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Interviewee: Norma Strachan
Interviewer: Marshall watson
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MARSHALL: [0:00] To start, why don't you just tell me a little bit about where you grew up, what your childhood was like, if you went to post-secondary, what you studied... Norma's early years—what were those like?

NORMA: Well, they were in the 1950s. I was born in the late 40s. It was the 1950s. I was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta.

MARSHALL: Me too.

NORMA: Oh, really? My family was uneducated and very redneck. To this day, I still have those stripes that I can be quite ashamed of. And they come out at the strangest times. It's a little alarming. And in the day when I was young, we weren't expected to go to school. At least not in my family. So that was it. The oldest son got the chance and declined and so...

MARSHALL: Nobody else got the offer?

NORMA: Nobody else was offered the chance to go beyond grade twelve. I think we were fairly intelligent. We read a lot, my brothers and I. But it wasn't anything cultured whatsoever. We were a very busy family. My dad had his own business—a farm machinery business. And his dream was to have a farm. I would say that I picked up entrepreneurial streaks from him.

MARSHALL: From that?

NORMA: Yeah. Just from being at the dinner table and talking about how they could make ends meet and how things were going to have to change.

MARSHALL: How that plan could come about and what it would look like.

NORMA: And what risks they were having to take. When I look back now, it's just so interesting because I learned so much that I didn't know I was going to need in the future. I guess everybody is like that.

MARSHALL: Yeah. To an extent.

NORMA: I was never comfortable with the idea of going to work for the government. My mother used to always encourage me to get a job in government like my cousin had and I started work after high school in the banks. And there were government



offices upstairs from our bank. And I watched the people come down and I thought 'they look so unhappy, they look like moles.' They were all kind of grey and they were all kind of grumpy. And that was... Like I was 19 years old and that was an early formative notion.

MARSHALL: So why do you think she [mom] was pushing that then? Why was that a direction she was guiding you toward?

NORMA: Security.

MARSHALL: The stability of a government job?

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: Okay. That makes sense.

NORMA: But that didn't look like it was a very fulfilling goal so I didn't really want to do that. I had no idea what I ever wanted to do and the expectation was get married and get out of the house and don't bother us anymore. And that's pretty well what I did. And then I took on a series of jobs. I used to change jobs pretty well every year. Just because I would get bored. So I worked for banks—they were always a good fallback. And I worked for doctor's offices often. I had an interest in psychology. I wanted to be a social worker. If I could have gone to university, I think I would have done that. When I was a teenager I suffered from depression a little bit and I ended up going to see a counsellor at the Alberta Guidance Clinic. And she had a real impact on me and so I thought I would like to be a psychologist like she was because she was very helpful.

MARSHALL: So that personal experience showed you this one possible path?

NORMA: Yeah. And I also liked the fact that... I did go to work at the Alberta Guidance Clinic when I was about 21, as a clerk. So I was working there in their file room. And they included the staff, included the office staff, as part of their consultative process around individual clients. So I got to become an intake clerk. [5:00] So if somebody phoned to make an appointment, I was the initial point of contact. And it was nice to be able to help people when they needed it. And it was also nice to be included in a multi-sectoral group of professionals—psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and the intake clerk.

MARSHALL: And to be involved in the whole...

NORMA: Yeah. And it was nice because my opinion was given as much respect as everyone else's. It was like 'Norma, what was your first impression of the client when they called?' And it was important. I liked that. It was another formative thing in terms of treating people equally. It might have been... you were talking about social justice and it might have been the beginning of my learning about those kinds of things.



- MARSHALL: About how you can deal with these types of situations—about how you can be in the world in terms of helping people or when you are around people who need help.
- NORMA: Yeah. And how to treat... It was almost like HR training, in many ways, for jobs I would have in the future. So I worked at the guidance clinic for about five years.
- MARSHALL: Oh wow.
- NORMA: That was the longest job I think I ever had. And then I stopped work when I had children. So I had my son and I ended up being divorced soon afterwards. And I ended up looking for jobs that would just pay the bills.
- MARSHALL: Still in Edmonton?
- NORMA: Still in Edmonton. So I stayed in Edmonton until 1979. At that time I was 31, I remarried, and we moved to British Columbia. We moved to Nanaimo initially.
- MARSHALL: Oh nice. And what was behind that decision? What was the impetus for that move? Do you remember?
- NORMA: Oh yeah. I remember. Personal reasons. We were two people... My husband and I both had previous relationships and we wanted a fresh start. Also, Edmonton... I remember being a child and thinking 'there must be a better place to live than this.' It's so awful there. [laughter]
- MARSHALL: The amount of people who are from in Edmonton who don't stay in Edmonton is astounding. My experience was very similar. I partially needed a fresh start. Also, there's better places than this. Even when I was growing up in the 80s and 90s. This can't be it. My family comes from a rural and conservative background, they had farms and were all in small towns. 'This is not a place for me. I don't feel safe and supported here.'
- NORMA: I bet. Yeah. It didn't... It felt like... I had never been anywhere else. But I just thought there must be something better.
- MARSHALL: Or at least different. Even if it's not better, just something different than this.
- NORMA: And there was the cold winter. Too cold in the winter, too hot in the summer. But it was the attitude. Even now when I go back the attitude is so anti-progressive. It's so backward.
- MARSHALL: It's a very blue-collar town. There's still that blue-collar, conservative sentiment.
- NORMA: Redneck, big time. And so that was... As I said, I still find, every once in a while, streaks of that come out within me. But I don't fit in very well with my family in lots of ways. When I go there now I have a three-day maximum then I have to get out.
- MARSHALL: I try not to go back there anymore. 'You can visit me.'



- NORMA: Yeah. It changes the dynamic because you're not surrounded by that attitude. And it's strange because it's a multicultural city and has been since before I even knew that word. There were all kinds of immigrants living around us and...
- MARSHALL: Yeah! There's a lot of diversity. And when you think of other blue-collar towns that have a more progressive bent—maybe because they have stronger unions or something... But Edmonton always just seemed very conservative and bigoted and closed...
- NORMA: And my father was rough and so I grew up swearing and very easily got into a lot of trouble the rest of my life because of that. He used to say 'those goddamn Germans' and 'those goddamn Ukrainians' and these awful things. And I would say 'well, what's bad about them?' And they could never really figure it out. I never really got a straight answer. It was just that they were different. [10:00]
- MARSHALL: I mean, for a lot of people, that's enough.
- NORMA: [laughing] Yeah. Anyways...
- MARSHALL: So then you left and went to Nanaimo. And this would have been seventy...
- NORMA: 1979. So we moved there and it was a little bit of a shock. It's a very strong union town. And before I left Edmonton, I worked at Grant MacEwan College. I had a number of interesting jobs... I'll just go back for a bit.
- MARSHALL: Sure. Let's go back.
- NORMA: I had a number of interesting jobs because whenever I got bored, I could change... back in the 70s. So I worked at the Workers Compensation Board in the Psychology Department. It was rehab centre within the Psychology Department. And it was interesting because we got a lot of people from all over BC and Alberta. A lot of neuro-psychology disorders. Anybody who had a tree fall on their head came there. And we had the only Neuro-Psychiatrist in two provinces. That was kind of a new role at that time and really, really interesting work.
- MARSHALL: Within WCB?
- NORMA: Yeah! So it was kind of a government job. But it was a little bit... we were a little bit off to the side. The lone wolf industry of the psychologist in amongst all these old physicians who were, you know, really not very helpful to a lot of these patients.
- MARSHALL: Physicians within a bureaucracy so...
- NORMA: Yeah. And, as I said, I also worked at Grant MacEwan College. And this is somewhere else I was given a lot of leeway. I was given time off during the day to attend classes and then come back to my desk. I was the Executive Assistant to the Director. So that was interesting too and again working with professionals who were inclusive and



knowledgeable and I always was fascinated by their knowledge

MARSHALL: And again you were involved in the bigger picture work through the Director...

NORMA: Yeah. And I noticed a lot of the other clerical staff had the opinion that 'oh, those professionals, they all think they're so smart.' But I thought, 'they are smart!' [laughing] 'I think they're pretty smart!' So I wasn't standoff-ish like the others and so I was always included and they were really good to me. So when I moved out to British Columbia, it was 'no, I'm sorry, you don't meet the criteria.' I did get a job at Malaspina College [now VIU] on call. But no, I wasn't allowed to do all kinds of things because of the union regulations and stipulations. You know, 'you can't do one thing more than...'

MARSHALL: Here are the bounds and guidelines and you exist within this.

NORMA: Yeah. So it was difficult to adjust to Nanaimo. But the weather and the location were pretty wonderful.

MARSHALL: And so how long were you at that job after you moved?

NORMA: Not very long. A year. And then I worked at the bank. And then I worked for an excavating company. And then the economy went down and I had to move back to Calgary for a while. That was 1981. The economy crashed. We lost our house, we lost everything and I had to move to Calgary for a year and a half. There I worked for a vacation RV rental company. There were a lot of people who came over from Europe and would rent an RV in Calgary and then drive it through the Rockies. So I worked there for a year and a half. And my mother thought, 'Oh my god. Norma, you're never going to amount to anything.'

MARSHALL: Just bouncing around.

NORMA: Yeah. Then... So when I started moving into this sector, the social service sector, it was 1986. I had returned to my education at Malaspina College. So I was able to take the first two years of the university transfer. I was married and had that amount of support. [15:00] My son was old enough—he was 11 then—so I didn't have to... he could take care of himself and make his own sandwiches.

MARSHALL: He could amuse himself for an afternoon...

NORMA: Yeah. That's right. So I was able to get the first two years in Nanaimo. And it was required that you would have to transfer down to the University of Victoria to get your degree. I was 38 at the time. So I transfer down to Victoria.

MARSHALL: 38 and going back to school. That's a brave thing to do.

NORMA: It was pretty scary. Not so bad in Nanaimo because it was a smaller college, much friendlier, very, very exciting instructors. I was in Sociology. I was introduced to



Philosophy.

MARSHALL: Because there was that psychology-bent in some of your previous roles. Is that where you landed? Psychology and Sociology?

NORMA: Yeah. That's what I eventually got my degree in. What do you call it? A double major.

MARSHALL: So those seeds that had been sown earlier helped to lead you down this path.

NORMA: Well there I was at 36 when I started and I was so excited to find out that all of the things that I have been formulating along the way... I wasn't all that bright but I realized that a lot of other people had formulated them before me and named them. You know? It was really pretty interesting to find out that these were theories and proven theories and I could relate... It was so easy to learn because I could relate everything back to my experience.

MARSHALL: Right. What you've experienced and seen and the work you've done before you could now understand the science behind it or the theories behind it.

NORMA: What I realized is that education, like love, is wasted on the young. Because it's just so wonderful to be middle-aged and going to school and learning all those things when your experience can really tie in.

MARSHALL: Having had some experience and the patterns between what you're learning and what you've done and what you maybe want to do.

NORMA: So by that time I had separated from my husband. When I moved down here [to Victoria]. And so I needed a part-time job. And I was really getting quite frantic. I was determined that I wasn't going to quit school. I got a job. And it's actually right across the street from here at SJ Willis School. I got a job for a new organization that was starting called Work Streams. It was an employment training program—brand new. Started June 1st, 1986. And it was sponsored by the Downtown Blanchard Advisory Committee—Blanchard Community Centre. And they needed a Bookkeeper for 20 hours a week. So that's what I did. Between my student loan and 20 hours a week I could make ends meet. So I started there. And my friends... I would tell them what I was doing and they would say, 'do those kids really get any jobs?' Because that particular program was for kids. They said, 'do those programs work?'

MARSHALL: Right. Does it actually do anything?

NORMA: Well I said, 'well I got a job and that's all I really care about!' [laughing]

MARSHALL: It works for me! I'm good! [laughing]

NORMA: But because we were working in a classroom... We had one classroom that was divided with those little dividers half-way up. And so I am stuck in the corner at the back doing the bookkeeping and the government reports. And I can hear the



instructors on the other side of the barriers talking to the kids. And whenever there was a break where the kids were going out for lunch or something, they would come by and they would be talking to me and if they needed help with their resumes, I was doing the typing. And it was a typewriter. So we were communicating back and forth. And I saw miracles. I saw miracles happen. In one room. It's going to make me cry.

MARSHALL: That's okay. That happens in these conversations.

NORMA: Okay. It was just so shocking. That these kids who came in that, I would normally be saying, 'look at that idiot' or 'look at that loser' or 'god I hate kids with this or that long hair.' They turned into wonderful people. It turned out they were wonderful people. That somehow the best was found in them when somebody believed in them. [20:00] They become...

MARSHALL: And that's what it takes. Often it's just one person who will help, or see them, or be there.

NORMA: It was amazing and I just felt my life shift.

MARSHALL: Yeah. That'll do it.

NORMA: So there I was at 40 years old and everything I had ever believed was totally out of whack. It was a really good thing.

MARSHALL: That's amazing. That's a gift.

NORMA: Sorry.

MARSHALL: It's okay. You don't have to apologize.

NORMA: So I became a convert. That's for sure. The board of the Blanchard Centre was very supportive to me. There were a lot of growing changes they went through during the first few years that they had this organization—the Work Streams program. And they actually offered me the job of Coordinator I think they called it. But I would have had to stop my education in order to take it and I decided I'm not doing that. I'm 39 years old and my whole life I've wanted to have a degree and I'm not stopping now. So...

MARSHALL: And you would have only been a year away from finishing at that point.

NORMA: Yep. One more year. So that was... um. Then they were worried about how they could keep me. They didn't want me to leave the organization because I was helpful. So they found a way for me to get rental housing. One of the board members was on the CRD Housing [Capital Region Housing Corporation]. They found they couldn't give me much more salary because I was capped by the government funding. But they really did find lots of ways to support me. The flexibility of being able to work around my class schedule. You know, whatever they could do to help me and my son be supported... and the subsidized housing.



MARSHALL: That's great.

NORMA: And I wanted... I thought 'you gotta make this part of your life, that you're going to continue that—helping people in that way.' What was given to me I wanted to be able to give to other people.

MARSHALL: Totally. Pay it back.

NORMA: Yeah. That's right. It was a very strange time too—to be able to discuss any of that with my family. Because they had no experience of any of that it seemed. Although many years later my mother told me stories about her having been put in an orphanage when she was a child. And then when she was a senior, the same organization was running her senior's home.

MARSHALL: Oh wow. Completely full circle.

NORMA: Yeah. Life does seem to go full circle some times.

MARSHALL: The patterns that can emerge when you look with hindsight. And so the Work Streams employment was a government contract? It was government funded?

NORMA: It was funded by the federal government.

MARSHALL: So it was kind of a government job. You did get that government job your mom wanted. [Laughing]

NORMA: Well they always made sure we knew that we were contracted staff. And it was year-to-year funding. And we did have the advantage of having some really good project managers. I forget what they called it at the time... Canada Job Strategy. Around 1986. So we had that program for a couple of years. And then it grew. We grew. Work Streams grew and we moved down to Market Square. And we ended up having another program which was called Career Streams. And many of those people were coming out of university but didn't have any... they didn't have the benefit of career counselling so they would have gotten a job that would have led to a career that they could...

MARSHALL: A job or career that relates to what they were studying.

NORMA: Yes. So there was sort of lots of... lots of evolving of the needs of the client group.

MARSHALL: Right. Because career centres on campuses didn't start popping up until the late 90s or early 2000s. But now they are built into some of the bigger institutions—they're built right in.

NORMA: And my question or concern always is—are they... If they aren't client focused, they can be focused on... And then I started thinking back to Grant MacEwan College days and we had a lot of young people who wanted to be travel agents. And boy were they



selling seats to the travel agent program. [25:00] Because it was a great attraction for young people. And the college needed the money...

MARSHALL: Oh. So you just make available what is in demand at the time.

NORMA: Yes. And the fact that there was very little call for travel agents—that they would be paid minimally, that it wasn't really a good career choice, was irrelevant. Because...

MARSHALL: Yeah.

NORMA: And now, colleges and universities need revenue too. So, you know, sometimes you are stuck between a rock and a hard place in terms of the motivation they're doing it for.

MARSHALL: So did you stay... You stayed at Work Streams until you finished your degree?

NORMA: Yes. I stayed there until I finished my degree and then they hired me as a Counsellor—a special needs counsellor for the clients with the most barriers. So there were... We had a number of young people with schizophrenia it seemed, or had physical disabilities, or had addiction issues and so I was a counsellor for all of them. And I also got to teach life skills. I was afraid to teach—afraid to speak publicly. And I certainly never have wanted to be a teacher. But I got to work with Jo Accapuro [?] who is a brilliant life skills instructor. She had been a teacher in the Alberta school system. So she had the formal background for it. But the curriculum development for life skills training—she's got one of the best curriculums I've ever seen. And eventually we published that curriculum.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

NORMA: And it met the Conference Board of Canada guidelines for what employers were looking for. So that was the Essential Skills curriculum that ASPECT did. So yeah that was 1988 I graduated.

MARSHALL: You graduated and moved into a full-time position.

NORMA: Yeah. And I worked as a counsellor for a couple of years and then I became the Executive Director of Work Streams. And around that time... So 1988... and then I think 1990 the NDP got voted in in British Columbia. [It was 1991.]

MARSHALL: Yeah, around there.

NORMA: I had made some friends from college who ended up being very involved in the NDP. One of them became... She was voted in as an MLA—Jan Pullinger from Nanaimo. She was voted in and she was great at explaining to me... We were having coffee one day and I said to her, 'how do you get in touch with politicians to let them know about what's going on with these kids and what the funding requirements are.' And she was very good at explaining to me that they had a committee that handled most of the



social services and you could apply to get a meeting to go talk to them. And there was... She made it seem approachable.

MARSHALL: And do-able—understanding how the system works in relation to the position you were at.

NORMA: Yeah. That's it. And to be able to go to the legislature and have a meeting with 10 or 12 MLAs from all around the province... I remember the first meeting we went to. Corky Evans was the MLA from down in the Kootenays and he got up and he wandered out of the room. And I thought, 'well, that's rude.' And a few minutes later he wandered back in with a friend who was visiting him. And she ran an employment training agency in the Kootenays. So he brought her in and we had this discussion and suddenly it was like that snap where you get it. These are just normal people who come from normal places and they are interested in knowing how we can provide better services. They really do relate. They weren't born in a bubble before going to live in the legislature.

MARSHALL: They are real people that are interested in things and interested in certain issues and it's hard to see at certain times.

NORMA: Yeah, that's right. That's not an impression I'd ever had before about politicians. Again, it sort of shifted my world. And that was around 1990. And concurrently there was a bit of a... a real collision of things all going on at one time back then. [30:00] So I became the Executive Director at Work Streams. I was asked to—by our federal government project officer—to start putting on conferences on the island... For all the employment training agencies so that we could get together and start to network. And they found money from slippage at the time so that we could set up these conferences. We'd meet up in Parksville at Tigh na Mara for a two-day conference. And there was a lot of input from our Project Officers about who would be good speakers at these things. But we also shared curriculum, we shared success stories, we shared all kinds of knowledge. And it was the beginning of a real bonding between all the agencies on Vancouver Island.

And then, it turned out, that out in Ontario there was a woman—Sandra Glass—who was setting up and got funding from the federal government... And she ran a provincial association in Ontario called One Step. It was an association of community-based employment training agencies in Ontario. She got money from the federal government to bring together representatives from all across Canada and try to instill in them an awareness of the... of what the benefit would be if there were provincial associations all across Canada.

MARSHALL: Using the Ontario example as like a model for how it could work.

NORMA: That's right. So that was happening and I was invited to go to a meeting over in Vancouver that was the outcome of that. David Hudson—who worked for an employment training agency over there—had been lucky enough to go to Ontario. He



came back and called together everybody he knew in Vancouver. And tried to instill the fire in them. And he did a pretty good job of it—getting an association started here.

MARSHALL: Motivating everyone.

NORMA: So it was started in 1990. It was called the BC SED Association. Because all of our programs we're called Severely Employment Disadvantaged. The federal government gives these names.

MARSHALL: That's just how it was worded?

NORMA: Yeah. So all of our contracts were for Severely Employment Disadvantaged clients. Now that disadvantage could be anything from—those things that I mentioned—being deaf, having a concussion, being schizophrenic, or having two parents who loved you too much to make you get out of bed in the morning and go look for jobs.

MARSHALL: The whole gamut.

NORMA: A number of these programs had been started up unbeknownst to me and to many of us. There had been no connectivity. So we started the association in 1990. We had about 50 agencies that came to the first conference in Vancouver. I got involved with that organization. I was involved on the board. We had representatives—always— from each region of the province. And we started up the association. I think we paid \$25 a year and has about 50 members. The federal government had given us \$7000 dollars for the first conference. And each year we would spend that \$7000 on the conference but we were able to recoup the money so we were always able to keep the organization going.

MARSHALL: That's really interesting. And then at the same time you were having the meetings with the provincial MLAs or the committee—was there a goal there? Or was it more of meeting with the people you knew in government to see how things worked? Were you working toward something or trying to better understand how things worked?

NORMA: We were trying to... Yeah—better understanding how things worked. The big motivation for starting the provincial association is that in 1990—maybe before that—there was talk of the federal government transferring all the employment programs over to the provinces. And that was a little bit alarming and a little bit exciting at the same time.

MARSHALL: Because then you get to...

NORMA: We didn't know whether to look forward to it or not. [35:00] So that was starting to be sort of the undercurrent and negotiations were starting. So we wanted to get to know our provincial government better so we could be a part of sharing the information and formulating the plan for the future.



MARSHALL: If that were to come to pass.

NORMA: Yeah. So that was 1990. And we eventually changed the name of the provincial association to ASPECT. We had a contest and somebody came up with that. It's an acronym that stands for the Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training. ASPECT. Way easier to say.

MARSHALL: And that would have been...? How long until the name change?

NORMA: That would have been 1992 or 93. You know, I don't really remember the year we changed. It's somewhere in the documents.

MARSHALL: It exists. Someone will figure it out and put it all together.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: So early 90s changed to ASPECT and you continued on as...

NORMA: Well I was still working at Work Streams. That was my day job. But we didn't have any staff and we didn't have any money at ASPECT.

MARSHALL: It was just a volunteer association of people doing the same thing around the province.

NORMA: Yeah. So in about 1995—1994 or 95—I became aware of other organizations that were getting funding from the provincial government. One of them was called Community at Work. They got a \$10 million contract. Now, our contracts with the provincial government here... Because our funding sort of started to shift to the provincial government. Our contracts were always like \$200,000. They were small. You got paid minimally. Sometimes if the contract was one that had subsidized wages for young people then there would be a little bit more money that you were responsible for. But there certainly was no money for...

MARSHALL: That would go to your team.

NORMA: Yeah. So when you hear somebody's got a \$10 million contract to put 100 people through a program it was shocking. That was the first one we heard about. Then we started getting you know... There were more and more of these contracts that were coming out to this group called Community at Work. What seemed to be happening was that group of managers—the people who ran that organization—would go to the Chamber of Commerce lunches and say to the employers 'if you think you've hired anyone lately who's been on welfare, get them to sign this contract and we will give you \$3000 contract because you have taken somebody off welfare—just get them to sign the contract.' It turned out that that was riding on the back of the community-based agencies because the agencies would have worked with the clients for 12 weeks. Our programs were 12 weeks then. We'd have 6 weeks of classroom training



and 6 weeks of on-the-job training. We went out and found the jobs and help the clients get...

MARSHALL: Connect the two pieces...

NORMA: And for all of that we got paid \$2000 a client. Meanwhile, this other organization would come along and would connect with the employers and would give \$3000 to the employers and \$7000 went in their pocket. But on the back of community agencies. And I thought, 'that does not seem very fair.' And that's when we started being more public. Speaking out. Trying to get meetings with Ministers and Deputy Ministers to try to find out how that was happening. And wondering if they knew the connection. So... Even at that time, it was still so difficult to go and meet with the Deputy Minister and I couldn't particularly get any leverage. Until we got some media attention. [40:00]

And when we got media attention from Monday Magazine, that's when things started moving and all of a sudden I get a phone call from the Deputy Minister saying 'I want you to come in here tomorrow; I want to see you tomorrow.' I was scared. And all of the other directors from ASPECT—because I was still just a director from ASPECT—all of them were over in Vancouver and we didn't have any budget for people to come for that.

MARSHALL: To go to government meetings [in Victoria].

NORMA: Yeah. So anyway I always remember going to a meeting with a Deputy of the day—I'm not sure which one it was.

MARSHALL: And at this point your plan at the time was just 'this doesn't seem fair...?'

NORMA: Yeah. Why is that a \$10,000 job and why is our job a \$2,000 job. And why is the money not being spent on the clients? It's not like it's being spent to give them a better education or to train them and their skill set. It's just... It's abuse of taxpayers dollars. So I went to the meeting and the Deputy said to me, 'so there's been a lot of press lately and it seems like you're pretty unhappy with this and what is it that you're unhappy about?' And so I explained that we work with these clients for 12 weeks—6 weeks doing life skills training, 6 weeks going out and monitoring them at a job placement that we have secured for them. We do all of that for \$2,000 a client and then at lunch, these guys are getting \$3,000. And not that employers shouldn't be encouraged to be hiring these clients and if they were using that to be upgrading their skill set, then maybe...

MARSHALL: But that's not what's going on.

NORMA: Plus coercing a client into signing a document and saying this is what happened I think is illegal. And I'm explaining all this to him and here's where the redneck part of me comes out. 'I'm pissed off,' I said. I couldn't think of a better word to express



myself. And he said to me, 'Well, I'm pissed off.' And he turned to the fellow who signed the contract for the government, and he said, 'are you pissed off?' And that guy said, 'oh, I'm pissed off.' But then I said to them that I'm pissed off because it happened; you're pissed off because we found out about it. That's what...

MARSHALL: Yeah.

NORMA: So what they decided to do after that was that they were going to tender those contracts. Because we had also gone through a very onerous tendering process.

MARSHALL: Right. To get to where you were at the time...

NORMA: Yeah. And they were... The tendering processes were getting more and more difficult and meanwhile this was a little sweetheart agreement signed off.

MARSHALL: And then the government then realizes they are getting taken advantage of and they are half angry that they got found out and half angry that...

NORMA: That's it exactly. That's it exactly. So they said 'so what do you suggest that would make a difference?' And I said that they had to tender those contracts just like they tender everything else. Make it fair and square. So they did. That's what they ended up doing—tendering the contract. And I got a phone call from somebody saying 'well, I just want you to know that we're going to be tendering that contract and it's time for your to put your money where your mouth is; maybe you want to be bidding on it.' But they made it a province-wide contract and I thought that my little program...

MARSHALL: But you were just a small little program in one community at that time.

NORMA: That's right. In Victoria. Yeah, in Victoria. But I had one of those epiphanies. In the middle of the night one night when I was on holidays, I woke up and I went, 'well Work Streams can't do it but ASPECT could.' Because we've got a network of agencies all across the province.

MARSHALL: It's provincial.

NORMA: We've got Prince George, we've got Kelowna, we've got Cranbrook, we've got Vancouver.

MARSHALL: Right. So ASPECT could get the contract and then become less a networking association and become more operational, organizing agencies.

NORMA: Yeah. And with a commitment to ensure that the delivery of the program was done through the community-based agencies, that they were fairly paid, that the clients got the money that was supposed to go to them for training, and that we would be the administrative infrastructure. [45:00] That was the vision. I don't know where that came from in my mind in the middle of the night but I had to phone every single director of ASPECT the next day because we didn't have computers. I had to



phone everybody from my home on my holidays and say, 'I'm thinking of putting in a proposal for this.' And of course, we had nothing to lose. It was all, 'sure, go for it—if you want to spend your holidays writing a proposal.' And we got the contract and it was a \$6.5 million contract. It blew my mind. It was for 650 clients at \$10,000 a piece and I kept adding up the numbers and thinking, 'this can't be right, it's gotta be \$650,000; it can't be 6.5 million dollars.' And that was 1996. So I had to leave my job at Work Streams and go and start up an ASPECT office.

MARSHALL: Because you needed now to administer this contract.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: That's when ASPECT became...

NORMA: It became a business...

MARSHALL: Rather than a network.

NORMA: That was the issue. That was the difficult thing to balance because our competitors were PriceWaterhouse, the BC Chamber of Commerce... and then there was ASPECT. I think the community skill centres had an affiliation as well—yes they did. So we had pretty big players.

MARSHALL: In the same field that you were now a part of...

NORMA: And we're at the table with Deputy Ministers negotiating the terms of our contract. Meanwhile, we're an advocacy organization and a membership organization. So the balance then was figuring out how to do this fairly. So we put out a call for proposals to our members asking who wanted to participate. And you know what was interesting? The only agencies that really stepped up and came forward were the for-profit ones—small for-profit organizations that were members of ASPECT. They bid on the contract but the non-profits... they weren't ready for that switch yet. They felt like it was something that was a little too far out of their milieu.

MARSHALL: It seemed a little too far removed from what they...

NORMA: Yeah. So it took a lot of years before we actually found the balance between saying to people, 'look, you can still be a caring agency providing excellent services for your clients and be charging billable hours.'

MARSHALL: Right.

NORMA: When the province went to performance-based contracts... you had to find the balance between being a business and being a caring organization.

MARSHALL: The community, local non-profit where you know everyone doesn't always feel like a business.



- NORMA: I think my commitment, I think in my heart, is really for the non-profit sector. But it's really for the community-based sector. I just really believe that the best services happen when somebody can walk down the street and say, 'there's an employment agency over there; I can go in and get help and if I need something else they'll refer me over to the health clinic, they'll refer me to housing.' You know? That networking...
- MARSHALL: It's less about for-profit versus non-profit and more about the nature of the organization—where it's community-based, the people know the other people they can connect with. They have the local knowledge, local experiences, and local connections rather than a big, huge thing with satellite offices where you're just putting people through the motions and checking the boxes.
- NORMA: Yeah. And what we always found was that when they were... There was really a tendency toward centralization at one time where some of the bigger corporations would say 'we can run everything out of Victoria and we'll just provide phone service and people can call us if they need help and we'll connect them with an employer in that community.' But if they're not in that community to provide support or to make sure that client gets up and gets to work or to help that client buy clothes if that is what's needed, then they're not providing the service and support and they're showing that they have no understanding of the supports that are needed. [50:00]
- MARSHALL: Yeah.
- NORMA: So I think a big part of ASPECT's job after that became... it became supporting our members to rise up to the changes
- MARSHALL: That were starting to happen...
- NORMA: Yeah and still hold their values true—whatever those values were.
- MARSHALL: Right. And so what did the next couple of years look like for ASPECT? Were there more contracts? Did it just keep rolling over? Did ASPECT grow? Did you get more or less members after that change happened?
- NORMA: Sometimes we got more members. You know, it's not... Sadly, I would say, a lot of agencies might not have joined ASPECT for our values but they joined because there was an opportunity to get a contract. That's a little bit of an internal conflict. There were also agencies that we had to be harsh with because they weren't... they were fudging their results. So either you gotta call them on it and help them change their ways as a membership organization—help them learn to do their job better—or we have to cut them.
- MARSHALL: Like 'here are our values, we'll help you get to this place, or this isn't a good fit.'
- NORMA: Yeah. That's right. So ASPECT grew. We had a staff, at one point, of fourteen. Because we were providing so much support to our members and to the clients and we had so



many contracts. But it's interesting that our advocacy was always for a community-based level of delivery. So as government moved more and more towards centralizing and having larger contracts, it sort of gave an advantage to organizations that were corporations and had their own technology teams.

MARSHALL: Right. That were bigger and had a lot of existing infrastructure.

NORMA: And could hire PR people to write proposals, you know. So there was all kinds of movement that was going to really eliminate the community-based sector. And you could also see that was happening concurrently in the health sector. We've got American organizations running a lot of our health services now.

MARSHALL: But that was one place where ASPECT put their flag in the ground and said, 'no, this is one thing we're standing by—the community based approach.'

NORMA: So then, you know, as devolution did happen—finally... It had happened before already in Quebec and Alberta back in 1997 but it got stalled here in BC because of differing philosophies or whatever. But under the Harper government in 2005, they made a decision that they were just getting rid of the employment training programs; they were going to the provinces.

MARSHALL: They were all going to the provinces at that time.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: Did the cuts in 2003-2004—all the provincial cuts that happened—did that affect the funding for ASPECT or were employment contracts less affected by the slashing that happened in BC in 2003-2004? Because I know a lot of social service organizations were reeling and having to close programs or merge or absorb other smaller organizations as a result...

NORMA: I think employment didn't get hit as badly by that because... Well partly because there were some really forceful lobbyists and they were often from the corporations.

MARSHALL: There were still some big players in the sector that were looking out.

NORMA: Yeah. And also I think because the... Because there was a strong belief that the best way out of welfare was to get a job. So, you know, I think they didn't dare reduce the employment programs.

MARSHALL: At the same time as they were cutting everything else.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that makes sense.

NORMA: Yeah. But they... There was a lot of work going on behind the scenes too. [55:00] And at that time... I think the time you're talking about was when a lot of people were



not allowed to be on welfare for three months. There was a three month wait period when you applied for welfare. So that was a push to make people think 'any job is a good job.' It didn't have anything to do with, you know, what gave you any sense of fulfilment. And I'm in agreement with that. We don't all get to be fulfilled right away.

MARSHALL: Sometimes you just have to take what you can get.

NORMA: That's right. Yeah. But there were lots of shifts. I think that period of time divided the social service sector. I think it moved employment away. I think there was some animosity that was developing.

MARSHALL: There did seem to be a bit of, as a kind of unintended consequence of the way the cuts happened—in that some of them were staggered—and it appeared as though different sectors or different parts of the sector were treated in a different way based on how cuts came down.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: And so even though, from someone outside completely would look at it and be like 'oh they just cut tons of social services,' those within the sector who understood a little bit more about who had more contracts and where things were going that the minutiae of that was also very messy. Even though everybody was getting programs and funding cut, it still segmented things a little bit in that...

NORMA: It was very divisive.

MARSHALL: Very divisive. 'Why does that program, that looks a lot like our program, still get their money but we don't?' There wasn't a lot of rationale...

NORMA: That's right.

MARSHALL: I mean, there's never a lot of rationale behind government cuts so it can become this very divisive thing like you said.

NORMA: That's right. I remember going to meetings at the time and there was a lot of stuff that... Again, this was the disadvantage of there never having been a cohesive social service sector because we didn't often get a chance to all get together and talk about what was going on. And when it did come up, it was... I remember thinking, 'holy moly, I didn't know that was happening; you're kidding me!' When they shut down Riverdale or Riverside [Riverview Hospital] and the number of people who were getting put out on the street. Hearing about how many women were being abused. Things like that I remember being very touched by but not having been aware of it because it didn't seem to matter to the media much.

MARSHALL: No. Or even in, I think it was the mid-90s, with Gove and the restructuring of the ministries—that was just kind of dropped on the sector and everything was switched



out. Things like that are never really explained very well but that was another period of turmoil.

NORMA: It's like a shell game. Politics is like a shell game where there is money or values or policies underneath each shell and they're moving them around and you try to follow it. Like at that time I started thinking that I didn't understand why it was happening and what the pressures were. I remember asking [unintelligible] one time what he was looking for when he gave a \$64 million dollar direct award. I said, 'what motivated you to do that?' And he said two words you don't like to hear: ministerial discretion. I want to understand how they get to have that power. What is ministerial discretion based on? Where does that get decided? Where's the accountability for that? And that's when I started getting more and more interested in policies and policy development.

MARSHALL: Yes. Understanding how things work, what the mechanisms are behind the funding decisions given that they can seem happenstance or piecemeal or like that shell game you described.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: And did then... Like you said, in the mid 2000s when, under the Harper government, all the employment training moved from the federal government to the provinces—did that have a significant change on how...

NORMA: It had a profound effect. When they first started talking about devolution, it was when the NDP were in. And I think the federal government did not want to give the money to the NDP. They were politically opposite. So that's why everything stopped in the water then. So what they did was... BC ended up with a co-managed relationship where the federal government had their programs and the provincial government had their programs. [60:00] And often we would be running a program—I know we did at Work Streams—where we'd have one program for exactly the same client group on one side of our hallway and one on the other. So there would be one for EI-eligible clients and another for welfare clients, as we referred to them then. Same program. But it was based on where you got your funding from.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

NORMA: Because the federal government wouldn't allow us to take anybody in that didn't hit their criteria.

MARSHALL: And the provincial funding has slightly different criteria and they have to remain separate.

NORMA: Yeah. And it was a total waste of money and often very small, minor differences as to what we were able to do or which clients were eligible.



MARSHALL: Right.

NORMA: And hardly anything for someone who wasn't on either of those two funding sources. So if you were a person who wanted to change jobs or if you were a kid who lived at home with your parents you weren't eligible for anything. So there was a lot of maneuvering going on. That was, I think, the most confused period of time where there was a lot of money being wasted in British Columbia because some was by the federal government and some was by the provincial government. So we were looking forward to a more coordinated approach. But then you have to be careful what you ask for. Because the more coordinated it gets, the more massive it gets, and the more it eliminates other people.

MARSHALL: Is that what happened?

NORMA: Yeah. That is what happened. And we tried really hard, um... as soon as we heard devolution was happening, ASPECT had a conference on employment programming and what the devolution could hold for us.

MARSHALL: This would have been around 2006-7. Around then?

NORMA: 2004-5. It was in preparation.

MARSHALL: Getting ready before it happened. [crosstalk]

NORMA: I called the Deputy Minister of... I think it was the Ministry of Economic Development that was going to get one portion of the money. Here in BC—of course it always has to be the most confusing—the money from the Labour Market Development Agreement was going to come to one ministry. Money from the Labour Market Agreement—there was the LMDA and the LMA—was going to another ministry. It went to two different ministries. The only place in Canada that ever happened. Every other province it went to one ministry.

And so I called the Deputy Minister and told them ASPECT would like to have a conference about the policy development that would happen around this and ask how our members could start preparing for the devolution. And she said, 'that is absolutely ridiculous, you have no right having a conference to discuss this; you're not gonna have any influence whatsoever.' She said, 'I won't be coming and you will not be having that conference.' I thought... 'you don't own us.' And we ended up having the Deputy Ministers from Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta come and representatives from the nonprofit sector from Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta and informed our member about what might happen and how those provinces handled devolution because they had already gone through it. And so then the next year, that Deputy Minister was quite keen to come.

MARSHALL: Oh, I bet.

NORMA: And the timing was so different too. Some of the... For example Alberta devolved in



1996. So we're looking at almost 10 years later.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that's almost a decade later.

NORMA: And they were also transferring over all their federal government employees that had to deal with that.

MARSHALL: Oh, okay.

NORMA: So Alberta inherited about... I don't even know how many hundreds. I think it was over 500 federal government employees. So they were integrated into the delivery system. A lot of them still had a role and they referred clients.

MARSHALL: In this new version that was provincially managed.

NORMA: But in BC, come 2006, there weren't... a lot of those federal government employees were aging, like me. It was the baby boomer generation and so they ended up taking early retirement and deciding not to transfer over to the provincial government.

MARSHALL: And that probably complicated the situation because the people who had been running and managing stuff aren't around anymore either.

NORMA: That's right.

MARSHALL: Plus it's the new provincial approach.

NORMA: But I would say that ASPECT was really successful in our advocacy with the provincial government. [65:00] We envisioned a community-based model of delivery and we kept promoting and promoting that to the government and so I think we collided... coincided at the right time with the right Assistant Deputy Minister who was interested in having consultations. That was Allison Bond and she had done the public consultations on health before that. So that's what they did. They went around the province and they set up multiple opportunities that involved anyone who wanted to be involved, really, in giving input into what the issues of employment training in their community were. And how they saw the model... what the kind of model they would like to envision.

MARSHALL: Right. What it could look like in the future.

NORMA: And there were lots of complaints afterwards that, you know, 'well government said they heard this and they heard that but that's not what we said.' But I have to say that the result was, instead of having one provincial-wide contract or one provincial-wide model, there were some general templates that were put out, but they had 72 contracts. They divided the province into 72 catchment areas and said, 'in order for you to bid on this contract for this catchment area, you have to have a partnership between yourself and other agencies in the area.' So, in some ways, that was both a good thing and a bad thing because... it was a community-based model.



MARSHALL: Right, it structurally builds in the community-based needs in the model...

NORMA: Yeah, but the agencies that got left on the outside of the partnerships—either by choice or by ignorance, some of them were by ignorance, it's shocking that anybody could think 'oh, that's not going to affect us' but there were people who did. Or... agencies that were um... not liked, not well-liked and didn't play with the team... they got left out of that particular bidding process. And actually I think most of those organizations are gone now. Because there was never any alternate source of funding.

MARSHALL: And if the model is changing to this way and you don't fit into the new way or don't see yourself in that system...

NORMA: And it was a very risky contract too because it started off being a performance-based contract that the agencies were going to have to... you know they were going to get paid by performance on a piece-by-piece... piecemeal payment schedule. There were a lot of boards—a lot of non-profit boards—were reluctant to take that risk. A lot of individuals were reluctant to take that risk. And then afterwards it turned out that they had to renegotiate the payment schedule because, you know, it wasn't actually a very good payment schedule.

MARSHALL: If enough people are averse to how you are doing things then it becomes a red flag and you have to begin to think about how you can do things differently.

NORMA: Yeah. That's right. So I don't know that the program was... The transition was really, really difficult for agencies. I don't know if the program was all that successful. I know a lot of people said they had gone to get help and couldn't get help at an agency because they didn't fit some criteria. You know... the employment program BC, as it came to be called, sort of started off on one set of stipulations and then those changed.

MARSHALL: They evolve over time and any type of change that is that big and far-reaching will leave some gaps, there's going to be some...

NORMA: It was a massive change and I think, overall, it was managed as good as can be expected. And really the government's philosophy was that they wanted to reduce the number of contractors they had. Because they had over 400 contractors before. 400 contracts. Probably 400 contracts and I think we had just over 100 agencies at that time in BC.

MARSHALL: So did ASPECT keep growing? There was a whole other decade you were at ASPECT after that point.

NORMA: Yeah. But we had... Well, what happened was ASPECT did not bid on that contract. Although many people—many of our members asked us to. We didn't bid on any of that because it would have been wrong, I felt, to bid on a contract when we advocated



for community-based model, this was a community-based model...

MARSHALL: So let's just let the community-based model exist. [70:00]

NORMA: Yeah. Our job became supporting our members so they could write the best proposals as possible and adapt as easily as possible, be prepared for database changes, you know? Understand the financial model. So that's what we tried to do. It was time to back out. We came to be at the time it was needed and then it was time to back out. So our advocacy was really effective. Our business model failed. We had no other source of income, really. During the time that ASPECT had been a broker, we had... my board... none of the boards had wanted to raise membership fees over \$100 a year, charge a higher price for a conference, or develop other business models. It was like, 'no, no, we've got enough going right now.' Which was true. One year we had \$20 million we were responsible for channeling through in specific ways.

MARSHALL: And then after this change in the late 2000s, ASPECT became an advocacy-based membership organization again?

NORMA: That's right.

MARSHALL: And did it remain that way? It's still that way now?

NORMA: Yeah, it is. It's struggling, like a lot of non-profit organizations, but that's still what we do. You know, the same time that the provincial employment program of BC came out, some of the other contracts that we had for immigrants, that were managed for the federal government... those changed. They got clawed back to the federal government and change happened. It was just a changing time. And ASPECT doesn't have any employment contracts anymore.

MARSHALL: And you stayed with ASPECT until fairly recently...

NORMA: 2016. Yeah. Well...

MARSHALL: And then you retired? What was that transition like? When did you make that decision? What did that look like?

NORMA: It was... Well, I was almost 70. I was really tired. [laughing]

MARSHALL: And you had been in the same place for quite a while.

NORMA: Yeah. Because it was always such an exciting job, that was the longest job I ever had. 20 years I was at ASPECT. 10 years I was at Work Streams. So um... But yeah. I don't know that I ever would have made the decision to leave ASPECT. It was and still is such an exciting job to have, I think. But the... my husband got ill and his condition was urgent. So it was like, 'okay, the time has come.' And the board and I had discussions and I had succession planning in place. But as the contracts were ending, the people that were working at ASPECT at the time that I had thought



would stay and carry on, decided they would go on to bigger and better jobs. So that happened.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that happens sometimes too.

NORMA: I'm still good friends with those people, but they're in great jobs and they often phone me and say 'oh, I was thinking about the other day.' Talking about human resources management or other things that used to happen around the office. We had a great team of people there for a long time. Some of them worked there 17 years, 15 years. A lot of people were there...

MARSHALL: There must have been something that worked in that model given that this thing that started as kind of a networking organization off the side of people's desk grew to be this big and this influential and helped so many organizations through very tumultuous changes. And then fundamentally changed again and still existed and still served what was needed given each time period as a result of all the funding changes and policy changes over those decades.

NORMA: I've often wondered if I would ever do it again knowing what happened. And I think that... one of my greatest prides was that I could sit at the table with government and corporations [75:00] and say, 'we're doing social services in a business model, we can compete in a business model, but we still do it with heart and we still do it with a conscious.' You don't have to lose that.

MARSHALL: It's still about the people and the community.

NORMA: Yeah. if you stay client-centered, it's not hard to do things better, you know? That's just what I could never get. When there were new contracts given out some of the winners would go and build million-dollar houses on the oceanfront. When the contracts were given out at ASPECT, that money got divided out exactly the way it was supposed to. The money was going to the community-based agencies that sustained them and their communities and it went to the training of clients. Some of those models of contracting, like training for jobs, were brilliant. Because you could actually pay for courses for two years at university.

NORMA: You just answered one of my final wrap-up questions very nicely. But is that then the... if you had to name the secret to like ASPECT's success or longevity over these decades, is that a piece of it? That adherence to the community-based person-based, heartfelt approach to this type of work? What was the secret that kept ASPECT going through all those changes?

NORMA: I don't think you could do this work... When I go back to when I was working at Work Streams that first year, and you see those miracles happen, I don't think you can or should do this work unless you've been a part of that, unless you've seen those miracles. I don't think people could just go to university and come out as an Executive



Director and run an organization with some business model. I think it has to be the model where you understand how it affects people, how it affects the clients. And um... I just think that's such a critical part of it.

When we've gone on personal holidays, we often go to Australia because we have relatives there. So then I started looking at... they've got these service centres and I've got in touch with Jobs Australia. They have a national association—like ASPECT was a provincial association. And they keep all their money... It's a totally different model. They have a federal government and a state government. But the federal government is responsible for almost everything and it is given out to the states in some degree. But always managed by the federal government. And employment training is managed that way there. And the organization in Australia that represents the non-profits has... they have a separate organization that manages their contracts. It's almost like an overlap—it's dual parallel organizations. I looked at that and thought, 'that would have been a better model.' We should have started up a business division and kept the advocacy division.

MARSHALL: And have both of them running. That's one of the other things I was wanting to ask. At the ends of these I don't... I mean, we haven't asked people about failures per se because, in this sector, you do your best with the hand you're dealt and a lot of the changes are out of your control. But that's one thing—is that the thing or is there one other thing you could have done differently with the benefit of hindsight? That's a very different and unique model that, in retrospect, you could have employed.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: Is there anything else, looking back now, with the wisdom of all these experiences that you've thought 'we could have done this differently' or 'we could have seen this coming.'

NORMA: Sometimes I think you are better off not being able to see what's coming.

MARSHALL: Yeah. That's true I guess. [laughing]

NORMA: I think if we had known that our first contract was going to be \$6.5 million, I think... and I did manage that organization for a whole year before the board realized that \$6.5 million is a huge fiduciary responsibility. [80:00] And then every once in a while, in the cycle of board work... About every 8 years I found the board would come around to... some sort of fanaticism that happens. 'Oh my god, we've got all this money? Have we done this right? Have we done that right?' As an Executive Director it helps to have the experience to have lived through the last crazy cycle to be able to give them the information they need to be prepared to deal with that again. It's a big financial responsibility for them.

So I think... I wish that there had been an organization that trained board members better. Where they could get more steady access to training. We know some of them that have tried to do some of that. And I wish that there had been a program



at the university that... No there's that Masters of Community Development at UVic. They've partnered that more with the MPA program—public admin—so there is more cross-sectorial understanding between government and the community. I like that model a lot more. I wish that I had understood policies better.

MARSHALL: Yeah. That relationship—the two sides of the same coin. That's where the money comes from so understanding what's going on underneath the surface when it comes to those decisions can be helpful.

NORMA: Yeah.

MARSHALL: While still staying true to the work you want to do and the community-based model. There's a weird kind of... two worlds you have to straddle. And the best you can understand both of them because they do work together. They are fundamentally related.

NORMA: What's one thing you are—looking back now, or having seen the arc of the sector and the things that have changed over decades—what's one thing you are either excited or hopeful for? For the future? It could be in terms of ASPECT specifically or for the sector?

NORMA: I was feeling pretty sad for the first couple of years after I retired. I thought, 'I'm not so proud of some of the things that happened.' And I'm not so proud of some of the agencies we advocated for. Because when they were given the opportunity, sometimes they weren't... they were as crooked as some other people I know. Sometimes that happened.

MARSHALL: That happens.

NORMA: Sometimes I was really disappointed. I was in that jaded state for a while. And then I was shopping in a consignment store one day and the ladies that run it were telling me that they have clothing for people trying to get work. And they were running a little employment program in the evenings out of their back room. And I thought, 'do you want some of our employability skill curriculum, because it answers some of the basic stuff about how to help people with communication problems.' It might just be helpful, I said. So I gave them my employability skills curriculum and I thought, 'you know, the sector should be like—they're dandelions.' They'll crop up wherever there is a need. They just crop up.

One of my colleagues wrote a history of the community based training sector in Canada and, you know, they crop up in church basements and they crop up in consignment stores, and they'll crop up in community centres. So that is one of the things I am kind of glad about. I am glad that people like you are documenting things and sharing some experiences and history. Because when you get to be this old, you get to see the patterns of 'oh, we've been through that before.'



MARSHALL: And that's the interesting thing. You see the patterns of history repeating itself. There's cuts or there's new funding or programs change or the model changes or they go back to this policy that's brand new and a new approach to whatever. But with the benefit of hindsight or history, you can see that they actually did something similar in the 80s and this is what happened as an unintended result. Here's how to mitigate that. [85:00]

[*end recording*]