

Following your passion:

A reflection from Abigail Sutherland, MSW Candidate and BA Child and Youth Study Honours Graduate.

It's hard to imagine my current reality, without the education, support and experience that Mount Saint Vincent University and the faculty of Child and Youth Study provided me throughout my undergraduate education.

My love for children and youth was an unintentional influence from my two biggest supporters, my parents. As foster parents within our small rural Nova Scotia community, a large portion of my life has involved various children of all ages and abilities within my family unit, for both short and extended periods of time. As I finished high school and began forward thinking to university, the CYS degree offered an attractive program that would allow me to integrate my passion with my post-secondary education.

Throughout my 4 years at the Mount, the CYS faculty has offered support, guidance and invaluable knowledge, above and beyond that of the required and elective curriculum. Outside of the classroom, the mandatory practicum program provides intensive opportunities for students to integrate theory into practice. Whether working alongside policy analysts and program directors as a practicum student with the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Services or as a practicum student teaching within a split grade 3/4 classroom, learning progressive education practices at Halifax Independent School, my diverse placements have enabled me to graduate with experience that prepared me to either enter the workforce, or to continue into graduate education.



As I progressed through my education, I was inspired by the unique educational opportunities within the faculty, such as selected topic courses and the small CYS honours program. During my fourth and final year, I collaborated with Dr. Devi Mucina on my thesis, "Autism Across the Rural Lifespan: Examining the Supports and Services in Pictou County". As an independent research project, the honours program and Dr. Mucina promoted independence, strengthened my critical thinking skills and offered invaluable educational support and guidance as I pursued a research topic so close to my heart.

My interest in pursuing my Masters in Social Work following



the completion of my BCYH degree was immediately supported by all faculty members whom I had developed professional relationships with throughout the course of my education. As I grappled with the decisions of which institutes to apply to, and the uncertainty that accompanies submitting applications to competitive graduate programs, the faculty offered unwavering support and confidence in not only my ability to be accepted into the institutions I sought, but in my capacity to compete and succeed within these programs. Nearing the end of my final semester at the Mount, I was accepted into the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, my first choice of MSW programs.

In September of 2014, I relocated to Toronto and began my Master of Social Work education, specializing in clinical social work, in the area of mental health and health care. In January of this year, I commenced my first practicum placement as a MSW candidate, at St. Joseph's Health Care Centre in Toronto, Ontario, within the inpatient adult psychiatry program. Although an older population than that of children and youth, my BCYH degree proved to be easily transferable to this new environment. The various psychological theories and frameworks, and the CYS selected topic courses such as "The Psycho-Social Care of Children and their Families in Health Care Settings", in combination with the comfort of having experienced previous practicum placements, acted as the foundation for my professional growth and educational success within this setting.

With the end of the first year of my MSW education, the process of applying and interviewing for my year two MSW practicum placement begun. During this process, I was able to interview for a placement at the Hospital for Sick Children, where I relied heavily not only on my Master of Social Work education and experience, but my vast knowledge of children, youth and their families. As a professional dream of mine, I am happy to say that I was successful in this interview, and I am currently a Master of Social Work candidate at Sick Kids, within the Oncology Department. Specifically, I will spend the next 8 months in the Leukemia / Lymphoma Unit, which also includes both the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit, and the Sears Cancer Clinic.

As I prepare for my third week at Sick Kids, it is amazing to look back at the last 5 years and reflect on how my education, practicum experiences, and the support and guidance from the CYS faculty and Mount Saint Vincent University have contributed to the place I am so happy to be at today. It is true when they say "to teach is to touch a life forever." What I am sure of, is that my future practice as a clinical Social Worker will always involve working with children and their families, and my BCYH degree will always be the lens to which the majority of my practice is conducted through.

Abigail Sutherland is a BA(CYS) Honours graduate, class of 2014.