



PACIFIC COAST UNIVERSITY
FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH SCIENCES

Mike Carleton

Mike Carleton, B.A. (Hons.), brings a wealth of personal and professional experience to his role as a member of the Academic Council for PCU-WHS.



Looking back over a career dedicated to improving lives and providing opportunities for people with disabilities, Carleton says he has seen great improvements, but there is still plenty of work to be accomplished. There has been progress brought about by human rights legislation, building code requirements for accessibility and greater consciousness of people's abilities despite their disabilities, so there are more opportunities for people with disabilities, but there are still a disproportionate number of people who, for various reasons, are not able to participate in the workforce.

For Carleton, it was during his third year at Simon Fraser University when he was involved in an automobile accident leaving him a paraplegic. Carleton was on track to become a teacher and refused to lower his horizons. He knew there would be challenges, but returned to university and completed his degree and the professional development program for teachers. When he didn't land a full time teaching job, he began exploring other options, and was successful in obtaining a position at the BC Workers' Compensation Board as an adjudicator.

Carleton became interested in the vocational rehabilitation services that the WCB provided to injured workers. He began taking counselling psychology courses at the University of British Columbia as preparation to become a vocational rehabilitation consultant at the Board. Then in the late 1980s when the BC government created the Premier's Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, they advertised for an executive director, and Carleton applied and was successful. It greatly appealed to him as it looked like a way to make changes to the social and economic environment.

As executive director, Carleton had contact with all of the various advocacy groups around the province. One of those groups advocated for disabled workers, which was when he met Wolfgang Zimmermann. Zimmermann became a member of the Premier's Council and went on to become Council Chair. When the two started working together, they became focused on trying to increase the employment representation of people with disabilities.

Through his continued involvement with NIDMAR and PCU-WHS, Carleton sees an opportunity to close the lingering gap in opportunities between those with occupational and non-occupational disabilities. For those who have access to resources, there are terrific opportunities to achieve their goals and to become fully participating members of society, but there are still many individuals who don't have access to the kinds of resources they require to enter the workforce.

That is why the consensus-based approach is a critical component of the strategy to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce. What is most critical is to remain in the workforce – to maintain an employment attachment.