



## Connection to Community Drives Passion for Professionals



**IDMSC**® International  
Disability Management  
Standards Council

*The designations of Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) and Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP), administered under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC), are increasingly becoming the accepted professional standard for disability management practice worldwide.*

*The following individuals who achieved the CDMP and CRTWC designations illustrate the wide range of professionals who decided to enhance their career profile with internationally recognized professional designations.*

For Lorna Delaronde, achieving certification was a means of staying on the cutting edge while serving a community known for fierce pride and innovation.

Delaronde is a Claims Officer with Mohawk Self Insurance (MSI) in Kahnawake, Quebec and last year, she successfully wrote the CRTWC exam. And that is just a start, she adds. MSI is the only First Nations workers' compensation board in Canada, with jurisdiction over employees and contractors working inside the self-governing community, which is located on the St. Lawrence River outside of Montreal.

Kahnawake has undergone some major transitions in the past few decades, and Delaronde has played an active role since high school. "I was born here in Kahnawake, but for high school, I went off reserve to Chateauguay," she said. She attended Howard S. Billings Regional School, built as part of the English-language school system. "I went to work straight out of high school as a summer student, and was then hired by the Confederation of Indians of Quebec. I was doing the Quebec All-Chiefs' meeting minutes as an 18-year old." Two years later, the Mohawk students at Howard S. Billings staged a walkout when the provincial government moved to impose French as the first language at the school. "The students went to the Mohawk Council [of Kahnawake] and said, 'We want our own high school.'"

In response, the parents, School Committee and Council fought for funding to create Kahnawake Survival School, to teach Mohawk culture alongside mainstream scholastics. "I was hired to work in curriculum development and later worked in the teacher resource center." At the same time, the Mohawk Council made the decision to implement their own workers' compensation program in lieu of the Quebec workers' compensation commission (CSST).

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mohawk men (including Delaronde's father, grandfather and husband) earned almost mythical status as high-iron workers, and Mohawks from both sides of the border have worked on most of the major bridges and buildings in North America and worldwide. One of those iconic high-iron bridges is the Mercier Bridge, which joins Kahnawake with the Island of Montreal. In 1984, while Kahnawake ironworkers were undertaking renovations on the bridge, they became involved in a jurisdictional dispute with CSST inspectors. "That is how MSI evolved, in the same way the Kahnawake Survival School was born," Delaronde said. "Push came to shove, and the people took matters into their own hands."

Delaronde joined MSI after 23 years with the Kahnawake education system, followed by two years in Human Resources at the Community Economic Development Commission. "I started at MSI in 2005. It was a three-part job: claims, administration, and administrative assistant to the director."

Delaronde said MSI made a big step in 2007 when it entered an agreement with AcclaimAbility Management Inc. "I had to make a big decision, whether I wanted to work in administration or in claims and I really enjoyed working on claims. I have to give a lot of credit to Acclaim Ability. They mentored me for several years when I went to their Ottawa offices and did job shadowing. They really recommended the NIDMAR continuing education courses, and they were the ones that convinced my supervisors that this would benefit me."

Despite a hectic schedule that included caring for her elderly mother, Delaronde managed to complete all 25 modules prior to writing the CRTWC exam. "I just went into the exam and gave it my best, and when I got the notification, I was jumping for joy."



With her CRTWC in hand, Delaronde now intends to write the CDMP exam in June. This January, the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake set in motion the creation of new Occupational Safety and Health legislation that could bring significant changes to service delivery within the community, and Delaronde said the added certification would allow her to take on increased responsibilities. One of the changes is the formation of the Kahnawake Labour Office, which will

also be evolving within the next few months to meet the needs of the community.

The next few months are going to be pretty hectic, Delaronde said, but with ten years of experience and guidance, plus certification, she is confident she will be able to take on whatever role should emerge. "I'm hoping that my experience and the training will open the door to other exciting opportunities within the community."

While Delaronde works in an English-speaking jurisdiction in a French-speaking province, Sylvie Leblanc serves francophone clients working out of her home office in Northern Ontario.

In March 2014, Leblanc was hired by the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan (OTIP) as a Bilingual Early Intervention Rehabilitation Consultant. In 2015, she successfully achieved the CRTWC designation.

Leblanc has managed her career with the goal of staying close to her home community. She grew up in the rural Northern Ontario community of Verner, located approximately 70 kilometers from Sudbury, and completed her schooling in the French-language system. "I did my Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy at the University of Ottawa, all in French," Leblanc said.

Early on, she realized that being fully bilingual, including being able to chart and report in both official languages, would be a major asset. "It's a good career advantage to be bilingual, especially in Northern Ontario, where a large percentage of francophones reside. In a very competitive job market, you want to make yourself stand out, whether through education or transferable skills."

Very early in her career, Leblanc was exposed to Disability Management, and quickly became very

interested in increasing her knowledge in that field of expertise. After working in a variety of community-based programs as an OT practitioner, instructor, case manager and DM consultant, it became apparent that her interest was leaning towards that area of practice. "I had to follow my spouse," Leblanc said. "I have been able to find employment in several communities while following my spouse, because my job skills are so portable."

Leblanc had already made the decision to undertake professional certification through NIDMAR, as 'a next logical step' in obtaining a full-time position in a DM role. "As an OT, I only needed additional continuing education specific to DM and RTW to be eligible to write the CRTWC exam. I did the modules at home while working full-time."

Leblanc is the first employee at the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan to obtain the CRTWC designation and her employer supports the value of this professional certification in her role. She is currently considering undertaking CDMP certification. After networking with other online students, Leblanc said she has discovered that the professional certification provides a benchmark, both for employers and for colleagues, since the DM field encompasses such a vast amount of backgrounds. "Whether you work in human resources, as a case manager or as a therapist, that common professional designation highlights that, regardless of your vocational background, there is a common skill set and the same common knowledge."



Mark Preston-Horin was an elite-level athlete working towards a career as a teacher when a horrific workplace accident introduced him to disability management, both in his personal recovery and as a viable career path.

Preston-Horin currently works as an Occupational Therapy/Physiotherapy Rehabilitation Assistant at The Residence, a 200-bed residential care facility located in Mission, BC. He grew up in nearby Abbotsford, and, following high school, he took courses at the University College of the Fraser Valley while working a series of jobs with the YMCA and the Chilliwack School District, at the same time playing in the Canadian Junior Football League. He later attended Douglas College, where he played collegiate rugby while working as a Recreational Programmer with the City of Surrey. It was a sport he would continue to play at a high level.

More fatefully, he also managed to obtain an apprenticeship as lather, “so I could make good money while I returned to take part-time courses.” Then, in 2003, in his final year of apprenticeship, Preston-Horin suffered a life-changing (and preventable) workplace accident.

While working on the roof of a mall under construction, he stepped through an unmarked, man-sized hole that, due to a contractor error, had been cut on the wrong side of the roof complex. Preston-Horin suffered a broken hip, pelvis and tailbone, and sustained multiple fractures and dislocations to both of his upper extremities, with the attendant loss of function.

“It was through my recovery that I got introduced to the world of rehabilitation,” he said. Recovery was a two-year full-time process, including 10 surgeries, and Preston-Horin realized he would have some loss of functional capacity for the rest of his life. And his rugby career was over.

Beginning in the fall of 2005, sponsored by the WorkSafe BC Vocational Rehabilitation program, he undertook the Therapist Assistant Diploma program through Okanagan College, and obtained his credential in 2007. His goal was to attain a BSc in Physiotherapy and become a Physiotherapist.

When the course requirements abruptly changed, he instead accepted a position as a Therapist Assistant at Lillooet District Hospital, where he worked for three years and became involved in Occupational Health and Safety and worker advocacy.

Then, in 2011, he moved to Chilliwack, where he took courses at the recently renamed University of the Fraser Valley and worked as a casual at Chilliwack General Hospital.

Preston-Horin was first hired at The Residence in Mission in May 2012, but in late 2013, another opportunity arose and he was hired to work as one of 16 specialized Stewards for the Unions of Facilities Bargaining Association in their new Enhanced Disability Management Program.

During the next two years, Preston-Horin lived and worked in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey, advocating for healthcare employees. It was there he discovered the career potential of certification. “I started taking the online courses and I realized, I can do this line of work and I can do this certification. And I can really make a difference because I lived the experience of being that injured worker.”

He successfully wrote the CDMP examination in 2015. At that point, Preston-Horin decided he would have to return to hands-on practice, using both his certification plus the added credibility of his own personal experience, in order to advance his career in DM. “I think the secret of having a successful program is being able to reach out to employees and build that connection, let them know what the resources are, and have them actively participate. That’s a win-win approach.”

Two months after completing the exam, Preston-Horin returned to his hometown of Abbotsford and his old job at The Residence in Mission, while setting a course for the future. “Now I am tweaking my resume and looking down the next step on the career path, whatever that might be,” he said