

Leading the Way

In 1985, Stephen Swatridge joined the K-W Rotary Children's Centre located in Kitchener. This small, medically oriented clinic focused on a narrow range of children with physical and speech-language challenges. Change was on the horizon and Stephen was the person to lead the Centre forward.

"The first formal work plan I submitted to the Board identified three goals to be achieved by 1990: To achieve Accreditation status, to computerize our processes and to build a new physical space to replace the Kitchener site," says Stephen.

On their own each would have been an ambitious goal, but by 1988, KidsAbility, as it would eventually be known, received its first three-year Accreditation award and the support staff said "goodbye" to their typewriters shifting into the world of computerization. The final of the first three goals laid out in 1985 would become a reality 10 years later when the ribbon was cut on the newly constructed Waterloo site. Thanks to the remarkable fundraising efforts, the site opened debt free.

The new site not only provided much-needed room for existing staff, programs and services, but it also allowed KidsAbility to begin to expand services to better support the increasingly complex needs of its children and youth.

"We built an integrated system of services, supports and facilities that enabled children and youth with special needs to develop their potential and create for themselves a place of belonging in Waterloo Region. In so doing, we helped families to better understand both the nature of their child's challenges and the potential for their development."

After 27 years of leadership, which saw the opening of sites in Cambridge, Guelph, Fergus, Mount Forest and Kitchener, Stephen hung up his KidsAbility name badge in 2013 and welcomed his successor, Linda Kenny.

"My life was blessed by the people who surrounded the children and families served by KidsAbility – our staff, volunteers and board members. I enjoyed, for very different reasons, the challenges and the opportunities over the years."

"I reflect on many warm, enduring memories of KidsAbility that include the enthusiasm and creativity of the volunteers; the commitment of our staff to bring only their best in service to children and families; the operational excellence of the staff leaders who nurtured growth even through times of financial restraint; the leadership and altruism of our Board; and the financial and moral support of the Rotary Clubs who, after decades of service, continue to be dedicated to the mission. My most enduring memory is that of the children who faced their challenges with spirit and determination while being supported by their families whose love and encouragement served as excellent examples of how to live life to the fullest and fulfill one's potential."



Stephen Swatridge

Chief Executive Officer - KidsAbility
1985–2013