

Growing Guelph

Denise Watson was a newly minted speech-language pathologist from the University of Toronto when she first applied for a job at the Rotary Centre in 1987. After a shift in plans, she decided to accept a job up north instead. Two years later, Denise's path took her back to Waterloo Region and, again, she applied for a role at the Rotary Centre.

Arriving early for her interview, Denise remembers introducing herself to Mary Helen, KidsAbility's friendly receptionist. As they were striking up a conversation, before she knew it, Denise was caught up in the commotion of what was a typical day at the bustling Rotary Centre. A staff lunch party was going on with some serious shenanigans, including something that sounded like a human whistle! At the same time, the school bus had arrived with the children for their afternoon classes and thinking that Denise was a class volunteer, the bus driver plopped not one but two children onto her lap!

She laughs: "Mary Helen kept an eye on me and gave me a wink of good luck as I walked past her. I delivered my kids to their classroom and then proceeded to the interview room, which was a homemade library with seriously sloping walls!"

The interview was a success and 28 years later, Denise looks back and smiles on this initial and unique introduction to an organization that she has been proud to call home.

"I have had the privilege of working in many roles at KidsAbility, with many special kids and families, alongside amazing staff! There have been hard times and less-than-great days, but always the life, hope and promise of the place has remained."

As KidsAbility looked for opportunities to expand its services and sites to better meet the needs of a growing community, Denise found herself at the beginning of a significant chapter in the organization's history: a pilot project to create a team dedicated to serving the children, youth and families of Guelph-Wellington. The pilot proved to be a success and permanent funding and space was secured. Bringing services as close to families as possible remained a priority

for KidsAbility. Each time a new service was added, or new space was acquired to meet the needs of the children in Guelph-Wellington, Denise was at the centre of it all.

"KidsAbility has a life all its own and I am proud to have been part of it – shenanigans and all."

No matter what site Denise worked from or what role she has had, one thing remained constant: Denise is a passionate champion of the children and youth with special needs in our community.



Denise Watson

Staff - KidsAbility