



2023 UPEI Distinguished Alumni Award

Monica Elaine Campbell (BSc 1978)

Monica Elaine Campbell was a standout student at Colonel Gray High School in Charlottetown before attending UPEI. She graduated from the University in 1978 with an Honours Bachelor of Science, majoring in mathematics. After graduation, she pursued a career in civil service, eventually moving to Ottawa at the age of 31 to work for the federal government as a Classification Audit and Monitoring Officer.

An avid lifelong learner, Monica Elaine returned to post-secondary education later in her career, enrolling in the Palliative Care Multidisciplinary program at Algonquin College and graduating with honours in 2005.

She went on to receive many accolades and awards including the June Callwood Award, the Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre Achievement Award, The Canadian Council of Disabilities Award, the Rena Bowen Volunteer of the Year Award from Algonquin College in 2019, and the Order of Ontario in 2016. Today we recognize her with a 2023 UPEI Distinguished Alumni Award for her outstanding contributions to the community. Monica Elaine's achievements are impressive on their own, but they are even more impressive when you learn that she was born profoundly deaf and diagnosed with deafness at 15 months of age. She has never heard a single word in her life and didn't begin to learn American Sign Language until 36 years of age.

Most of her studies took place at a time when schools and universities allowed far fewer accommodations and devoted far fewer resources to accessibility supports. This meant that Monica Elaine took notes from what was written on the blackboard while also trying to read the lips of teachers and professors. She estimates that she was able to understand only about five per cent of what the instructors said as they often spoke while pacing back and forth at the front of the classroom and writing on the blackboards.

Despite these challenges, Monica Elaine excelled academically. She is grateful to two former UPEI professors, Dr. Doris Anderson, and Dr. Ninian LeBlanc, for providing handwritten notes after class and offering one-on-one sessions to review what had been taught in previous lectures.

When she moved to Ottawa, Monica Elaine began to access more supports for Deaf people, learned American Sign Language, and explored Deaf culture. These experiences changed her own views about herself as a person and her ability to communicate. She became passionate about rights for the Deaf and earned respect as an advocate for and trusted member of the Deaf community in Ottawa and nationally.

Her true calling happened accidentally. Staff at an Ottawa hospital contacted her asking if she could help lip-read for a dying cancer patient who had become too weak to write. She successfully relayed about 85 per cent of what the patient was saying to her family. The Ottawa Hospital called her twice more, once for a patient in palliative care and again for a paralyzed patient in the ICU. Once again, her world view



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shifted. These experiences helped Monica Elaine come to the realization that palliative care was not equitable for Deaf people and that she could do something about it.

After completing the Palliative Care Multidisciplinary program at Algonquin College in 2005, Monica Elaine formed a committee with two friends that resulted in the Glebe Centre establishing a dedicated floor for Deaf seniors. They then helped to create the volunteer Deaf Palliative Care Team, now known as the Ottawa Deaf Health Care Team. She represented the Canadian Association of the Deaf on the Quality End-of-Life Care Coalition of Canada for four years, spent two years working with Health Canada's Secretariat on Palliative and End-of-Life Care, and participated in the Vulnerable Persons and end-of-life New Emerging Team research project at University of Manitoba, as well as the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer for three years.

In addition to advocacy work, Monica Elaine volunteered with the Deaf Kitchen Club where she taught Deaf women with low literacy skills how to prepare meals. She has never forgotten the importance of learning and education. After graduating from UPEI, she tutored 19 different high school and university math and physics students in her home while she was working full time with the provincial government. One of the students she tutored had dropped out of high school after grade 9 but wanted to be an x-ray technician. The student had enrolled at UPEI as a mature student with no math from grades 10-12. Monica Elaine first taught her the math she missed and then physics, allowing her to pass her first year at UPEI. She eventually succeeded in becoming an x-ray technician and told Monica Elaine's mother she wouldn't have achieved that goal without Monica Elaine's help.

In recognition of her many achievements and her tireless work to advance the rights of the Deaf, the UPEI Alumni Association is proud to present Monica Elaine Campbell with a 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award.