


Panelists



Shauna Calnen-David **Elyssa Porlier** **Kasandra Salembier**

Ask Me Anything

Neuro-Diversity is Diversity

Time: 1:00 pm EST **Date:** December 14, 2022 **Hosts:** Kelly Brewer-Balch and Danielle (Dan) MacKinlay

Ask Me Anything: Neuro-Diversity is Diversity

Featuring: Shauna Calnen-David, Kasandra Salembier, and Elyssa Porlier

Opening remarks by: Mario Pelletier

Co-hosted by: Kelly Brewer-Balch and Danielle (Dan) MacKinlay

Date and time: Wednesday, December 14 at 1:00 to 2:30 PM EST

Audience: Open to all Government of Canada employees

Register: [Online registration form](#)

Link to join: [Join the webinar](#)

Ask Me Anything is now on GC Wiki Collab <https://wiki.gccollab.ca/AMA>.

Event Description

This December, the Ask Me Anything stage welcomes speakers to share one of their many layers: neurodiversity. The term neurodiversity was coined by Judy Singer, a sociologist with autism, who highlighted the strengths of being neurodiverse.

Diversity and inclusion extends beyond the surface and delves into what makes us unique. Neurodiversity appreciates that many people have a layer of autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and dyspraxia. Our speakers will explore neurodiversity in the public service, how to be an ally to our neurodiverse colleagues, their strengths, and the power in neurodiversity of those around us. Neurodiversity is diversity.

Join us this month on the Ask Me Anything stage as we recognize, uplift, and celebrate neurodiversity.

About the Ask Me Anything Series

This session is part of a series of Ask Me Anything sessions that give us a platform to share stories, listen, ask respectful questions and continue on our journey to have more inclusive organizations.

As individuals, you can't necessarily change where you live. You certainly can't change your past, but you can adjust who influences you—through the authors you read, the music you listen to, movies you watch and interactions with your community. The *Ask Me Anything* series provides you with an opportunity to increase your perspective—to learn from the lived experiences of individuals who are bravely sharing their stories to help educate and move the public service towards a culture where equity is embedded.

The series also provides an opportunity for you to know that you aren't alone. These experiences, especially the negative ones, are systemic and happen all too frequently throughout the public service. The objective by shining this light is to continually increase the network of public servants ready to take action and move forward towards a culture of inclusivity and belonging.

Opening Remarks by Mario Pelletier



Mario Pelletier, Commissioner – Canadian Coast Guard

Mr. Pelletier began working for Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) in 1989, after graduating with a bachelor's in nautical sciences from Cape Breton University (Canadian Coast Guard College) and obtaining a Marine Engineer's certificate.

He started his career as an engineer officer in the Quebec Region. In 1998, he joined headquarters, where he held positions with increasing responsibilities. In 2011, Mr. Pelletier was appointed Director General, Fleet. He held that position until the new organizational structure of the Canadian Coast Guard took effect on October 1, 2012 when he became the Assistant Commissioner, Central

and Arctic Region.

On June 1, 2015, Mr. Pelletier was appointed the Deputy Commissioner of Operations. He received a Commissioner's Commendation in recognition of his strong leadership, commitment and the high level of expertise and professionalism.

Mr. Pelletier was appointed Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard on December 9, 2019. Mr. Pelletier comes to his new role with vast experience and a well-established reputation for meeting challenges and obtaining desired results.

Meet Our Amazing Panelists



**Shauna Calnen-David, Business Expertise
Consultant in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)
Strategic Services Branch, Service Canada Atlantic**

After graduating from Mount Saint Vincent University with a BSc and BEd, Shauna began her career as a school teacher in Halifax for 10 years. She joined Service Canada in 2016 as a Payment Services Officer (PSO) in the Employment Insurance (EI) call center. In 2020, she became a Business Expertise Advisor (BEA) in Employment Insurance, providing training and coaching to newly hired PSOs during the height of the Pandemic and the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit. Recently, Shauna accepted a position as a Business Expertise Consultant with the Strategic Services Branch. One of her roles is to look at policies and practices in the Atlantic region through a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) lens. This includes increasing education and awareness for employees at all levels, examining current hiring and promotion practices to increase representation of marginalized groups throughout our workforce, and helping to make our workplace more accessible and welcoming for employees with disabilities.

Prior to becoming parents, Shauna and her partner traveled to 14 countries in the Middle East and Asia, including living in Pakistan for 3 years. From 2005-2008, Shauna worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) at the Canadian Embassy in Islamabad, where she assisted the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Liaison Officer with matters of international cooperation among policing agencies in the region. During this time, she accompanied the RCMP Liaison Officer for operational travel throughout Pakistan, including the northern Tribal areas and visiting refugee camps along the Afghan Border in Peshawar. Today, living in Bathurst, Shauna is a proud mother of two resilient boys. Both boys were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder as toddlers. This has brought many additional challenges, but also unexpected rewards

to parenthood over the past 13 years. She has become an advocate not only for her own children, but also for all neurodiverse learners.

Social Justice has been Shauna's innermost passion for more than half her life. She does not claim to be a DEI expert, just someone who refuses to be a bystander; one person who is committed to hearing and sharing ALL peoples' lived experiences. She is a lifelong learner who is always looking for ways to be a better ally, in the hopes of making Canada more inclusive and equitable for everyone.

*"I am only one, but still I am one.
I cannot do everything, but I can do something.
And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."*

-Edward Everett Hale



Kasandra Salembier, Project Administrative Assistant, Vessel Procurement, Canadian Coast Guard (CCG)

Kasandra Salembier earned an administrative assistant certificate from La Cite Collegiale. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce with a major in accounting at Athabasca University.

Kasandra began working in the private sector, assisting the company's owner in submitting bids for government contracts. She worked in the office of the Director General, Integrated Business Management Services at the Canadian Coast Guard after leaving the private sector. Kasandra is an administrative assistant in Vessel Procurement and is currently working on the Offshore

Oceanographic Science Vessel project.

Kasandra comes from a family of four children, each of whom has a condition in the neuro-diversity group. Kasandra has ADD (attention deficit disorder), is a slow reader, and has dyslexia. She also has Chartco-Marie-Tooth muscular dystrophy. Kasandra is the loving and proud parent of a two-year-old son. He was recently diagnosed with moderate to severe autism, leaning toward the severe spectrum.



Elyssa Porlier, Team Leader, Writing and Analysis Services, Organization and Classification Centre of Expertise, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Elyssa Porlier earned a Master of Arts in Literature and worked for twenty years in the private sector. Her experiences led her to a life full of discoveries, such as by hosting a radio show at CISM, working as volunteer Manager for emerging artists, an Assistant-Manager in a non-profit home for sick people and a Special Projects Manager for the Montreal Alouettes Football Club.

Since she started her career in the public service in 2018, starting at Veterans Affairs, Elyssa found a public service filled with professional, dedicated and passionate federal employees. Today, as a Team Leader in the Organization and Classification Centre of Expertise at DFO, she fosters a collaborative and positive environment. In this regard, she has put in place a system to address the isolation of teleworkers, including bi-monthly coffee breaks and team meetings to discuss stress in the workplace.

Elyssa lives in Montreal and deals with generalized epilepsy and accelerated long-term forgetting (ALF), which she compensates for by taking detailed and organized notes that help her perform at work.

Elyssa enjoys quiet hobbies such as reading, drawing and writing, notably while sitting at a coffee table and contemplating the world run by. She is a tattoo-aficionada and is always up to go out for breakfast with friends or a 6AM-morning walk with a pal.

Meet Our Co-Hosts



Kelly Brewer-Balch, ADM(Mat) Level 1 Diversity and Inclusion Analyst, DMGMC, COS(Mat), National Defence

Kelly joined the federal public service in 2018 working first with Employment and Social Development Canada and then moving to National Defence in the Diversity and Inclusion Office, ADM (Materiel Group). Kelly has an invisible disability and is Mom to two neuro-diverse children. Born and raised in Newfoundland, Kelly also lived in Massachusetts and Florida. Kelly has always been interested in creating more inclusive environments and providing a 'level playing field' so that everyone has the opportunity to achieve success as they define it. Kelly has always been an active advocate for her children – especially as it became evident

that their way of thinking was different than many of their classmates - as a member of several school councils in addition to being an active school volunteer.

Kelly is a co-creator of, and current project manager for, the Lifting as you Lead Mentoring Circles program – a ten-week program that provides a platform for employees to network with colleagues and leadership across the federal public service while developing interpersonal skills, learning about key leadership and cultural competencies, and finding career building opportunities. Kelly coordinates the Micro Mission opportunity for her DIO team and is proud to be a member of the Ask Me Anything series team working behind the scenes as a chat moderator. Taking the plunge to be in front of the camera as a co-moderator this month is a deliberate effort to get out of her comfort zone and stretch!

Outside of work, Kelly is passionate about helping people preserve their photographs and the stories that go with these precious memories. She hosts retreats, works with her clients to create photo gifts and loves to see her daughter share scrapbooks of her life journey with friends!



**Danielle (Dan) MacKinlay (she/they)
Communications Advisor, Internal and
Corporate Communications, Transport Canada**

Danielle recently joined Transport Canada's Internal and Corporate Communications team as a Communications Advisor. Since 2005, they have worked as the Manager, Library Services at the Canadian Coast Guard College.

They have a Master's degree in Library and Information Studies from Dalhousie University, a BA(Hons) from Mount Allison University in French Studies and Psychology, and recently completed a Leadership and Inclusion Certificate from Centennial College (Toronto) and the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion.

Danielle is also a bilingual, queer person, parent of three young children, an avid reader and craftsperson, of French Canadian and Scottish descent, who lives with an invisible disability.

Their career passions are advocating for others and amplifying voices, with the goal of building a more compassionate workplace. They believe that access to services, information and knowledge are the key to safe and creative workplace culture. Born and raised on Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island), they are influenced by the rich culture and history that defines the island. They are interested in how we can speak more mindfully and effectively to one another.

Mission - Ask Me Anything Series

We recognize that individuals are composed of a multitude of layers that make us who we are. We do not fit easily in one box or another and we can't be neatly counted. We represent the mosaic of Canada.

It is important that we find value in each other's experiences, differences and unique characteristics. When we build our cultural competencies, we are able to work better together in our teams and respond to each other with relevance, empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain greater appreciation of each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

We know through diversity, that workplaces and communities are stronger, more successful and resilient. And most important, it creates spaces of inclusion and fosters a workplace of belonging where people feel valued.

#AMAChallenge

We encourage others to have courageous conversations with their peers. Use the monthly Ask Me Anything sessions as an opportunity to have brave conversations in your workplaces with your teams.

Here's what you need to do:

- Invite your leaders and colleagues in your organization to an Ask Me Anything watch party, tune in live and watch the session together. Make sure it's in their calendars.
- Before the watch party, book an "After the AMA – Team Session" with your immediate team for the day after the event for 30-60 minutes. Share the resource guide and have these questions for discussion.

After the AMA – Team Session Discussion Questions

1. What was my main takeaway – expand and share an amazing quote, story or moment
2. What made me uncomfortable/ what was one of my blind spots?
3. What is an example of systemic discrimination that I am aware of in my life?
4. What am I not going to do anymore?
5. How can I use my voice/ influence? – both overtly/covertly
6. Where am I going to dig in and learn more?
7. How will I continue this conversation?

It is important that we find value in the experiences, the unique characteristics of each other. When we develop our cultural competence, we are able to work better together within our teams and respond to each other with relevant empathy and compassion. By celebrating and sharing our authentic selves, we gain a greater appreciation for each other and the diversity that surrounds us.

Thank you to our contributors

Thank you to our contributors from across the Public Service of Canada – Canadian Coast Guard, National Defence, Fisheries and Oceans, Service Canada and Transport Canada

MCs: Kelly Brewer-Balch and Danielle (Dan) MacKinlay

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