

Order of Nova Scotia recipient hopes to bring attention to important issue ^[1]

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The recognition is nice but for Sharon Hope Irwin the most exciting part of being named to the Order of Nova Scotia is the exposure it may bring to an issue close to her heart.

"It's an opportunity to make more visible the issues that I deal with, namely what do we do with kids with disabilities when it's time for child care or after school programs or anything like that," she said. "It's tough — it's tough for parents and it's tough for kids."

A resident of Sydney, Hope Irwin has devoted 40 years to ensuring that child care is inclusive, affordable, accessible and comprehensive. She moved to Nova Scotia in 1974 to create the Town Daycare Centre in Glace Bay and served as its executive director as the centre successfully integrated children with a range of disabilities, from visual impairments to those coping with cerebral palsy.

In recent years, Hope Irwin has continued her work in the field with the non-profit organization SpecialLink: The National Centre for Early Childhood Inclusion, which she founded. Its main goal is to "encourage the inclusion of more kids with disabilities in regular programs."

Hope Irwin said she now travels across the country doing workshops about methods and strategies for including all children in programs. She's also written books and created videos on the topic.

And while many strides and improvements have been made in the area of child care for children with disabilities, Hope Irwin said much work remains to be done and being named to the Order of Nova Scotia gives her a chance to highlight the challenges ahead.

"I am happy to receive it and I love having the opportunity to remind people that the job isn't done, and that the parents of kids with disabilities still struggle with an awful lot of issues that the rest of us can barely imagine," she said.

Five people are being invested into the Order of Nova Scotia this year, including Hope Irwin and acclaimed writer Alistair MacLeod, who will be invested posthumously.

The 2015 recipients will be recognized at the investiture ceremony, Sept. 30 at Province House in Halifax.

The Order of Nova Scotia was established in June 2001 and is the highest honour bestowed by the province. Since it was created, 77 recipients have been invested into the order.

-reprinted from Cape Breton Post

Region: Nova Scotia ^[3]

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