

Remember Every Name – a group led by survivors of Huronia Regional Centre, especially to honour those who died there - <https://www.remembereveryname.ca>

Unloved: Huronia's Forgotten Children - Marilyn was Senior Consultant in this White Pine documentary film that tells the story of the lost brothers of Director Barri Cohen, through the involvement of Huronia Regional Centre survivors, allies and researchers.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f8da0d49dc6872504eb6520/t/6245e409c7705905b553a45b/1648747532949/Unloved+EPK-1.pdf>

“Unheard Voices: Sisters Share about Institutionalization” (Madeline Burghardt, Marilyn Dolmage, Victoria Freeman and Colleen Orrick) in the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies Volume 6, Number 3 (2017) on institutional survivorship

<https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/367/601>

“History examined: one women's story of disability and advocacy” in Disability and Mothering: Liminal spaces of embodied knowledge. 1st ed. (Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jen Cellio, editors)

[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL16486010W/Disability_and_mothering'](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL16486010W/Disability_and_mothering)

