



Bridging the gap

I first met Cindy Low, Executive Director of Bridgeway Academy (located in Dartmouth and specializing in children with learning disabilities) when I was fifteen and speaking to a national conference on learning disabilities. Cindy came up to me immediately after I spoke to thank me for “smashing stereotypes of children with learning disabilities” and for what she called my “gutsy ability to give an unvarnished critique” of the education policy to a room full of education officials. I vividly recall Cindy telling me to never lose what she saw as my ability to speak my mind even where it meant shaking up the status quo. Her feeling was that it wasn’t a bad thing if the status quo wasn’t working. That was good advice that I have taken to heart.

It was easy therefore to accept Cindy’s request for volunteer assistance as a pro bono legal advisor and member of the Board of Directors of Bridgeway School, including heading up the governance committee. While I agreed with Cindy that not-for-profits increasingly need legal and governance expertise on their boards, she was particularly convincing when she added “you will also bring to the Board the life experience and insight of someone who been through the wringer and back in the education system.” Cindy was quick to add that my duties included serving as an example — to our students and parents — of someone who had lived and is living many of the challenges they themselves are facing.

My own experience in the education system is one of the reasons I’m committed to Bridgeway. My life experience as a student and now as an adult with dyslexia, and the challenges this poses, gives me a powerful appreciation that organizations such as Bridgeway need our support. As a young adult I attended Landmark East in Wolfville, an institution which, like Bridgeway, levels the playing field for students with learning disabilities and rescues students who have slipped or are about to slip through the cracks of the regular system. Bridgeway helps students retool, master new strategies, re-

build their confidence, and get back into the public system with the skills they need to succeed, and succeed they do. In my case, were it not for this type of intervention I would have never finished high school, and if not for the Bridgeway’s and Landmark East’s out there, countless other students would likewise be denied the real right to education and the life changing opportunities it offers. I was lucky to get support that made the difference and live with the knowledge that it might have — and almost did — go another way for me. Luck should not be a factor in whether or not students receive the real benefit of an education that meets their needs and gives them the tools they need to succeed.

Education (and the public policy that surrounds it) is my passion. Educational opportunity can lift people up, open doors, and provide the opportunity to realize one’s potential and the potential of our communities. I also see it as the most powerful public policy tool available to deliver on the promise of social and economic justice. The absence or narrow application of educational opportunity can destroy lives. Bridgeway is the education policy equivalent to how I approach my practice: “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” and that’s why I’m so committed to it.

There is a certain irony in the idea of a person who admittedly had a bumpy ride in the education system, ultimately focusing so much of his professional and volunteer life on education, but so be it. I currently work for an international education organization, “Education Management” (www.edmc.edu) and volunteer in a number of capacities. I guess I’ve never forgotten the credo instilled in me during my time working with Premier Savage: that “from those to whom much has been given, much is expected.” I have received much and there is still much to give back. ♣

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