



## **Q & A with Clare Northcott, Family Plus Life Solutions**

### **What does innovation mean to you?**

For me, it means approaching a situation, problem or idea with an extraordinary way which has not been tried or attempted before. When people think of innovation I believe their minds immediately think of innovation from a business perspective. Business solutions that change the way that a product is used or the opportunity that new solutions bring about that creates efficiency. Because I have spent my entire career in the social sector I think about social innovation and the alternative ways that we could collectively work towards solutions to some of the greatest social issues faced in our communities.

### **How does your organization approach innovation?**

Family Plus has been in existence since 1929 and has constantly had to innovate and reinvent themselves through changing government mandates, mergers and the introduction of workplace wellness. Back in the 1980's we were the first organization to introduce Employee Assistance Programs as a product for workplaces to integrate into their benefits packages for employees. This was at a time when psychological wellness was not thought to be something connected to workplace productivity or absenteeism.

Our project Paving the Way is bringing together a multitude of leaders in the mental health system to come up with new and innovative solutions. The difference between this types of innovation is that it is cross-sectoral between public and non-profit. This change has created a rippling effect that is now drawing some interest from the business sector, the missing piece to true social innovation.

### **Why do you think innovation is important for Saint John and the province?**

We have a declining and changing demographic that is forcing us to think about things in unique ways or risk becoming obsolete. We need to consider the opportunities that we have despite our challenging times and embrace them as opportunities to do things differently. Creating these types of conditions that foster conversations should be easy given our small population and ability to leverage the support necessary.

### **What are some simple things people can do to drive change?**

Create spaces and opportunities for organic innovation. Social Innovation Hubs where people co-located and can share their ideas and possibilities is essential.

Invite entrepreneurial spirited people from all sectors with shared mandates to become part of a social innovation lab that stimulates integrated thinking when looking at a potential issue or problem and

helps people understand the opportunity to use all of their resources towards a new approach to change ideas. Get out of your comfort zone and meet the people who may have a unique perspective.

For the social sector, we need to find ways to have existing and potential funders, support innovation. They are comfortable with funding programs and services that illicit positive outcomes. True innovation enables opportunities for trying things that may not work initially but with adjustments can be the key to massive change.

### **How is technology changing your business model?**

We are just starting to see some of the changes that technology will bring to our programs and services. People are in front of some form of technology almost all of their waking hours. Face to Face counselling, assessment and treatment are still important but challenging for rural settings. We are going to need to rethink how we deliver services and adjust for what lies ahead in the mental health field.

### **Where would you direct people if they wanted to learn more about innovation?**

Some of the websites that I often refer to and draw inspiration. Social Innovation is still relatively new to our sector and it requires a great deal of collaboration to properly find the solutions to the most pressing problems.

<http://www.sigeneration.ca/>

<http://www.innoweave.ca/>

<http://thephilanthropist.ca/>