

DASCH CEO receives lifetime achievement award

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STAFF REPORTER

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The chief executive officer of Direct Action in Support of Community Homes (DASCH) recently received a lifetime achievement award from a network that celebrates women who are raising the bar for women to be seen, heard and valued.

Karen Fonseth received the Women of Inspiration Lifetime Achievement Award from the Universal Women's Network at its annual awards ceremony held virtually on Nov. 14.

"One of my staff nominated me, and I had to be interviewed and talk about my career and my life as a whole, in that they make their decision on you as a whole person," Fonseth said. "Out of the 25 awards handed out, I never expected the lifetime achievement award."

Over 150 women were nominated for the awards this year, and Fonseth — a resident of Linden Woods — said she's honoured to be among the company of women who are mentors, business owners, truck drivers, scientists, lawyers and bush pilots.

"Monica Kretschmer, who founded the Universal Women's Network, celebrates women who have, as she puts it, keep putting one foot in front of the other, in order to persevere through difficulties life throws at them," Fonseth said. "Her original view of women who inspire is someone who never

lets life get you down."

Fonseth spoke about her struggles in life, and how she believes it's important to share those struggles in order to find strength.

"That's part of being a mentor and a leader," she said. "When you show people your true self, it helps build your integrity as a leader. When life knocks you down, get up fast. Otherwise you lose time, as yourself and in your career. Women can feel weak if something happens to them, but sharing makes you stronger."

Fonseth is also a Harvard graduate. At the age of 50, she was accepted for a business degree. "Harvard has an under-three per cent acceptance rate," she said, adding she was thrilled to study at the university. "I can't stress the importance of education enough."

Since 2001 under Fonseth's leadership, DASCH has rapidly grown as the organization responded to demand from families, closing institutions and government.

In 2001, DASCH supported 50 clients, operated eleven locations and had a staff component of 55. Today, DASCH supports hundreds of clients, operates over 60 locations throughout Winnipeg and has a staff component of approximately 700.

"DASCH has been going well, despite the pandemic. Last March when it started, we talked to the families and individuals living in the homes about what they would like to do. We purchased supplies for baking and other activities so the clients have been busy," Fonseth said. "We are also working to



Supplied photo

Karen Fonseth, CEO of DASCH.

ensure these vulnerable people understand why they need to stay in quarantine conditions if they have to be tested for the virus."

To do so, the staff use social stories, which can be pictures with or without words, laid out in a story board format. "We use social stories to introduce new activities or help them understand what's going on in their

daily schedule," Fonseth said.

Fonseth has been with DASCH for 19 years. "Serving the more vulnerable people in our community has been a joy for me," she said. "My goal is to continue to do that, as much as possible."

For more on DASCH, see dasch.mb.ca

Praise from the Universal Women's Network

"We are thrilled to recognize Karen Fonseth for her years of dedicated service in the not for profit sector and for her leadership and mentorship to so many in the community services field," Universal Women's Network founder Monica Kretschmer said in a press release.

"Karen Fonseth has proven to be an innovator and tire-

less leader to those she serves, and this honour is so well deserved for helping make the people and communities she serves successful in achieving their goals. Karen was selected for this award from hundreds of nominees and this recognition is a tribute to her proven skills in developing, growing and managing complex organizations both

provincially and nationally," Kretschmer said.

To view the 2020 Women of Inspiration virtual awards, see youtu.be/2LiNTHHHYPM

For more on the Universal Women's Network, see universalwomensnetwork.com

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