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# THE JOURNEY

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A portrait of Teresa Larsen, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a black top and a necklace with a circular pendant. The background is a textured blue.

## Feature Story: Teresa Larsen

Giving a voice to those  
who don't have one

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Providing Support  
In Our Community

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## FRASER, LTD'S MISSION

Supporting children, youth and adults on their life's journey toward independence.

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Fraser childcare isn't for special needs children, but all children. Our facility is one of the few inclusionary daycares in the community, which means every child here experiences an atmosphere that embraces diversity and promotes acceptance—both vital to building empathy and contributing to an inclusive society.

## TRANSITIONAL YOUTH SERVICES

Our Transitional Youth Services are vital resources for at-risk and homeless youth in our community. We provide life's necessities and support during crisis and guide youth on their journey to independence. We achieve this by giving homeless youth access to day-to-day necessities, providing mental health services, and offering temporary and permanent supportive housing—all with coaching, guidance and support every step of the way.

## ADULT SERVICES

We believe that regardless of physical or developmental challenges, we all deserve a safe place to call home, support for independence, and the opportunities to contribute to this great community. That's why we provide residential support, life skills, and community integration opportunities to individuals with a wide range of challenges, including dementia, autism spectrum disorder, hearing loss and vision loss.

## VALLEY HOPE COUNSELING SERVICES

Since 2012, Fraser, Ltd. Valley Hope Counseling has been providing confidential outpatient mental health therapy to those utilizing Fraser's services in addition to the public. Our therapists specialize in trauma-based therapy approaches. Our facility offers a comfortable atmosphere for all ages, individuals, couples and families.

**Call 701-232-3301 for an appointment.**

# DIRECTOR'S CORNER

with Sandra Leyland

## Greetings!

Teresa Larsen's article is sure to resonate with many individuals no matter the generation or career they have chosen for themselves. Standing up for what you believe is not always easy—that's an understatement if ever there was one. Recent circumstances surrounding the pandemic certainly speak to this and ring true more than we like to maybe admit.



To vaccinate or not. To wear a mask or not. To gather or not. These are all decisions that for many of us have recently been governed by someone other than ourselves. Advocacy is like that too—not always the popular decision or the one we want to hear, but to keep people safe and provide a foundation for change it is necessary.

I smiled when I read her reference to Geraldo Rivera. His work was a deciding factor in my career decision as well. As a sophomore in college with a Midwest background, I could not, absolutely could not believe after reading his reports that human beings were warehoused in these conditions. The decision to go forth with working with people who deserve better was made almost on the spot. Prior experiences during grade school with special education children, taught at the end of the hall in our grade school, was also a contributing factor in deciding to help the underserved achieve a life in which they get to make real-world decisions that also come with consequences to choices made. The concept of mainstreaming is an important one on many levels.

Mainstreaming as it was called back then, eventually carried over into employment. In disability circles, this is often referred to as the gift of "purpose." Many factors over the years have influenced employment for people of all disabilities but without advocacy would we have gotten this far? Fraser's Day Services featured in this magazine is testimony to the abilities of those we support and their ability to contribute to society.

Teresa heard the calling, as did I and thousands of others. Almost fifty years have passed and advocacy lives on because of people like Teresa Larsen and fellow advocates which expand outside our state Protection and Advocacy office. We toast her years of service and dedication to the numerous legislative sessions, investigations and countless midnight hours to get the work done. No one can capture and document the results of a meeting quite like Teresa. All the while maintaining an objective stance—at least on the surface.

Teresa, as you look at retirement later this year remember it all. The struggles and the successes. Remember and KNOW there are many of us proud to call you mentor, colleague and friend. We join the many who are **thankful** you followed your career path and made the choices you did.

You truly chose a difficult path and as the poem by Robert Frost says; *"And that has made all the difference."*

Best wishes to everyone as we soon enter our Holiday Season. Thank you to our contributors who provide necessary in-kind and financial support to our mission. This past year has taken a toll and **you** have made MANY things possible through your support.

Sandra Leyland  
CEO & President, Fraser, Ltd.

The Fraser Foundation logo features the text "The Fraser Foundation" in a serif font. "The" is in a smaller size above "Fraser", which is the largest word. "Foundation" is below "Fraser". A thin black line is positioned above the text, and a thin black line is positioned below it. The background of the logo area is a faint, light-colored illustration of a multi-story building with arched windows and trees in front of it.

The  
**Fraser**  
Foundation

**For more than 125 years, Fraser** has served the Fargo community as a champion of **children, youth, and adults** on their path to independence. Now we prepare for another century of success - we do so by securing \$16 million over the next 10 years. You can be a part of that legacy.

**For more information about The Fraser Foundation, please call:  
701-232-3301**

# TERESA LARSEN

A leader in protection and advocacy

In the world and work of Protection and Advocacy, Teresa Larsen is a giant among women.

And with her retirement as the outgoing Director this past July, she not only deserves both the recognition of a career that has spanned decades in public service, but a celebration of her incredible impact throughout the state of North Dakota as a champion for the equality and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Since 1995, Teresa has led the statewide team that asserts the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities—especially those who cannot speak for themselves. It's a job that has led to transformational policies at the North Dakota Legislature, dramatic shifts in public perception of the disability community, and has set the table for intensive conversation and debate over the future housing, individual care and community support.

"I've loved this work ever since I started," she reflected. "Whether it's impacting one person's life or a whole group of people or system, it just has such a positive influence on people."

Influence has always come with the territory of P&A, and the inspiration of Teresa's leadership has always been grounded in the belief that people with disabilities have the same legal and constitutional rights and guarantees as every other American citizen.

It's odd to think that only 31 years ago, that wasn't always the case.

In July of 1990, President George Bush signed into law The Americans with Disabilities Act. A sweeping civil rights act that protected individuals from discrimination regardless of their abilities.

The Protection and Advocacy concept was initially triggered by a series of local television news broadcasts, which Geraldo Rivera did for the ABC News affiliate in New York City. Rivera's investigative reporting exposed abuse, neglect and lack of programming at Willowbrook, a state institution for people with intellectual disabilities on Staten Island.



And while P&A Systems were originally intended to protect people in facilities for those with intellectual disabilities from abuse and neglect, they have dramatically expanded to include consumer control in decision making and empowering those with disabilities to advocate on their own.

Teresa, influenced by her career in human services, has led the charge ever since.

While employed as a case manager for a regional provider prior to her role at P&A, Teresa worked with a young woman with developmental disabilities living with her immediate family. She noticed that her relatives were exploiting her disability benefits—using social security money to purchase bikes she couldn't ride, presents she couldn't use—and purchasing all kinds of things for everyone but her.

"So I became her advocate," Teresa said. "Eventually I got her moved out of the home and into community-based services. I realized what an impact I had on this individual for the rest of her life. That's what made me want to do this work."

That type of advocate work—giving a voice to those who don't have one—has been a hallmark of Teresa's leadership at P&A.

***“Whether it’s impacting one person’s life or a whole group of people in our [state] system, it has such a positive influence on others,” she reflected. “I really appreciate that about this career.”***

## Person-Centered Planning

Stepping up for individuals’ wishes has always been the job of case managers or program coordinators. Over the years, however, Teresa has positioned P&A to lead the charge on empowering those with disabilities to understand their options and assist in their rights to choose their own outcomes.

Her staff and leadership team have been instrumental in involving personal choice in all matters of life. “It’s wonderful to provide individuals with a choice,” Teresa explained. “Instead of ‘this is where you are going to live’ or ‘this is your roommate’ we explain that it’s their decision.”

Teresa says that choice is a really big moment for most individuals.

“We call it person-centered planning. It has been one of my biggest joys to push this idea, and help the state of North Dakota, the Department of Human Services and all their divisions to get very involved with this. We’re changing society’s way of how they embrace the choice of individuals with disabilities.”

From her work at P&A, Teresa’s ability to frame the need for funding to legislative leaders has been monumental. Her copious notes taken from committee meetings, testimonies and hearings have been instrumental in communicating the direction of bills to the individuals and families she served, organizations across the state who are impacted by legislative rulings, and supporters of the rights being advocated.

Her years as a leader in the advocacy community have allowed her to frame the discussions on disabilities that apply to nearly everyone.

“Even though we may not have someone in our life right now [who has a disability], that could change tomorrow,” Teresa explained. “Anybody could acquire a disability at any time in their life, whether it be a physical disability or a mental illness.”

The stories she paints of parents aging, bring home the point to legislative leaders that even older adults experience things that are disabling. That type of

framework is a powerful tool in Teresa’s playbook when advocating for rights, additional budget resources and bills to expand access to those she represents.

Empowering self-advocates to represent their perspective to elected officials helps too.

“It’s interesting during this last legislative session, one of the self-advocates in Bismarck was having legislators use wheelchairs to try to get around the Capitol to understand more clearly their needs,” Teresa recalls. “And all of a sudden they say ‘Oh yeah, I see what you mean about that men’s bathroom. You know, I couldn’t really get in there and do my business because of the issue.’”

That type of constant reminder, the way Teresa has advocated for over thirty years, drives the point home.

They begin to understand and recognize it could be them, or a family member, or friend at any point in time that might acquire a disability.

## A lasting impact at Fraser

As an organization dedicated to caring for, and continuously lifting up, the underserved population in North Dakota for 128 years, Fraser, Ltd. knows a thing or two about advocating for those who have a limited voice, if any at all.

From program funding and equity in housing to inclusive childcare, advocates like Teresa help position Fraser to serve more individuals. Her tireless dedication to advocating for others inspires the Fraser leadership and has helped give a clear path to empower families to fight for the right to live as independently as possible.

Teresa’s leadership, and dedication to protecting those who otherwise would not be advocated for, will resonate for years to come.

Check out the **Mental Health Advocacy Network Podcast**

Hosts Matthew McCleary, youth coordinator for North Dakota Federation of Families and Patrick Kirby, founder of Do Good Better Consulting, speak with industry professionals about mental health.



# FRASER DAY SERVICES

## Taking Our Mission Further

For more than 20 years, Fraser's Day Program has connected adults who have intellectual disabilities with supportive services in a residential environment. This has involved providing these individuals with opportunities that help them build a variety of skills, including self-esteem, communication and personal care as well as an overall healthy sense of wellbeing. This past year Fraser has taken that mission even further by offering a dedicated space for these activities in a non-residential community-based setting—Fraser Day Services.

The space is located at 1013 45th Street South in Fargo and allows our team to have an even greater impact on our community. By working with other local organizations, we're able to help even more adults with intellectual disabilities benefit from the same personal growth and development opportunities once only offered in our residential programs.



We facilitate daily scheduled activities, training and support in a setting that promotes community participation, development of self-help skills, and improved sensory-motor, cognitive, communication and social interaction skills. It's all so we can help more people feel a sense of inclusivity within the community.

**Our curriculum-based program—“Targeting Life Skills—Making a Better Me”— has four main components:**

### My Hands—Making a Better Me

Includes “Service above Self” volunteering and giving back to the community, such as volunteering at the Arc of Cass County. Individuals will also learn how to be a responsible citizen, participate in group projects that promote teamwork, self-motivate, and contribute to group efforts. Daily schedules also help foster responsibility and support a meaningful day for each person.

### My Health—Making a Better Me

Activities, opportunities and support for skill development in healthy living, including lifestyle choices, personal safety, managing feelings, self-discipline, self-esteem and self-responsibility. Some examples include following prescribed diets, encouraging skills for independence through personal care, exercising, fishing the Red River or local lakes, and promoting self-responsibility through spontaneous activities.

### My Head—Making a Better Me

Skill development in managing and thinking in areas such as decision making, problem solving, learning to learn, goal setting, planning and organizing as well as wise use of resources, both personal and program-related. This may include participating in meetings, encouragement of personal organizing, playing games that promote problem-solving skills and bus training.

### My Heart—Making a Better Me

Skill development in relating and caring, including sharing, empathy and concern for others, social skills, cooperation and communication. This area also promotes creativity and personal expression. Activities may include modeling good manners, honoring personal space, arts and crafts, playing instruments and celebrating special occasions.

*Special acknowledgment and thanks to Iowa State University for granting permission to Paulette Wood, program development administrator at Fraser, Ltd. to adapt selected sections of Dr. Patricia A. Hendricks "Targeting Life Skills Model" reprinted 2009, for use with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.*

# Stepping Stones Resource Center

Providing invaluable support in our community

Our number one focus at Stepping Stones Resource Center is to help provide youth in our community with the most basic needs. But that means more than providing shelter, food and clean clothes. It's also about safety, respect, and understanding. It's all of these things that provide a sense of home. To so many young people in our community, SSRC is that home, making the facility and our staff some of the most critical resources for disenfranchised youth in our community.

"SSRC is a unique resource not duplicated anywhere else in our community or any communities close to us," said Lindsay Hanlon, transitional youth services program administrator. "The trust and relationships we build can't be compared to other services."

The team at SSRC provides individualized, non-stigmatized trauma-informed services for young adults experiencing homelessness. Youth coming to the SSRC not only get the help they need during this transitional period in their journey to adulthood, they're also surrounded by peers and staff who understand this specific demographic.



have in their lives and it's these relationships that teach them true acceptance."

For our staff at SSRC, that also means helping youth work through past traumas.

"Many have difficulty trusting adults due to their trauma history," said Amanda Lindstrom, therapist at Valley Hope Counseling, Fraser's mental health services. "Through counseling, they're able to form, for possibly the first time, a trusting relationship with an adult who helps them better understand their mental health and how to cope with symptoms."

This building of trust and understanding of how to manage their mental health is immensely valuable in helping youth meet their other life goals. This may include accessing housing, education or employment, all of which positively impact our community as a whole.

Valley Hope provides individual counseling, disability verifications for housing, crisis management support, and group counseling for the youth at SSRC, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. These are services typically not made available within the community and without them many of the youth would struggle immensely with their journey toward independence.

"We all have mental health and it's crucial as an agency, community and society that we continue to fund, support and advocate for mental health services for all people, in particular those who are most vulnerable," Lindstrom said.

The work we do is vital and instrumental in our community's mission to end homelessness. As we look to the future we hope we're not only able to continue to work toward that mission, but to do it on an even larger scale.



For many youth, SSRC is the only place they feel comfortable. It's also where they are respected and prioritized as an individual.

"They will always be accepted and welcome here even during a pandemic," Hanlon said. "It's often the only healthy relationships they



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21st Annual

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*Thank you!*



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