
HELEN PETERS (DOWN)

Inspector #2383 (2003 -)

*Written by John Burchill, President
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On September 15, 2012, the University of Manitoba officially opened the Bisons Walkway of Honour. This unique walkway, located on the Investors Group Athletic Centre plaza, commemorates the exceptional athletic achievements and contributions to the community of former Bisons athletes – representing both current and former sport programs – by listing their names on one of 19 three-sided towers.

Among those memorialized on these towers is Inspector Helen Peters (nee Down) for Field Hockey. Helen started with the Manitoba Bisons in 1993 and competed across Canada for the next five years at Provincial, Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union (CIAU now U Sports) and National events, winning a Bronze medal at the 1997 Canada Summer Games in Brandon.

This was only the second time in 30 years that a Manitoba team had even qualified, let alone win a medal in field hockey. The only other time had been in 1981 when the Under-23 team also won a Bronze medal.



Helen's family came to Winnipeg from England in 1992, however she remained in England to finish a diploma in National Service, which is a stepping stone in England if you want to enter into the police, fire or military professions. Her intention was to join the [Devon & Cornwall Police](#).

As a teenager, Helen volunteered in many areas of her local community and was presented with a Community Service Award from the Chief Constable of the Devon & Cornwall Police. She also achieved the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award for young leaders, presented at Buckingham Palace.

After graduating with her diploma in National Service Helen decided to make the move to Canada, anxious to continue her dream of becoming a police officer. However, the Winnipeg Police recruiting inspector told her to return to school or gain some life experience.

Throughout high school and college in England, Helen competed in Field Hockey and played for her local club. She reached out to Sport Manitoba to see if there were any Field Hockey teams in Manitoba and she was immediately invited to try out for the provincial team. Playing sports quickly enabled her to establish lifelong friendships.

In 1993 Helen entered the University of Manitoba and was accepted onto the Bison Field Hockey Program, along with team Manitoba. Over the next five years she travelled across Canada competing at Provincial, CIAU and National events. Helen was the starting goalkeeper for the Manitoba Field Hockey team and, besides winning a bronze medal, she was player of the year and a recipient of the Province of Manitoba Order of Sport Excellence.



After Helen graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Arts in English, minoring in Criminology and Physical Education, she concentrated on her lifelong goal of becoming a police officer. Her back-up plan, if she wasn't successful in being a police officer was to become a teacher. In fact, she served as a substitute teacher for awhile in the Hanover School Division.



After field hockey, Helen transitioned to playing soccer in the [Winnipeg Womens Soccer League](#) where she played goal for the Chicas team for several years. Helen also officiated soccer and represented Manitoba as a referee at provincial tournaments, national development camps and Western Canada Summer Games. In early 2022 she also volunteered for the Manitoba Games where she was the Co-Chair of the Care and Comfort Committee, overseeing the athletes' villages, food, transportation, access control, and entertainment. Unfortunately, after all the work was done, the Games were cancelled due to COVID.

Helen continues to referee youth and senior district soccer in her local community and now plays and referees [Futsal soccer](#). Sports, says Helen, is a great way to connect with people, maintain a healthy lifestyle, set an example to my daughters, and balance the stresses of work.

Ultimately Helen was hired by the Winnipeg Police in 2003 and graduated from Recruit Class #137 on May 14, 2004.

Helen had always had a keen interest in behavioral crime, which she quickly learned was overseen by Specialized Investigations. She was fortunate to join the Missing Persons Unit just as it began working with Street Reach. It was at this time she truly developed a passion for finding a balanced and trauma informed approach to policing.

She also met with many victims and families who had lost loved ones to suicide. She worked with members who lost loved ones and experienced trauma while they were working. She came to believe that having someone to stand in the gap, to provide comfort, leadership and guidance was just as important as solving crime.

In 2010 Helen became a Police Chaplain. She was first female Chaplain in the Winnipeg Police Service. Chaplains provide spiritual guidance, personal and family counselling, comfort, and referral to police members and the community. They assist officers by working with families who are in crisis, with the option of working closely with Victim Services to provide support. Helen had grown up with a strong faith and was used to speaking and performing in front of large crowds thanks to a second love of theatre.



Helen told me the challenge of respecting the rights of individuals and our communities at large, the challenge of balancing the safety of one with the safety of all, the challenge of ensuring the well being of our members, while asking them to perform a job that ultimately takes its toll in many ways. She has never shied away from a challenge, and when she has the opportunity to bring positive change, encourage, mentor, support, and leadership to our membership and community, she wants to be at the heart of it. Inspector George Labossiere, Helen's colleague in the chaplancy program, told me:

Helen's perseverance and attention to detail have enabled her to lead a number of successful service initiatives. What is less noticeable, but arguably of greater significance, is the level of care and compassion she invests as a member of the police chaplancy. She is always open to helping a colleague during a time of need.

After her first daughter was born Helen returned to work in the Child Abuse Unit. Something she had always wanted to do. She loved children and found it an honour to be able to help them through some of the most difficult and traumatizing times in their lives. As a result of her work supporting police members as a Chaplain and High-Risk Youth Helen was nominated and awarded the Queens Diamond Jubilee Medal for her efforts.

When Helen was asked to join the Special Project with Inspector Chris Puhach to find an alternative response to the mental health crisis, she jumped at the chance to once again help people in a new way. That project – ARCC ([Alternative Response to Citizens in Crisis](#)) – established a co-response model to address 911 calls that require additional supports for people experiencing a mental health crisis. ARCC teams would be comprised of a police officer in plain clothes and a specialized mental health clinician who would be a dispatchable resource to assist Winnipeg Police general patrol when needed.

The ARCC pilot project emerged as a result of the initial work completed through the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative which saw representatives from the City of Winnipeg, Winnipeg Police Service, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, Shared Health, and other community agencies work collaboratively to find ways to better align the supports offered with the needs of residents calling 911.

At the time, mental health is and was a relevant and unpredictable factor in a wide variety of police calls for service. In 2020, members of the Winnipeg Police made 2,102 trips to a health care facility with persons in crisis and spent approximately 3,533 hours, or the equivalent of 147 days, waiting to turn the person over to clinical staff. It was anticipated that the pilot project

would improve support for individuals in crisis while freeing up some policing resources in circumstances that can safely involve the ARCC team. In its pilot year ARCC achieved:

- 29% reduction in police presentations to hospital emergency departments for a mental health assessment
- 91% (310 clients) engaged by ARCC, as the prime unit, remained in community
- 930hrs of capacity was created for General Patrol officers to respond to emergency calls for service

In 2021 Helen took over the role as the coordinator for the Annual Police and Peace Memorial on behalf of the [Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police](#) and, in 2022, she was honored to be nominated a second time and awarded the Queens Platinum Jubilee Medal for her contribution and efforts in crisis response and well being approaches throughout the Service, both internally and externally.

Helen believes in progressive policing that approaches every situation through a balanced lens, that can articulate our role in ensuring everyone's right to live safely, one that requires the public safety/law enforcement approach as much as a restorative/well-being approach. She believes in bringing people together, in having difficult conversations that allow people to bring multiple perspectives to the table that allow us to learn from one another, make better decisions, to connect and see how passionately police officers truly care about people.



NOTE: Leading up to the World Police & Fire Games in Winnipeg this summer, anyone wishing to recognize a police member they feel made a substantial contribution to the world of sport in Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities is asked to send me their name and a brief description of their accomplishments so we can profile them during the year.