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Interviewer: Marshall Watson
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MARSHALL: [0:00] Why don't we just start with, you know, your background a little bit. What it was like where you came from and, kind of, your way into this type of work.

TIM: Hmm. Well, I had a very long, long career as an agency executive director that goes back to the early 1980s. And prior to that, I had predominantly been involved in some community development work which in the 70s and early 80s was kind of my passion and I kind of thought that is where I really wanted to go. I had done a bit of work for... oh all the way back to the infamous Company of Young Canadians if anybody remembers them. I worked in Winnipeg for a year with them. And then I ran a Youth Hostel one summer out in Hope. And then worked for a couple of government agencies...

A government agency in Saskatchewan doing community development work. And then for the previous assessor of BC's Legal Aid system. And was involved in the establishment and funding and oversight of the original Community Law Office Network. Now long-deceased I must say. So, real varied experience. I did some other stuff, but those were the things that really propelled me into what was actually an accident—that resulted in me at the PLEA community services.

MARSHALL: Okay. Sorry, you were in Saskatchewan for a bit, and then BC also? Are you from BC?

TIM: I was born and raised in Vancouver.

MARSHALL: Oh, okay.

TIM: I'm a local boy. But I'd spent a couple years in Toronto. A year in Winnipeg. A couple years in Regina. Enough to kind of learn about the wider room and be really happy to get back to the coast.

MARSHALL: Yeah yeah. For jobs? Or for school?

TIM: Yeah, it was jobs.

MARSHALL: Did you study anything that would have helped you with this type of—

TIM: I managed to get through the first year Arts 1 program at UBC. And then employment and the need to stay employed kind of became dominant and I never finished a degree. So I've spent an entire career admonishing people to [laughing] to do what I failed to do.

MARSHALL: [Laughing] Do as I say, not as I do.

TIM: A few years back there was, for me, an absolutely astonishing moment in which Douglas College named me one of their first honorary fellows.

MARSHALL: Oh wow!

TIM: And when I got the call from the College President to, kind of... just like a bolt out of the blue. And it kind of left me almost in tears because I'd never actually managed to sort of get to—

MARSHALL: Gone through that at the time

TIM: —To finish post-secondary. Even though I'd sat on College Advisory Committees and, you know, all of that stuff.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: That was a particularly personally meaningful moment. So that and the accident that led to my being at PLEA was that from the mid-60s my father was a Youth Probation Officer, originally with the city of Vancouver and then that was taken over by the province. Youth Probation and Youth Justice Services were initially under the responsibility of the Corrections Branch of the then Attorneys Generals Ministry until they then got moved into MCFD back in 1994. My dad had been quite an innovator in programs and had developed some programs that sort of operated alongside traditional probation services and were quite, in fact, the countries very first intensive one-to-one program for offenders was that program. First of its kind in Canada.

MARSHALL: Oh wow, he created it?

TIM: Yeah. In 1983—

MARSHALL: Do you remember when that would have been about?

TIM: 1973.

MARSHALL: 1973?

TIM: Yeah. And it lived on a variety of short term grants and eventually finally became taken over as a Corrections Branch program.

MARSHALL: Okay.

TIM: Everything was working fine [05:00] until 1983, if you'll recall, I hope with your other interviews 1983 is a bit of a pivotal year...

MARSHALL: Yeah. '83 and yeah there was a couple milestones [unclear].

TIM: That's right. The 26 bills. The dismantling of a whole bunch of things that were near and dear to my heart and also a decision to privatize a lot of social services. Correc-

tions Branch made the decision that anything that required the services of a Peace Officer—so Youth Custody and Youth Probation—had to stay inside Government. They weren't prepared to privatize Peace Officer duties. I think they may have been under some pressure to do that, but they said 'no, that's a line they couldn't cross'. But anything that didn't fall into that category, they felt they could do that. They could move them out. I... at that point I was... kind of Board Chair of a really tiny non-profit that was created by some of the people that got laid off from the old original Legal Services process.

MARSHALL: Okay. Alright. And you were back in BC at this time.

TIM: Oh yeah, back in BC. And it was intended as a bit of a, sort of, you know, can we find a way to create some employment for some people. We had, in fact, developed a very small and for the day, again very innovative, Youth Justice Residential program, that used a specialized foster, highly supervised specialized foster home model, aimed at juvenile girls. Highly, highly successful. 1983 came along, they [unclear] the privatization process happened. The people who were working in that went to one program, all of whom were kind of youth workers. Classic, classic, we still got a photograph of the gang. [laughing]

MARSHALL: [Laughing]

TIM: Yeah, looks like youth workers from 1983! And they were being offered redeployment in the public service. Like they could go and be court clerks and stuff like that, and a number of them approached us and said 'if we could, we'd rather stay with the program. Would you submit a bid on our behalf?'.

MARSHALL: Yeah... figure out some way to make that work.

TIM: I had... there were some challenges to task that... I had somebody on our board of directors who was then on the staff of the BC Federation of Labour. We were understood to be a labor-friendly organization.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: No way we're doing this other than with collective agreements and so forth. Which also created a competitive disadvantage. However, we organized ourselves and did the bid—won it. And that was as of April 1984. And that led to... we started... I think in '84 PLEA had six beds, about a dozen staff, and a budget in the order of half a million dollars... something like that. It's now a 30—

MARSHALL: Not bad to start out for! Yeah!

TIM: —30 million dollar monster. The... we were one of the... we share some history with Pacific Community Resources, they too were one of the early unionized programs that resulted from the privatization process. We inherited the government — the BC

government — master agreement with the BCGEU that kind of was on the succession application and all of a sudden that was our collective agreement. We did some work to kind of tailor and negotiate... just as a sidebar there was one that we were pleased with at the time. There was a management proposal at the first round of bargaining to include sexual orientation in the human rights clause in the collective agreement. We were one of the first—

MARSHALL: Really, in like...?

TIM: —First social sector bargaining units in BC to formally write that language into a collective agreement.

MARSHALL: Right. In 84ish.

TIM: 84.

MARSHALL: That would have been even before the Delwin Vriend case went to the Supreme Court or anything [mumbles]

TIM: Yeah. We were kind of... a number of us in the organization and the board had been active in human rights issues and we just sort of said there are certain things that are the right thing to do and they said 'Really? We'd love to do that!'

MARSHALL: Great! Yeah.

TIM: It was good.

MARSHALL: A little ahead of the curve. [10:00]

TIM: Yeah. From there... so at that point we had this one-to-one program, we had this small residential program, and that followed a number of years of pretty systematic growth both in terms of Youth Justice Services and... both expanding sort of, the programs as they were... expanding geographically. Initially we're city of Vancouver, eventually it was whole lower mainland. And then sort of spinning off services using our kind of core program models that the Child Welfare folks—in the Ministry of Social Services and Housing I think—asked if we could provide them with some beds. We said 'yes we think'.

MARSHALL: [Laughing] Maybe...?

TIM: And in about... that was the old satellite home. We were part of the old satellite homes network. At one... it peaked in about 2000 I guess, at over 100 beds. And mostly we realized very early that what we were good at was providing service for people who were hard to please, difficult to place, had experienced significant placement failures.

MARSHALL: Because of the people you brought out, like their experience as youth workers and so

their kind of—

TIM: Yeah. We were sort of developing that sort of expertise and decided that where we wanted to be. It's actually not where a lot of other people wanted to be.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: So we became, to a significant degree, one of the kinds of last resort placements. And became pretty proud of the fact that we managed to stabilize and sort of turn around the circumstance for a good number of kids who the system had largely written off.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: So that became... it was a really challenging environment but it became a really satisfying one. We branched off into some Youth Addictions Programs. Detox... youth detox... supportive recovery. Eventually into specialized Youth Justice Residential Addictions Treatment Programs.

MARSHALL: Later on, or fairly...?

TIM: They came in... later on, probably in the mid-90s.

MARSHALL: Oh okay, right.

TIM: And so the organization kind of just sort of slowly kind of grew and grew and grew.

MARSHALL: Yeah, but it was slower. It wasn't... you weren't just going for every bit available once you had this new organization, it was...

TIM: No actually we made some careful decisions that there were a whole bunch of things we were not interested in doing. There were particular service delivery models that we felt really comfortable with and competent at and we just sort of thought the rest of the world can deal with all the rest of the things and we'll focus and concentrate our work where we think we can do it best.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: What... there were inevitable ups and downs. One of the first ones being the anxiety that we experienced in the transition of Youth Justice Services into MCFD. Initially, our analysis was 'you couldn't have asked for a worse possible outcome'.

MARSHALL: [Chuckles] Right.

TIM: You know, we were not enamored with the administrative [unclear] management and service oversight qualities of that ministry prior to MCFD being in terms of child welfare. I mean they were really difficult to work with. And we just sort of thought, this is not going to work... Couldn't have been more wrong. One of the things that happened was that Alan Markwart, who was in the senior Youth Justice Official with Corrections

Branch also moved, and his team moved over to MCFD and quickly learned—

MARSHALL: —This would have been around… do you remember when this was?

TIM: Yeah, '96 I think is [15:00] when MCFD was created.

MARSHALL: Yeah right around Gove and everything…

TIM: Yeah, the aftermath of Gove. They… it turned out… there was a really happy kind of marriage, in a sense, in there. On the one hand, Alan and Alan's team were incredibly competent and capable, quite able to sort of say, 'We can run Youth Justice Services and not be a nuisance to the rest of the Ministry'. And the rest of the Ministry looked at those guys and said, 'First of all you're really, really tiny in the context of the Ministry's sort of overall mandate, size, and scope. So if you can keep out of trouble, we'll let ya'. And very quickly it became apparent they had—and Alan has been quite explicit about this—they had a degree of freedom that they never had in the old Corrections Branch.

MARSHALL: Right, previously.

TIM: And all of a sudden a creative bunch of people were able to become much more creative. And they did a fabulous job at partnering with their community agencies. We were obviously one of them—and the biggest one. And so we did a lot of stuff together. I remember Alan walking into our office one day and said… 'I'd like to introduce you to Audrey Salahub, who you probably have never met before… that point Audrey was the ED of the Asanti Centre of FASD services out of Maple Ridge.

MARSHALL: Oh okay.

TIM: And we sort of said, 'Actually we have heard of Audrey but we'd never actually met her!' And Alan said, 'Well that's okay, but what I need you to do [laughter] now…

MARSHALL: [Laughter]

TIM: Is put your heads together and submit an application—a joint application to the Federal Government Justice Department for a demonstration project for working with Youth Justice engaged clinics who[mumble] FASD. PLEA and the Asanti center still have that partnership in place.

MARSHALL: Oh wow!

TIM: And Youth Probation is actively a part of that as well. I mean it's now… 15 years old, 20 years old? It's been a long time—

MARSHALL: Late 90s? That's two decades?

TIM: It would have been early 2000s.

MARSHALL: Early 2000s? Okay.

TIM: And Alan could do that kind of stuff because he had a really well-articulated vision for where he wanted to go, and had an ability to sort of partner up with everybody... he was remarkably good. The other thing that was happening was that between Youth Justice Services and the Ministry and the contracted agencies, as well as what was going on with the police and crowd council, and other parts of the justice system. By 2004, when the current Youth Criminal Justice Act came into place, what had already started in BC earlier than that, which was the slow decline in the Youth Justice stats, became the steep decline. So BC has currently—for a number of years now—the lowest rate of Youth Justice engagement of any jurisdiction in Canada.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: It has closed one Youth Justice Custody Center—for geographic purposes it needs to keep two going—but they're virtually empty. And similarly caseloads for probation and caseloads of community agencies have shrunk really dramatically. And it's one of those fabulous success stories.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: It can't be attributed to any one player or actor, but a whole bunch of things combined.

MARSHALL: Systemic change, or...

TIM: It is an area where I really think those people who want to look closely at the whole question of systemic change and how that actually happens—

MARSHALL: How it happens...

TIM: Really need to study that with some piece of care—

MARSHALL: All the different pieces that connect and the...

TIM: What happened and what were the conditions that made that possible. It's actually quite a remarkable story.

MARSHALL: That's interesting.

TIM: Yeah. The other piece that happened in that period... from 2000 to 2004 the Federal Government put in place a consultation of planning process leading to the implementation of the 2004 Youth Criminal Justice Act with comparable Provincial Legislation. And PARCA which is the Youth Justice Network—and the Ministry collaborated, again making good use of Federal Government money—collaborated on a series of regional and provincial planning conferences to sort of prepare everybody for the changes that would happen.

MARSHALL: Oh okay, yeah, yeah.

TIM: And we were able to—oh, two or [20:00] three hundred people at a time—put provincial ministry staff and agency staff in the same room, talking about the same stuff, planning the same stuff.

MARSHALL: Were these funded and provided for to get everyone up to speed?

TIM: That was the plan. We were lucky there was some Federal money available to make it easier, but... and all the arrangements around all the Federal funding was that BC said, to the Feds, 'Give the money to PARCA and PARCA will administer the whole process.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: So we were actually in a significant leadership role around putting that together. And it was one of... it was again a really satisfying process. There were some subsequent, kind of, shared planned conferences as well so that was really sort of... those were really fine days in terms of social policy outcomes but also really a collaborative working relationship.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: We were caught up in 1998, I think it was, restructuring of services that the great Bob Plecas was overseeing during his tenure as Deputy Minister.

MARSHALL: Yeah so—

TIM: And what was the name of his sidekick at that point...?

MARSHALL: I have it in my notes somewhere. We can make a note of that... Before we just pause for one sec right there in the late 90s, that decade for PLEA, just like, that was the kind of slow, incremental, kind of intentional growth for about, because it would have been about ten years between 84 and the late 90s when the Ministry and then Plecas report write-up after, you know...

TIM: Yeah, pretty much, in a sense it was slow in that the residential services were the ones that were expanding the most and that was on a bed by bed by bed by bed basis. When we looked back on it actually it was remarkably fast. We were adding beds left, right and center. And our constant process of recruiting and training and orienting new caregivers.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: It uh... We had to develop... We had to get fairly well organized around doing that and sort of figure out how do you do that in a more systematic way.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that's kind of the recurring theme like, talking to people when something new

is starting and they're able to do it really well and they're meeting a need and they're so good that the work... and then you have to realize how to make that sustainable and organized and structured as you grow, because you're going to have to grow once you're established and doing the work and getting those bids.

TIM: The growth question I always found very troubling. I never thought very much about this province—and still don't think very much of this province's procurement policies. There came a point when I started to realize there was far, far more benefit to cooperation across agencies than competition. Having said that we were thrust into a situation right from '84 on and for a number of years, especially in the Youth Justice environment before MCFD was set up, where there was an adherence to retendering contracts routinely and so forth. It was very different than other parts of government.

MARSHALL: Mmm hmm.

TIM: And so we didn't have any choice. We had to learn to be really good at it. We were also a unionized agency at the top of the compensation heap, happily there, but it meant that the only possible way we could compete was on reputation service quality. Because anybody who really wanted could undercut us financially.

MARSHALL: Undercut you for... based on... yeah.

TIM: And you know, lo and behold, we lost very little RFP processes over those years. We learned how to do it. We learned how to understand not only the obvious but the nuance expectations that Government ministries had [25:00] and, you know, we kept our ear to the ground and kind of researched like crazy and... my colleague Anne used to say about the whole process around writing bids, was 'It's just a question of following the yellow brick road. Read the RFP documents and do exactly what they require and don't do anything else!' [Laughter]

MARSHALL: Don't do anything, yeah, yeah. [Laughter]

TIM: Just don't deviate and yeah... I mean, I got to the point... they ultimately changed the rules, I think partly because of some of the stuff that we did early, early on. But I even got to the point where in order to squeeze in all the stuff that we thought that we needed to say... I learned how to make smaller font. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: [Laughter]

TIM: The other thing that we did, because there were a number of situations where... particularly in retenderings... There were a number of situations that arose where we began to doubt that anybody actually read the damn things fairly carefully [Laugh].

MARSHALL: [Laugh] Why do you say that?

TIM: Well because it was not uncommon for either question to be asked of us, or com-

ments to be made, that if they'd read the damn thing they would've known the answer! So one of the... and then we started thinking well, if it's painful to write this stuff it must be excruciating to read them all. So one of the things that we ended up doing was deciding that in the depths of every single one there was a gentle joke. There was something that was going to make somebody laugh.

MARSHALL: Just to help the person who is reading!

TIM: We did it just to see if anybody read that far they would have got it and we would have heard about it. What we actually discovered was that people thought it was fabulous because it just lightened up their reading load.

MARSHALL: Yeah totally, it's a little gift for the people who have to go through, you know, dozens of these.

TIM: But it... we learned to be really good at that. Then the restructuring process in the lower mainland that brought Plecas's regime put in place.

MARSHALL: Mid-late '90s.

TIM: Was... for our organization, hugely successful.

MARSHALL: Okay.

TIM: We were... because of the way in which they chose to geographically carve out services, and how our preexisting services were sort of structured—mostly on a lower mainland basis—we felt, sort of, forced to actually submit applications for more than we really wanted.

MARSHALL: Oh, because of the way things had been organized?

TIM: Because of the way they sliced and diced things. Yeah. And so... and then we started winning them. And we won way more than we thought. At the same time, I was one of the people who was distinctly uncomfortable with the way the whole process had happened. And... The deputy at one point came over to Vancouver for a big meeting with everybody. There was a sort of, a lot of pressure on them to go ahead, implement, because they'd done the adjudications but they hadn't actually executed contracts.

MARSHALL: Oh, okay.

TIM: There was a lot of pressure on them to go ahead. And there was also a lot of pressure on them to sort of cancel the whole thing. As it turned out, I turned out to be the guy who drove the Deputy Minister and his sidekick from wherever the meeting was out in Burnaby somewhere down to the Helijet for his flight back to Vancouver—or back to Victoria. And they were kind of arguing back and forth in my car about what they were hearing and all that kind of stuff. And Plecas finally turned to me and said 'What

would you do?' And I just blurted out, cause I just sort of said—I find myself having succeeded hugely in the competitive process—'If I was in your job I would cancel the whole thing. And I can't exactly tell you why, but I just don't think it's gonna end well.' And for whatever reason, a week or so later, that's exactly what they did.

MARSHALL: Huh.

TIM: And then all of a sudden we were back to undoing all the things that prepped—

MARSHALL: The things that had been prepared for and... yeah.

TIM: The next thing that happened would have been in about 2000... And at that point had a very large number of [30:00] contracted beds for the Child Welfare part of the Ministry.

MARSHALL: Right, okay.

TIM: And the whole, sort of, satellite home thing kind of erupted as a policy problem.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that started bubbling in the late '90s, early 2000s.

TIM: Yeah, and it boiled at that point. And we... I think we may have had the largest number of beds—certainly in the lower mainland. We also had a pretty good reputation.

MARSHALL: At this point, yeah.

TIM: We were happy with that. All of a sudden the Ministry came along and sort of said 'We're downsizing so we're gonna start removing one bed at a time.' And...

MARSHALL: Had everything with all of your... the contracts moved over to MCFD at this point?

TIM: Everything. Yeah. Everything from Youth Justice was there. We did have some addictions services funded by Vancouver Coastal Health, but pretty much everything else was with—

MARSHALL: But for the most part yeah. Okay.

TIM: One of the things that suddenly... the penny dropped very quickly fortunately [Laughter]... and that was when you're ramping up on a specialized foster home model one bed with heavy amounts of support staff around that—family workers, youth workers and so forth—when you're ramping up one bed at a time, you can predict fairly well when you need to be adding staff...

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: And when you can afford to add staff...

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: When you start downsizing one bed at a time—and not necessarily in the same location or any of that kind of stuff—you all of a sudden have staffing and financial chaos. And we... I forget the numbers now, but the decline in beds was in the order of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth, spread over a couple of years. You know, every week there would be another one sort of disappear.

MARSHALL: Yeah, this was like early 2000s when all the cuts were started?

TIM: Yeah. And the whole satellite home thing got dismantled. The... we were lucky, it took a little bit of work, but we were lucky in being able to negotiate with MCFD an orderly, sort of more orderly transition, which... I think we would have gone bankrupt if we hadn't got that. It was just financially chaotic.

MARSHALL: Because if the beds are at different places and the funding is disappearing at different times...

TIM: If some of the funding is disappearing and you have to start laying off staff you still have some of the beds going that they were supporting... I mean, it's pretty hard to manage that so... We finally worked out an arrangement with the Ministry and it worked out well that both gave us an ability to, sort of, do a more orderly withdrawal as it were, but also to work with the Ministry around, as much as could be done, transitioning the beds over to the Ministry in a kind of barrier-free, easy kind of way, so we were maximizing placement stability for the kids.

MARSHALL: The kids, yeah.

TIM: And then in a number of cases we continued to provide support for those families for a considerable period beyond...

MARSHALL: For a little while after the [unclear]...

TIM: It rationalized the whole process. Painful but it rationalized it.

MARSHALL: Yeah. This was PLEA kind of lobbying to make things a little smoother? Just specifically? Or were there others?

TIM: No, we were on our own at that point. I forget what other agencies were doing, but—

MARSHALL: Scrambling. From the interviews that I've heard, they were scrambling and trying to piece together and some were merging, some were—

TIM: —Some were a lot more noisy than we wanted to be. We just sort of pushed our way into some meetings with regional managers and, you know, people with some decision-making capacity and sort of said 'Look. We know what you're needing to do, but this needs to be a rational plan. This needs to be collaborative—'

MARSHALL: Do it in a slightly better way if it's going to happen right.

TIM: Absolutely. And it worked, and I hand it to the Ministry managers who worked with us around that... [Laughter] We came out of that process having said to ourselves, 'We're never taking another Child Welfare Residential Placement into the agency ever again.' And that lasted a couple years.

MARSHALL: [Laugher] Famous last words.

TIM: Well, in the [35:00] 2004 restructuring in the lower mainland—which had similar dynamics for us of the way they sliced and diced services—was completely incompatible with what we had been doing previously. So we had this sort of... we ended up with the Youth Justice contract for the city of Vancouver. And we ended up with the Integrated Youth Services Agreements for the tri-cities and for Maple Ridge. And it... and actually what it meant was... because you may remember that there was a big philosophical battle between the Ministry Management team in Vancouver Coastal Region as opposed to my old friend Les Boon [?] in the Fraser Region who wanted to organize all those services on a community geared basis fully integrated. Vancouver wanted city-wide services much more specialized.

MARSHALL: Yeah that was the disconnect between the...

TIM: We turned out to be the only agency with a foot seriously in both camps and I'm here to tell you that both models work.

MARSHALL: Oh?

TIM: They both have strengths. They both have disadvantages. You can make them both work, trust me. We had to. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: Right, I guess... in both worlds.

TIM: And that... I decided out of that exercise that I was no longer going to get obsessive about structural solutions to problems that had other causes [Laughter].

MARSHALL: Yeah, sometimes you just have to...

TIM: Exactly. But with the tri-cities and Ridge Meadows integrated youth services contracts... Out of the blue one day we get a phone call from the... A protection worker, or a guardianship worker, in one of those communities who says, 'I know you don't do Residential anymore, but could you?' And we ended up looking at it and saying that despite our commitment never to do another Child Welfare commitment—

MARSHALL: —the recent commitment.

TIM: The fact is that if we're functioning as the Ministry's sole Youth Services provider in those communities and some of those kids have needs for Residential Services then it's not right for us to simply say 'We're not interested'.

MARSHALL: To say no.

TIM: And maybe we can do something better at sort of a more integrated approach, so we started saying yes again. And PLEA is once again, to this day, a significant Residential Service provider.

MARSHALL: Right. So that would have been?

TIM: That started in... That flowed out of the 2004 restructuring. It was probably 2006 or so that we got that call, it was a couple of years.

MARSHALL: Right, so, lots of...

TIM: Yeah.

MARSHALL: Contracts were clocked back and then very shortly after it was—

TIM: —It started again.

MARSHALL: It started again because...

TIM: —Nobody calls it Satellite Homes now. In the innovation and sustainability project that the deputy who is now at SolGen... Mark Sieben, initiated. We were heavily involved in that. And Allison Bond was then an ADM and we teamed up with Allison on a project to sort of have a look at whether or not it would be a good development model for the Ministry to take a large number of Child Specific Residential contracts and, in our case, with almost every region in the province—we were doing provincial intake by that point—to see whether or not a model could be developed or not to actually consolidate a contract, 25 individual contracts, into a single one still retaining enough flexibility to be able to expand and contract as needed. But keeping a sufficient core staffing levels to be able to sort of handle that and absorb both the contracting and expanding. And also to see whether or not it could be done more financially effectively.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: That process—

MARSHALL: —Just like at scale essentially? So you have a... so it's not smaller—

TIM: —Yeah. Can you save some money with a big chunk? That project [40:00] was almost the last thing I was engaged in before I retired in 2016. And we demonstrated, first to my satisfaction, that we could negotiate a contract that had everything that we needed in it, and they could negotiate a contract that saved them a big pot of money by doing that sort of thing.

MARSHALL: Yeah, approaching it a little...

TIM: One of the dilemmas with it was that their payment system, their whole computer system, is not designed to support that kind of approach.

MARSHALL: Right. When would those conversations have started?

TIM: 2014...

MARSHALL: 2014?

TIM: Yeah. It was in the aftermath of the last little... of the Christy Clark administration.

MARSHALL: And it would have also been after they went through the rigamarole of their, what was it, their ICM?

TIM: That's right. It was in the aftermath of that.

MARSHALL: It was the aftermath of that, that didn't really necessarily change anything if I recall correctly.

TIM: Going back to about 2003... I'm bouncing around here.

MARSHALL: That's okay.

TIM: Going back to about 2003, we ended up being on the list of the first 35 or so agencies to be pushed through accreditation.

MARSHALL: Oh, okay.

TIM: We... first time went around went with COA. After that experience, we switched to CARF and have stayed with CARF ever since. But in the internal analysis and planning process we quickly came to the realization that going back to the early 1980s—so a very very long period of time—we had perfected a system of management that relied on oral history. Really, really well. You couldn't find a PLEA employee who didn't know what they were supposed to be doing, why they were supposed to be doing it, you know what principles they were following, I mean people just had it down!

MARSHALL: Yeah. Well it makes sense even the way—

TIM: But it was minimally on paper. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: Oh I see, so there's the—

TIM: There's the... and all of a sudden we're going 'They want what?' [Laughter]

MARSHALL: All this good intentional work and careful steady growth...

TIM: We had to do two things. We had to jump into a process of sort of converting all of that oral tradition into written policy. But we also had to figure out how to track information that up to that point was really only there to satisfy the very limited demands

of the funding ministries at that point.

MARSHALL: Right, yeah.

TIM: And it worked but it was pretty...

MARSHALL: Barebones?

TIM: Really barebones.

MARSHALL: And just so you could—

TIM: —And all of a sudden the COA requirements left us... breathtaken. I looked at it and sort of thought, you know across the range of our programs, if I was to do manual recording systems I'd probably have to be hiring four or five clerical positions to do nothing but data entry.

MARSHALL: Yeah just to...

TIM: And file.... and stuff. And I thought not only do I not have that kind of money, I'm not sure that's the right way, that would be the best way to spend anyway. And so we made the decision to launch ourselves into electronic case management.

MARSHALL: Case management?

TIM: Through a number of fits and starts around which there are also bits of history in this sector. CARENET you remember?

MARSHALL: Yeah that sounds familiar yeah... that's when... George...

TIM: We were one of the people, or one of the organizations that initially joined up with CARENET and parted company rather harshly... because they couldn't produce. Tried to find products on the private market—nothing that would work for us.

MARSHALL: Nothing, yeah.

TIM: And finally decided that we had no choice but to try and design our own system.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: I have no recollection in my history of having the slightest bit of interest in IT and certainly no interest in being part of an IT startup.

MARSHALL: [Laughter] No, it doesn't sound like the most exciting. [45:00]

TIM: And I do have an understanding about how they eat money... that the development work on that ate a very large amount of our administrative budget for a very very long time.

MARSHALL: Yeah, I bet.

TIM: We got lucky, we partnered up with both a very tiny private company that had the IT expertise and programming expertise but also John Howard society North Island joined as a partner, kind of co-owner... which really helped the design of this stuff because they were running many similar programs but contextually in a very different sort of circumstances.

MARSHALL: Right, yeah.

TIM: And it took about four years to get operational.

MARSHALL: Wow and you said you started early 2000s, when accreditation started?

TIM: Yeah. Eventually, I think now there's probably at least a dozen other organizations that are using that system. And I'm told that in this last year it's broken even... finally. [Laugh]

MARSHALL: And so was it shared ownership between PLEA and John Howard, you said?

TIM: At this stage it's shared solely between PLEA and John Howard yeah. And... but it was... in retrospect, I'm really glad we did it. I'm glad to have had the experience of seeing how that stuff gets designed and developed. I'm glad that we made the decision that if it was going to be useful to anybody it had to be useful primarily to front-line staff. So management reports were the last thing we ended up adding to it rather than the first thing.

MARSHALL: Interesting.

TIM: It was designed initially just to make life better for—

MARSHALL: —Easier for the front lines staff.

TIM: Easier in the sense that if they followed the design—the way the system is designed—it would put them through a workflow process that would ensure that by the end they were compliant with every single CARF standard.

MARSHALL: Right, yeah, so you could know that the same time knowing what the requirements would be—

TA: —So it wasn't necessarily the easiest thing in the world but it sure saved a lot of heartbreak and a lot of work for people. And it's really successful. One of... relatively early on, one of the things we learned was that—oh it was, here's how it happened too—in our working relationship with some of the Ministry offices we were able to set up an arrangement where Ministry staff could press an icon on their own computer screen and instantly access on our system any information that we had on the clients that they referred to us, up to and including the most recent signed off monthly case

report. So all of the historical documentation we discovered we got a lot of feedback for a long time that as the ICM work was proceeding people were actually finding it quicker and easier to access information about their clients through our system than through their own.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: Because it was designed to be... we designed it for Youth Workers.

MARSHALL: Yeah, and they had built, I think they had gone through an enterprise software thing that was for sales companies? That they were trying to hack and slash into being...

TIM: They made some wrong turns.

MARSHALL: That's a polite way of saying it.

TIM: So PLEA also now is a co-owner of a finally-breaking-even IT company.

MARSHALL: Finally breaking even—that's a win!

TIM: We decided early on that kind of getting there was important, but that we were getting so much value out of using the system that it was worth the investment.

MARSHALL: It was worth the investment, yeah. There seems to be a pattern in terms of how PLEA organizes or approaches work and doing things the right way, or like the best way that it makes sense to be?

TIM: That's what we've tried to do.

MARSHALL: Yeah, it's an inspiring approach given how difficult the work can sometimes be.

TIM: Yeah. The other thing that we did... there's a couple of other things that sort of, in the more recent years, that have been interesting. One was that we decided in addition to [50:00] CARF accreditation we would secure Imagine Canada accreditation because of their more specialized focus in volunteer—they do much better than CARF and COA do around volunteer management but also their fundraising standards are really topnotch. And we sure chose to go down that route. We have one program that is not government-funded and reliant on the private sector and individual donors for survival. And so we find that it's really helpful to be able to sort of say, Imagine Canada accredited as well as CARF. Which is good.

MARSHALL: And so then what were the years like after the... 2000, mid-2000s, all the cuts and then since then, the following decade...

TIM: For the agency continuing to experiment, continuing to do more partnering, so we had some lengthy conversations which led to an MOU between ourselves and the community development department at Sto:lo nation out in Chilliwack.

MARSHALL: Oh okay, yeah.

TIM: To really try to sort of... both for us, take on a lot of the cultural learning agendas that we needed to take on. And for them to be able to sort of transfer some knowledge and skills around some of the program areas that we were engaged in that they had an interest in developing. And that was a lovely process. I mean I... we learned so much from them. And it was always an enthusiastic and upbeat experience to go into Sto:lo. It was just great.

MARSHALL: Lovely.

TIM: We also got involved in an experiment to provide southern placement services, Child Welfare services, for the government of the North West Territories. Who had... they had historically had a need for some southern placements. For kids whose both health and behavioral needs can't be met in the territory.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: And historically they've used a group home and institutional services in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Weren't very happy with some of, that was a good fit with all of their kids. And connected with us to do a bit of an experiment to see if our model would work.

MARSHALL: Okay.

TIM: We, by that point, had thought that having to account for cultural learning as well as culture shock for kids coming from the interior BC was pretty substantial. When you've got a child with significant FASD going from Polituck to Inuvik—and that's a big town by comparison. And then flying to Yellowknife for a couple of days—oh my god. And then all of a sudden a flight to Vancouver. We're talking about really significant cultural impacts that had to be prepared for and really sort of, we had to be really careful about.

The thing that was absolutely fabulous was that the cooperation between their department management and our management and the cooperation between their front line social workers and our front line staff and caregivers, was like you wouldn't believe. They were just on the phone with each other all the time. And the commitment to never giving up their territorial—never allowing their territorial citizenship to wither away—was amazing to sort of watch. They would never let us get BC health numbers for the kids that placed here. They said 'You've got to keep using the territorial numbers, and we'll worry about the bills between BC and the Territory and settle that. They were paying—where we were able to get the kids into the regular school system—they were paying an astonishing amount of money. Those kids were being treated as if they were foreign students. [55:00] And Yellowknife just sort of said, 'We get it, we just have to do it, we're not...' We wanted to go and fight with school districts and they just said, "No, no, no, we understand how this works.'

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: We had to learn huge amounts because we were all of a sudden dealing with demi-culture and inuit culture... And aspects of Adie culture that were really new to us. And our folks just threw themselves into it.

MARSHALL: Awesome.

TIM: As did the Territorial folks. One of the deals was that the Territorial government pays for an ongoing process of visits. Kids go home... depending on circumstance Moms or Aunties can come here.

MARSHALL: Can come here... that's crazy.

TIM: Back and forth is going on. There's a real commitment to sort of maintaining the cultural—

MARSHALL: —connections.

TIM: The family and cultural connections. And there were a couple of areas where we just sort of had to sort of quietly pretend that we didn't pay attention to British Columbia's policies because we weren't dealing with British Colombia.

MARSHALL: [Laughter]

TIM: Yes friends, some of those kids, as teenage kids, do go back to spend time in the summer on the land. And yes, that includes learning how to shoot a moose, thank you very much. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: Box checked. Check that box and move on.

TIM: It got a little more complicated when BC discovered what we were doing and sort of said to the Territorial government, 'What was it about the Federal-Provincial-Territorial protocol agreement that you failed to follow?' Because they had not done any of the courtesy supervision questions.

MARSHALL: Oh okay.

TIM: And we didn't know anything about it at that point.

MARSHALL: Right that's—

TIM: So we then had to backtrack, put all that stuff in place, and that kind of complicated things...

MARSHALL: So this pile of... how long did this last for?

TIM: It's still going—

MARSHALL: Still going?

TIM: It's still going on.

MARSHALL: So it started then...

TIM: It started in about 2003 roughly, in that sort of timeframe. Very small at that point. What emerged later, was that a good number of the young people who were—in pretty long term placements with us—were going to age out and require... be eligible for Territorial community living services.

MARSHALL: Okay.

TIM: But again... no access to adequate supports. So they talked to us about organizing things so that they were doing the eligibility for adult community living supports before they ever left Yellowknife as a kid.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: And the intention was, and their agreement with us was, if it turned out that from a 'needs perspective' that that kid needed to stay with us into adulthood that that could just stay with the family, it didn't have to transition to anything other than the different billing.

MARSHALL: Right. Wow, that's great.

TIM: And they just said, 'We need to make this seamless, we need to make this really easy, we need to plan.'

MARSHALL: Wow, that sounds so easy and smart.

TIM: There are aspects of the Territorial system that the Federal Auditor General keeps criticizing... probably with good reason. But I've never run across people who are so good-hearted and whose intentions are exactly what they need to be. I just adored them. Really like... I was only able to travel up there a couple of times, once in the winter. But that was really good.

MARSHALL: That's great.

TIM: The other thing that has been a source of really sort of interesting outcomes... Quite a number of years ago now I started thinking that we had not done anything—and really weren't well equipped to do anything—to kind of contribute to the research literature.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: It's my guilt around not having a degree, I think. And I kicked around a number of ideas. We had at that point a really good working relationship with McCreary Centre

here. [1:00:00] And also with Douglas College because they had created the Youth Justice Worker program, and we had a really strong working relationship with them. And at some point—it's quite a long time now—I sent a note to Annie [Smith of McCreary] and John Fleming that was then running that program at Douglas. And sort of said, 'Here's a really hairbrained stupid idea but what do you think?' And it was to create a research partnership.

MARSHALL: Nice.

TIM: And lo and behold they thought it was a brilliant idea and it's now many years old and its early days... a little serendipity managed to produce a $250,000, 3 year, justice department funded, evaluation study of all of our Youth Justice programs.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: Even in the Harper years we managed to get that through because we made some stupid comments about gangs and guns or something. And...

MARSHALL: Like joined between the three of you this was the...

TIM: The project. Yeah. As part of the partnership our... what we got out of it was, we got the ability to work with McCreary and Douglas on the design of it. What kind of questions are we gonna ask? What are we looking for? What, you know, how do we want to define some outcomes and that stuff. McCreary as an independent research organization was able to first all take on—they actually handled all the money on this thing.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: They, you know, they got the research contract. And all of us got the benefit of independent research.

MARSHALL: Awesome.

TIM: And the Douglas College people started finding ways to engage some of their Youth Justice program students in practicums and all that stuff.

MARSHALL: Yeah, totally.

TIM: And suddenly discovered that two-year diploma program students who were going on to finish degrees at SFU and elsewhere—and having had some research exposure in their portfolio—were doing way way better... getting into those programs.

MARSHALL: Oh yeah. That kind of access in your first two years... that's great. That sets you up for success.

TIM: So it... and there's been more variety of little studies as well as funded research and evaluation over the years since, that...

MARSHALL: That was under the Harper government, mid 2000s? Late 2000s? When was Harper?

TIM: Yes. It was 2012 when the study was published, so we started—

MARSHALL: Yeah, Harper was 2008.

TIM: —We started in about '09, I think it started in '09.

MARSHALL: Alright. That's still going on too? The partnership?

TIM: The partnership is not only still going on, but the partnership—and there is a formal memorandum of understanding on the whole governing thing—it has expanded, it now formally includes John Howard society in North Island. They said they wanted in and we thought that was a great idea because that then allows for major urban semi-rural kind of small community comparisons to be made. You can do all sort of—

MARSHALL: Yeah, you can compare all sorts of services in different contexts.

TIM: And they were actually way out in front of us around relationships with Indigenous communities and so forth. So there was some cross-fertilization that was gonna happen. And no sooner did they join than North Island College, who inherited a couple senior managers from Douglas, who took jobs over there in order to plan their retirement.

MW: [Laughter]

TIM: They phoned and said, 'You know, we've got some programs up here that be, including nursing, that would really benefit'. So they're in, formally. So it's now two colleges, McCreary, two agencies—

MARSHALL: So that's also grown.

TIM: —and on friday there will be the second meeting of what is hoped to become a larger group of agencies who are thinking they might like to get involved as well.

MARSHALL: Still growing!

TIM: Still growing.

MARSHALL: That's great.

TIM: It differs... it's an unusual arrangement. Most of the time when you're a community agency that finds itself involved with research it's because a particular academic has come to you and said 'I want to do this study will you provide access— [1:05:00]

MARSHALL: Yeah, I want to use this program as a... yeah.

TIM: Exactly. And in this deal, the MOU is actually signed by the organizations. Not individually.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: And so any—and we're really sort of firm actually—any individual researcher, from anywhere, who wants to sort of come in has to play cooperatively.

MARSHALL: With everyone who is involved already.

TIM: That's right. PLEA annually—I think they're still doing this properly—PLEA annually takes a year's worth of its data off the information system, converts it and sends it here. So if anyone actually wants to use that data—

MARSHALL: Oh it's just available.

TIM: —They've got to come here, and work through McCreary's data access policies and data protection stuff. So we don't have to mess around with that either.

MARSHALL: Huh. That's interesting.

TIM: Yeah I know it's a fascinating thing and it's one of those ones where I think has some really interesting potential to sort of get big.

MARSHALL: Yeah. That's really cool. That's very cool.

TIM: So I was... that's one of the things that I actually... I really am glad I was sort of able to play a part in getting that off the ground.

MARSHALL: Yeah, totally. That's wonderful.

TIM: The other sort of—in terms of the more recent years—shift away from the agency because I ended up also in the last few years that I was executive director of PLEA, getting increasingly involved in sectoral issues. And sort of networks.

MARSHALL: Right. Above and beyond...

TIM: So I was a fed member. I was on the board of PARCA which is the Youth Justice network. I chaired the board of the Realize Strategy Co-op, previously United Community Services co-op, for most of its 20 years. All but four.

MARSHALL: Wow.

TIM: In 2012—which would have been the lead up to the 23rd election—there was a smallish group of provincial federations that included the Co-op and PARCA and the Federation... ASPECT, there were a couple of others... and the BCGEU... got together to have a conversation about whether or not it was possible to create a... some kind of public information, public education program lead in to lead up to the 2013 election.

MARSHALL: Alright.

TIM: Primarily the BCGEU was the major funder, which was really good. Collectively we did

a number of things... Rick arranged with Jody Patterson—actually it was Paul Wilcox more than Jody.

MARSHALL: Oh yeah I read about this.

TIM: To write some stuff, most of which ended up on my bio line. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: That's right, he was ghostwriting a lot of articles.

TIM: Ghostwriting those articles. I did a Vancouver... I did a cable TV community cable interview for about 90 minutes... we had all of us, there was... Michelle Fortin, who's now down here, but then was...

MARSHALL: Watari.

TIM: Watari. Volunteered somebody in her organization to do some social media. I mean, it was a shoestring. It was...

MARSHALL: Yeah, I remember.

TIM: We actually—I mean in some ways we actually got a little more impact than we thought we were likely to get, but it was pretty tiny.

MARSHALL: It was still, but...

TIM: Coming out of that we had—after the election—we had a debriefing meeting at which there was an agreement that the major sectoral organizations really needed to figure out how to get their act together and create a mechanism that would support working together, sharing resources and developing joint strategies on major issues and when dealing with the provincial government. That ended up leading to Third Voice.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: Which is now sitting on a shelf.

MARSHALL: Yup.

TIM: It's still incorporated. It's still got titular board. I understand that occasionally they do talk to one another. [1:10:00]

MARSHALL: Oh, okay.

TIM: Not very often, but they do talk. And of course, most of the principles are involved in all sorts of meetings with one another around... you know.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: But it never flew. And right now I've been involved in the consultation process that's going on between the government and the sector. And I'm kind of puzzling over what

all that needs to look like. I think absolutely there needs to be some kind of joint council between government and the sector to do the kind of major issues long-term planning sort of—

MARSHALL: Yeah thinking about how to...

TIM: —strategy stuff. But the sector itself still needs at least an effective caucusing vehicle.

MARSHALL: Right, within itself.

TIM: In a way that's organized and structured and disciplined. And at the moment that's still pretty iffy I think.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that's not necessarily a thing.

TIM: It's not a guaranteed thing.

MARSHALL: I remember putting some Third Voices name on some posters I think around the last Federal election, maybe 2015, but I don't think I've heard much since then...

TIM: No, it's been really quiet. They've managed to sort of keep the organization alive, but just.

MARSHALL: But just...

TIM: But it's there as a vehicle that can take money, it can take do things—

MARSHALL: If when...

TIM: —If we need an organized structure to... But there is a need for this sector to have some more serious conversations about how it works. How it works together as well as with government.

MARSHALL: Yeah, especially given some current progress around some meetings that are happening and the round table with the government. But having a space for the sector side of things to get on the same page and unify and also work on other things...

TIM: Well, at least try to sort of try and resolve differences in ways that don't sort of get played out on the larger table.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: So there's still a ways to go. I think the... there is... I'm not detecting yet that the forces of cooperation are strong enough to kind of counter-balance the competitiveness of the sector.

MARSHALL: Right. Right. Time will tell. And then so you retired in 2015?

TIM: I stepped down as PLEA executive director at the end of August 2015 and Tim Veresh

took over for September. I stayed on in an advisory capacity and finishing up some programs and doing some writing... so I actually left, formally retired, at the end of June 2016.

MARSHALL: Okay, so there's was a bit of a succession overlap in terms of...

TIM: Yeah, as it turned out, I mean I was happy for that transition time, that was a gift, really. And, but it... I knew... I've known Tim for a long time and I knew that he didn't need a hell of a lot of transition support from me. So I was able to largely sort of stay out of his way.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: And mostly still do.

MARSHALL: [Laughter] For the most part?

TIM: And then last—in July of 2018—I was asked to take on the Reimagining Community Inclusion Initiative for the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. That finished its work at the end of March. And... there are some... my one bit of humour about that was that going into that project, it is highly unlikely that anybody would have, in a single sentence, used the word 'facilitator' and Tim Agg. [Laughter] Not my reputation. Good Executive Director, but not great classic facilitation skills.

MARSHALL: Facilitator? [Laugh]

TIM: But we were able to work with [1:15:00] a really large group of stakeholders from three ministries of government—CLBC, the entire community and family and self-advocate sort of part of that sector. And in six months managed to come up with a consensus report and I think it's a document that's gonna turn out to be helpful. It's an aggressive shopping list of things that need to be done. But it was also written in a way that was designed to sort of give government, CLBC and the community sector some real flexibility around how to get there.

MARSHALL: Right. Yeah, that's what I was going to ask. What's kind of next for that since it's wrapped up in March and like, having looked through at some of this stuff—like you said it is a, you know, 'aggressive' I think is the word you used, but there is some, like in that shopping list there's some things that don't seem that far out of the realm of possibility given—.

TIM: No and... we... when we looked at all of the things that people were saying needed to be done. It ranged from really quite sort of modest practical changes that could be implemented fairly easily—like 'just get on with it'—through to major change requiring major public money invested in the system sort of... the housing agenda is the easy one. What we also realized was that there was a need to signal to government, to CLBC, and to the service provider community—that in part driven by the

demographic changes that were taking place and a variety of other dynamics—there is major change needed in how the business is done; how the work is done; how it's funded; how it's organized. And that's got significant implications for everybody. Anybody who sort of thinks all you need to do is sort of change the funding models in CLBC and the world will be a much better place—it would be a much better place—

MARSHALL: But that's not all.

TIM: —but it's nowhere near all. And one of the things that I think we succeeded at was, within the service provider community, generating a recognition that some of the issues that they face also cannot be planned for and managed in a really short term. Some of that's long term stuff. How do you decide that we're not in the business of day programs anymore because the Young Adults coming up aren't into it?

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: Right? And you kind of go, how quickly do you think you could actually do all the things that you'd need to do? I mean maybe you might want to... if somebody said, 'Why don't you take the next couple of years just think?' And then start doing some experimenting and, you know... But if we know anything... if somebody at that table decided that it's gonna be instant experts and simply announce how it needed to change, you could guarantee it wouldn't work. Because it wouldn't be organic.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: And so we also then wanted to sort of try to create on one hand a fairly safe environment for that kind of longer-term change to sort of develop and evolve, but also recognize that it is significant and it's not going to happen easily.

MARSHALL: Big systems change stuff. Yeah.

TIM: With the best will in the world. What was wonderful was that there was a lot of goodwill. People responded very well to the one kind of order that I gave at the very beginning for the process, which is I just wasn't interested in complaining about the last 25 years, thank you very much. [Laughter] Can we talk about the next 25 years?

MARSHALL: That's a healthy perspective!

TIM: And you know, occasionally we had to sort of nudge people back into... but—

MARSHALL: It's much easier to complain about stuff.

TIM: But people did engage that. And took it really really seriously and there were some moments in those big table conversations [1:20:00] where... oh, at the very last session, the thing came up about what's the language we're using to describe disability? And suddenly realizing that both service providers and family members and self-advocates were preferring amongst each other different language to talk about who

they were and how they portrayed themselves in the world.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: So this whole sort of piece called, you know, maybe this report was going to kind of give a new bit of jargon to kind of how are we gonna discuss developmental disabilities... not gonna happen. And not gonna happen because the issues behind all of that are really deep and really difficult for people to work through. And all of a sudden I was watching this stunning conversation going on with that group of people... how smart is this? And I kind of thought, I wish there were a large number of activists around the world who were actually here. I wish we'd filmed it! Because it was really strong, strong material and people had to be respectful of the fact there just wasn't one way of seeing disability.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: So I think people came out of the whole process with some real optimism. There was a decision made in the Ministry to hold back on implementation planning until the new CEO arrived. And Ross [Chilton] started in August and sort of... I'd reported out the end of March... And I think it was wise to do that. I think they needed to sort of let him kind of take charge. It gave the new board an opportunity to kind of get a more solid grasp on where they were going. And some continued work on relationship building and [mumbles]—

MARSHALL: Yeah that was maybe started there.

TIM: —That was also important. I'm pretty optimistic that that... now, what I have said to the folks in government is that if they take an erratic approach to investment—a little bit here, a little bit three years from now, a little bit five more years from now—you know that kind of traditional sense...When the squeaky wheel kind of squeaks. If they do that they're not going to get very far.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: But if they could find a way to incrementally invest year over year over year for the next ten years. That could be close to transformative in terms of what it would do. And not with huge amounts of new money every year, but the compounding impact would be—

MARSHALL: —The compounding effect.

TIM: And sometimes you'd put that in housing and sometimes you'd put that in salaries and... you'd do a variety of things with it. But it would be that sort of... can government manage to find a way to do that incremental improvement year over year? It remains to be seen—

MARSHALL: We'll see. TBD!

TIM: Except that, you know, my sense is that resonated really well.

MARSHALL: It seems more palatable than here's all the problem and here's how much money we need.

TIM: Yeah. Give them a lot of flexibility but at the same time it's pretty demanding.

MARSHALL: Totally. I agree. It sounds like a great start. The discussions that I've overheard about—between March and now.

TIM: Good. [Laughter]

MARSHALL: I have two, kind of, closing questions. Is there anything important that we missed?

TIM: That I missed?

MARSHALL: That you want to kind of speak to?

TIM: I have no idea... partnerships, partnerships, partnerships, partnerships. I think that one of my lessons over three-plus decades is that we made way more mileage out of the partnerships that we developed then we would have developed if we had simply stayed in that traditional sort of agency-centric competitive mode.

MARSHALL: Right. Yeah.

TIM: And that's coming from an agency that was remarkably successful being stuck in a competitive world.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that kind of speaks to... or leads into one of the questions... [1:25:00] and this isn't a question I ask every time. This is a rare one. But, given the way you've described the work you've done and the work that PLEAs done... There's something unique about the approach... where things seem to get done the way they need to get done. Or things kind of... people work together. And you've spoken to the, like, the intentional way that you put things together and plan who you work with... I was wondering if you'd... like, that's not always the experience of other organizations working in this sector. Lot's of time it's scrambling and it's less about partnerships and just merging because we need to survive and, you know, some of it's down to luck or fortune or, you know, where the chips fall at the end of the permit process. But like how would you describe like the way you approach this work that's kind of enabled that?

TIM: I want to, I think sort of go to two places and I think they're strongly related. The partnering process really hinged for us on... are we hanging out with kindred spirits here? And do we think about the people we're serving? Even if we're doing different things, do we think about the people we're serving in the same way? Do we have that kind of... and is there a fundamental commitment to that work? And do people take

that work seriously? Those kinds of things... I mean, that partnership with the Asanti Centre has survived years and years and years, similarly with John Howard North Island. We even figured out how to jointly manage a different Residential Program.

MARSHALL: Right.

TIM: Tricky, but... it worked. More recently, sort of since my departure, the Children Of The Street Society, which does the sexual exploitation training and intervention. They have made the choice to merge into PLEA.

MARSHALL: Oh wow.

TIM: And again, there was a long-standing working relationship, partner services, and kind of philosophical kind of convergence. I think that's... those kinds of things have been really really critical. The other element that's probably the—for PLEA it's probably the stronger one—And that is that PLEA made a choice right from the beginning to develop an approach to service delivery that was completely focused on the needs of individuals and to... we were doing wrap-around services before the word was invented.

MARSHALL: Yeah.

TIM: Avoided group-think and group-programing like the plague. And sort of kept to that very sort of core approach while adapting it into Youth Justice context, into Child Welfare, into addictions, into you name it, we were... But at heart there was a consistent approach to services such that you could go anywhere in the organization and have a conversation with your colleagues and know what the deal was. And be able to... and then having kind of got there... we were able to build a support and supervision and management structure that was simply designed to support that.

MARSHALL: Right. Yeah.

TIM: It left an agency with way more responsibility and authority. Way more decentralized than in most. There were all sorts of people who could watch what I was doing, and not doing, for a very long time and sort of wondered why we needed an executive director. And I was... I had the luxury of being—most of the time—being able to manage with a really light touch. Because we knew that at the front lines people knew what the models were, knew what the principles were, were passionate about it, and we could let them go.

MARSHALL: Yeah. That's great.

TIM: So, that's it.

MARSHALL: There's something there. That's wonderful.

TIM: And I think we managed to avoid muddling up the agency with a whole mess of dif-

ferent approaches and stuff.

MARSHALL: Sure, sure—

TIM: —Because we were [1:30:00] so specialized in a consistent client group... that made it easy.

MARSHALL: And having the same values all the way through the levels of the organization and also in the people you work with and partner with. That's great.

TIM: And having a board that was more than happy to leave all the operational responsibilities with me. Don't underestimate the value of that!

MARSHALL: Yeah. The board just staying on the board.

TIM: It was a great board but I had way more discretion than a lot of executive directors do.

MARSHALL: Yeah, that's an important point too. My last question is one I ask everyone. It's just a nice way to wrap things up... Part of this is, you know, looking at the past to inspire the future. Given all that we've talked about—and you know, maybe some of the things we haven't talked about—what is one thing that Tim Agg is hopeful for, for the future? For the sector or the people within it, or the people we care for?

TIM: I think first of all that having had the chance to do the community inclusion review and then speak at the Fed meeting in February in Victoria, and the more recent conversations around the government sector round—

MARSHALL: Yes, the Round table.

TIM: —Round table. I'm really impressed with the number of young leaders that are showing up. And I've been part of conversations over a long period of time about whether or not when the boomers leave finally what's gonna be left behind, and I'm really impressed actually. I'm not... I don't despair about... there are all sorts of people who are probably being called to leadership perhaps before they thought they might be ready... that's our generation. I mean, all my colleagues, whether it's me, or Ruth Annis or any others that were in there kind of at the start of building the organizational networks that we have... you know, we were flying by the seat of our pants too. And that's when all sorts of creative things can happen. If you don't scare yourself. I think the other question is that... I am—I'll do a careful nonpartisan assessment—from the aftermath of the 2013 election when the premier's office and several of the Ministries began to sort of recognize that there were a lot of things that weren't working terribly well in the sector... Led to the Innovations Sustainability Round Table. It sputtered, it didn't succeed, but there was a recognition that things weren't working terribly well. That has clearly been something, that at a political level and a senior officials level with the current government, that recognition persists.

MARSHALL: Yeah, it's still there.

TIM: The process around the Round Table and the upcoming Forum is intended to lead to creating a permanent ongoing mechanism for the sector and government to sort of plan and work together. We're at a point in time where in order for services to evolve and develop and continue to be really responsive to public needs... It's really critical that that partnering process grow. And that government financially supports, and we actively support, a lot more experimentation and kind of innovation than we've seen. And I think people are ready for it. I think it's time.

MARSHALL: Yeah, it seems very necessary.

TIM: But we do have demographic changes that are going to drive and if we don't step up we'll be left behind.

MARSHALL: Yeah. Great. Thanks Tim, this is wonderful! And we're done.

TIM: Good.

MARSHALL: You're free to go!

TIM: Okay!

MARSHALL: Marshall Watson. Tim Agg. We are at McCreary Centre Society in Vancouver—

TIM: —At exactly three o'clock.

MARSHALL: At exactly three o'clock. On October 23, 2019. [1:34:43]

[end recording]

APPENDIX A

Following his interview, Tim Agg requested that a few details about an additional piece of work be included at the end of the transcript. Below is the email correspondence sent by Tim on October 24th, 2019 for inclusion in the final transcript.

When I got home I looked at my notes and realized that I had missed a significant commitment over a ten year period, from 1994 to 2004, and I think that it should be included.

In 1994 I was asked if PLEA would assume the financial and administrative sponsorship if the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, which had recently secured government funding but lacked the capacity for full independence. We all expected the arrangement to be relatively short term, as independence as a peer-led organization was an important goal. As things turned out, the agreement lasted for ten years.

During this time, PLEA was the legal employer of the Federation staff, and administered its budget. At the same time we committed to leaving them as much self-direction and control as

possible. The rest of the PLEA management team decided that since I had no front line experience, my taking on the direct oversight of the funding contract and joining the group of adult advisors would be a good education – as, indeed, it was. The history of the FBCYICN should be recorded by its members and alumni, so I will just say that working with their staff, elected leaders and advisors was always challenging, sometimes difficult and often awe-inspiring. It provided deep learning about what it means to be in care. Ever since the Gove report, and to this day, I keep hoping that the system could truly listen to young people and build the system around them.

I met some incredibly bright, talented and courageous young people through the Fed, and stay in touch with a few. In 2004, they chose to transfer the funding contract directly with the organization, with an adult board of directors. They continue to thrive and to lead!