



COMMUNITY LIVING
BRITISH COLUMBIA

CELEBRATE **DIVERSE** **ABILITIES**

Stories from around British Columbia



Michelle (centre) enjoys the day in her local community garden in Burnaby with Suzy Phillips, PLAN mentor, (left) and neighbour Tara Leroux (right).

In my nature

Michelle McDonald's passion for gardening and love of the environment are among the many things that make her proud to be herself.

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MESSAGE FROM CEO Seonag Macrae

Celebrating our unique identities and contributions



Welcome to the summer 2018 edition of Celebrate Diverse ABILITIES, a publication developed by the CLBC Editorial Board and written by self advocates in British Columbia.

For this edition, our theme is “Pride in my Identity.” For the many authors who shared their stories, the things that make them proud are as varied as they are, from Sherwin Strong’s pride in his First Nations heritage to Michelle McDonald’s passion for the environment. However, throughout the stories common themes emerge: the importance of respecting and celebrating the aspects that form our unique identities, as well as using these things to contribute to the lives of others. I hope you enjoy reading the stories as much as I have.

I am proud to share with you that CLBC continues to make progress as we move into the second year of our 2017-2020 Strategic Plan. Notably, in June we launched an upgraded CLBC website at www.CommunityLivingBC.ca to better meet the needs of individuals and families by answering key questions about CLBC supports. We are also preparing to launch an improved welcome and planning process in the fall that supports the different ways people choose to plan for adulthood. Individuals and families will play an important role in delivering workshops that are part of this process. You can read more in the CLBC News section on pages 4 and 5.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Dr. Michael J. Prince as the new Chair of CLBC’s Board of Directors as of July 1, and thank outgoing Chair Tom Christensen for his guidance and commitment during this term. Read more about Dr. Prince in the News section, as well as recent visits by Board members to communities to hear directly from people and families CLBC supports.

Thank you as always for reading. I hope you are having a wonderful summer and we look forward to continuing to share many great success stories and news updates with you throughout the rest of 2018.

Sincerely,
Seonag Macrae
CEO, Community Living BC

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CLBC Editorial Board Members are:

front row, left to right: Jennifer Dosanj (Surrey), Lee Kissinger (Victoria), Blake Parkinson (North Vancouver), Sam Milton (Gitsegukla), Gerald Oesch (Chilliwack). **back row, left to right:** Ryan Kenny (Williams Lake), Bryce Schaufelberger (Mission), Nathan Bodie (Victoria), Rob Tippe (Revelstoke).

MESSAGE FROM The Editorial Board

A special thanks to Editorial Board members and CLBC staff who provided writing and technical support to the authors in this edition.

Loving what you do and who you are

Hello! We are the CLBC editorial board made up of self advocates and community living leaders from across the province. Our role is to work with Community Living BC to improve communication with the people they serve and to find ways to share the stories and contributions of people with diverse abilities in B.C. Working together on this magazine has been a one way to let CLBC, and the broader community, know what we think is important.

In this edition, we are sharing stories about pride and identity. We asked people with diverse abilities to write about what makes them proud to be who they are. You will read stories about people who are proud to identify as Indigenous, independent, an environmentalist, a self-advocate, a person who has autism, a public speaker, a student, an employee and more. We want people to know they aren't alone and that the more we support and respect each other, the more confident we become.

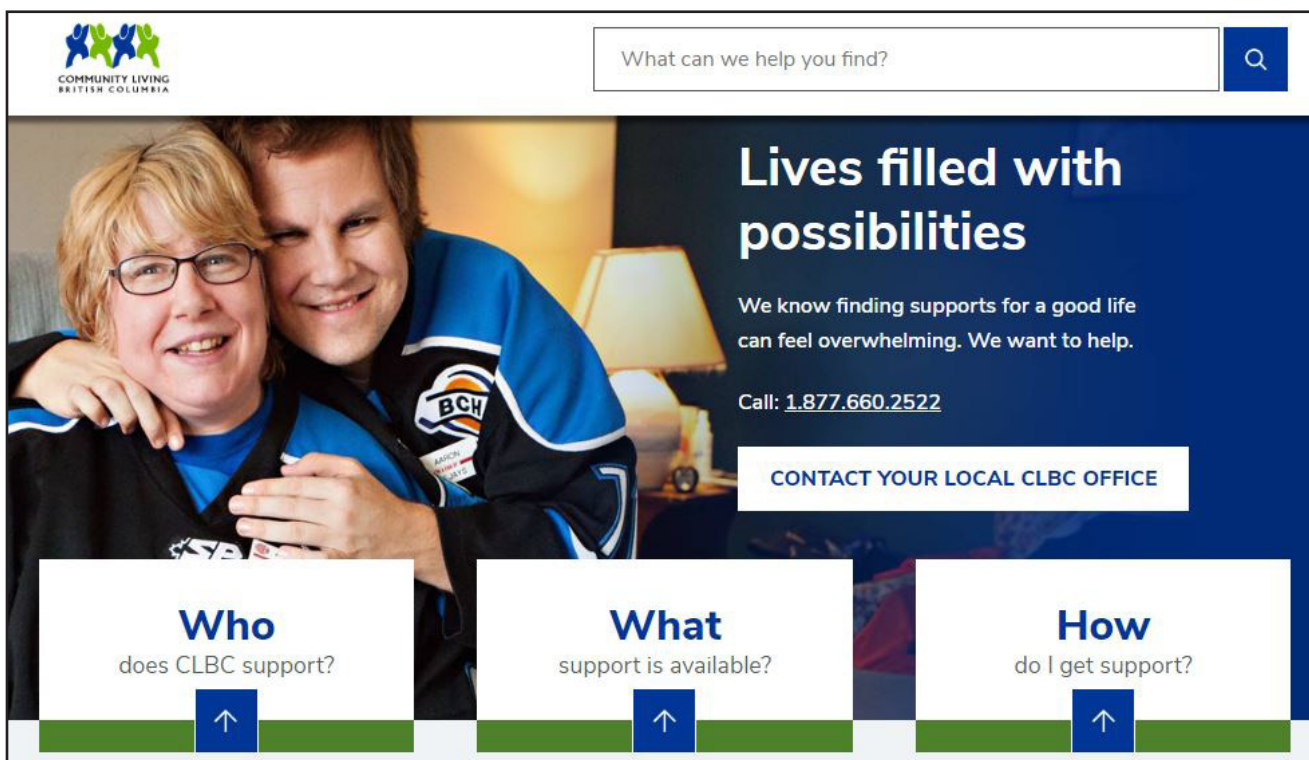
We hope these stories inspire you to talk about who you are and to share with others what you care about. Editorial Board member Sam Milton says, "Love what you do and love who you are." If you would like to share your story about what makes you proud, visit www.SelfAdvocateNet.com and click the "Submit your story idea" link.

We'd like to thank all the members of the self advocacy community and others with diverse abilities who contributed their story to our magazine.

We look forward to your feedback and suggestions for the next edition of Celebrate Diverse ABILITIES.

Sincerely,

The CLBC Editorial Board


 The screenshot shows the CLBC website home page. At the top left is the CLBC logo. To its right is a search bar with the placeholder text "What can we help you find?". Below the logo is a large photo of a smiling couple. To the right of the photo, the text reads "Lives filled with possibilities", followed by "We know finding supports for a good life can feel overwhelming. We want to help." and "Call: 1.877.660.2522". Below this is a button that says "CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CLBC OFFICE". At the bottom, there are three white boxes with blue borders. The first box is titled "Who" and asks "does CLBC support?". The second box is titled "What" and asks "support is available?". The third box is titled "How" and asks "do I get support?". Each box has a blue arrow pointing up at the bottom.

CLBC News

This is the home page of CLBC's new website. Stay up to date with the latest News and Stories from CLBC by visiting the "What's New" section of the site at www.CommunityLivingBC.ca.

CLBC launches new website for individuals and families

Community Living BC has launched a new website at www.CommunityLivingBC.ca that aims to make it easier for individuals and families to find answers and information they need.

The new site, which is mobile-friendly, is organized around three questions: "Who does CLBC support?", "What support is available?" and "How do I get support?" It includes sections like "How do I get started" and "Meet a CLBC facilitator." All top level pages have a "What this page says" plain language summary.

The website has more information about how to get support, including the welcome and planning steps, options for connecting to community and CLBC services, and how CLBC works.

New website features include:

- simplified navigation
- an interactive office locator map
- accessibility tools
- an upgraded News & Stories section

Visit the site, and let us know what you think by sending an email to CLBCInfo@gov.bc.ca.

Beginning Fall 2018: An improved welcome and planning process

Starting in fall 2018, individuals and families approaching CLBC for support will have more options available to learn about CLBC and how they can plan for services.

Following significant testing and trialing, CLBC has created a series of workshops to welcome people to CLBC, and developed new options, together with partners like the Family Support Institute, to support the different ways individuals and families choose to plan for adulthood.

Invitations to attend the first workshop series will be going out to people new to CLBC from each local office in August and September.

WELCOME WORKSHOPS

People new to CLBC will be encouraged to participate in these four Welcome Workshops to learn more about CLBC:

1. Getting Started
2. Community Connections
3. Planning Choices
4. CLBC - 'The Real Deal'

The workshops will be led by an individual who receives support from CLBC, a family member and a CLBC staff person.

CLBC welcomes new Board Chair



CLBC welcomes Dr. Michael J. Prince as the new Chair of CLBC's Board of Directors and thanks outgoing Chair Tom Christensen for his invaluable guidance during his term.

Dr. Prince, who began his term on July 1, is the Lansdowne professor of social policy at the University of Victoria, and a well-known expert in policies for people with disabilities. CLBC looks forward to his leadership and expertise.



Above:
CLBC Board Member Mike Watson (centre) joined the fun at the annual West Kootenay community barbeque in Castlegar.

Board members visit local communities

Each year, small groups of CLBC's board members visit local communities to connect with individuals, families, Community Council members and CLBC staff to learn more about CLBC's service delivery and the people CLBC supports. The visits are part of the board's commitment to listen and learn which assists them in guiding CLBC's work. Over the recent months Board members visited Castlegar, Campbell River and Courtenay. Read more about these visits on the CLBC website under **What's New > News & Stories**.

Courtenay

Taking pride in my First Nations heritage

by Sherwin Strong

My name is Sherwin Glen Dan Strong. I come from the Nuuchatlat and Carrier First Nations.

My birth parents were unable to look after me and my twin sister, however they gave us up to my parents Zellah and Gerry knowing they would teach us about the traditions and culture we come from. In all my 24 years, I can say that growing up in a Native family was a true blessing.

When I turned 19, before leaving the care of the ministry, a local woman from Waichay Friendship Centre was able to locate and learn the roots of my family and heritage. I found out that I am related to Maquinna. Maquinna was the chief of the Nuu-chah-nulth people of Nootka Sound, during the maritime fur trade in the 1780s and 1790s. He was the leader that met James Cook at Friendly Cove. Knowing this about my heritage gave me great pride.



Left:
A symbol representing the Saik'uz people, who are part of the Carrier First Nation.



Above:
Sherwin Strong's Indigenous heritage plays an important role in his life and work as a Self Advocate Liaison.

When I was 21, I had a chance to present my story and heritage to youth and families in Gold River in my role as the Self Advocate Liaison for the Comox Valley. On this trip to Gold River, I stayed in a Cedar built hotel that sits on Maquinna Ave. It was a very surreal moment for me. I was with CLBC Facilitator, Barb Legg. She and I were presenting together about CLBC being able to now offer services on reserve. I was speaking about my own transition from the Ministry of Children and Families to Community Living BC and what it was like to be newly employed.

This by far has been one of my greatest memories that represent the pride I have in my Indigenous heritage. I look forward to many more in my journey into adulthood as a First Nations man.

From Can't to Can

by Crystal Carson

Hi. My name is Crystal. I am a self advocate in Nanaimo. I like to help people and give back to my community by volunteering for organizations like Foodshare, the library and Hospice. Recently, I raised \$1,800 for Hospice through a six kilometre walk. I have a job at Vancouver Island Vocational Rehab Services which I love.

My mentors were my Mom and Dad. I was devastated when my Mom, who was my best friend, was killed in a tragic car accident when I was in my early 30s. She always gave me good advice to not give up on my goals and dreams and to believe in myself. My Dad died a few years later. Cuddles my kitty is my best friend. She gives me great comfort and joy. She helped me through my grief when my parents died.

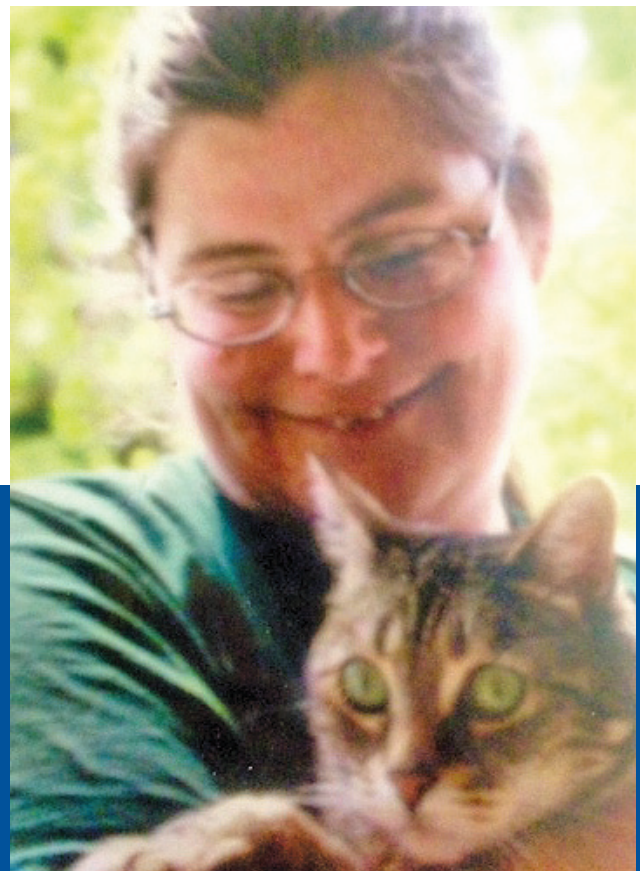
I was told by others that I couldn't live on my own or finish high school. I moved into my own apartment in 2001 and am taking adult education classes. I completed my grade 12 math exam and am waiting for the results. By taking classes I am learning new skills and boosting my self esteem.

As a member of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo (SAN) I am learning to speak up and take action about things that are important to me and others.

Nanaimo

We got to make a film, "Food, Fun, and Advocacy," which we presented to over 300 people in Nanaimo. The film is about the Self Advocates of Nanaimo and their involvement in advocacy and community food programs. You can find the video on Youtube. We have been invited to present the film to organizations like CLBC Nanaimo and Nanaimo Association of Community Living. Some of the members of SAN are fundraising to present our video at the 2019 Inclusion BC Conference in Victoria.

By living on my own, taking classes, working at my job and volunteering in the community my, self confidence is increasing. I have learned there is "no 't' in can" like my Mom taught me.



"We all want to be respected and build confidence to be who we are."

CRYSTAL CARSON

Kelowna

Right:
Travis finds rewards in
his ability to help and
entertain others.



Not like anyone else

by Travis Pankiw

I often try to compare myself to other men. Which is difficult, because I'm not like other men.

I currently work between two to five hours a week, and I'm 29 and living with my dad.

I wake up around noon, I don't own my own car.

A high school dropout needing to pop pills just to stay straight. At times, I struggle to take care of a house cat.

I'm obsessed with alternative politics yet I've never voted.

For me, looking someone in the eye isn't instinct.

There's 28 cents in my bank account, and my most valuable possession is an old super Nintendo cartridge. I have the social skills and emotional regulation of a 17-year-old boy.

Yet life is wonderful. The work I do is immensely rewarding, as it is helping mold youth with autism into their greatest potential.

I'm very grateful to be healthy, alive, and free. I have a network of online friends, whom I can entertain and excite at my every whim.

People sometimes speak to me asking for help with depression and death, so my voice holds the greatest of meaning.

I hold debt to no bank or person.

I have an IQ of 128 and the insight to use it as I see fit. Last month alone I saved a life from drug overdose and helped a man escape a burning building.

My Autism has given me challenges but also fed the perseverance of my soul.

The courage to be myself

by Tami Pedersen

This is a story about finding the courage to be myself. It's also a story about how having friends in your life can help you see yourself in a new way.

My story starts a few years after high school. Until then, I'd been living at home in Kamloops. Life was okay, but I wasn't very happy. I was playing the part of being who I thought my parents and others wanted me to be and I felt kind of trapped.

I needed a change, so I took a huge leap and moved to Vancouver. When you are from a small town like Kamloops, Vancouver seemed huge and busy. I didn't know anyone.

Luckily, I connected with an employment program and met some really nice people, one of whom was Laura. She became a lifelong friend. Laura got me into Indy Car racing where we volunteered and I met my friend, Dan.

Both Laura and Dan gave me the chance to see myself in a different way. I didn't have to worry about being judged and it gave me a chance to start trying different things.

I even went on a cruise with Dan. That is when I got bitten by the travel bug! I love to travel. It helps me to change the way I think about myself and the world. I get to learn about things I might never have thought about and that is really cool.

I lived in Vancouver for 17 years before moving back to Kamloops. Today, people in my life see me happier and more confident.

Now I have all of these wonderful friends who love and like me for me. They accept me. I'm learning to love myself as I continue to grow and learn. Finding your way is about finding a way that works for you!

"I love to travel.
It helps me to
change the way I
think about myself
and the world."

TAMI PEDERSON



Kamloops

Burnaby

In my nature

by Michelle McDonald

I am Michelle and there are many words to describe me. I am a gardener, nature lover, self advocate, friend, mischief-maker, environmentalist, volunteer and many more.

I like that I have a good sense of humour. I especially like playing pranks and making people laugh. If a person knows me well enough, I use my hands to pretend to be a spider on their back. I also like drawing funny pictures for people, and sending funny pictures I have created on my computer.

I love that I have a sense of adventure. I lived in Kenya when I was younger, and we travelled a lot and I saw many unusual animals and plants. My favourites were lions and flamingos. I still like to travel. I always enjoy going to the Inclusion BC conference to learn.

Above: Michelle loves to share her passion for gardening and the environment with others, including her neighbour Tara.

Right: Michelle is active in taking care of her community garden plot, including digging up invasive plants and keeping the flowers well watered.

I have a love of the environment, and it feels good when I share knowledge about things I have learned.

I love trees and hate to see them being chopped down for any reason. I like to think they are sentient beings.

I also like educating people about how important spiders and insects are. I'm passionate about plants and love working on my community garden plot. I love to grow my vegetables, herbs and fruits. I have also volunteered recently by digging up an invasive species of a plant so that a native species can grow instead.

I like talking to people wherever I go, and I feel happy when people respond nicely to me. I like it when people are respectful and helpful to others. I like sharing the message about anti-bullying and people being kind to others.

I am Michelle and I am proud to be me.



Dragon boating, books and family

by Tara Leroux

There are a lot of things that make me unique. My life is very awesome because I feel part of my community in many different ways.

I joined a book club a few years ago. We meet every week and choose a book together. Every week, we talk about a chapter of the book together. We talk about the characters and a summary of the plot. Sometimes we go on great field trips that relate to the book we're reading. I love it because it's fun, I get to meet new friends and get out and enjoy myself.

I also signed up to dragon boating a few years ago. I go every Saturday from March to June. It is a ton of fun. I love being part of a team, getting exercise in the outdoors and meeting a lot of different people. The festival in June is one of the best parts of it, having fun with my teammates and coaches.

During the week, I work in a daycare centre with children aged 3 to 5. My job is to help out the teachers and kids by preparing snacks. It's a lot of fun to be around the children.

Another thing about me is that I also love to create art. I recently applied for and received a neighbourhood grant to start up my own monthly art group at my local neighbourhood house so I can get together and work with others who love to create too.

Family is also very important to me, I love to spend time with them when I can, and I visit my father every Sunday, and I help him by bringing him groceries.

These are some of the things that make up my identity and make me proud to be who I am.

Burnaby



"My life is very awesome because I feel part of my community in many different ways."

TARA LEROUX

Vancouver

Normal doesn't cut it anymore

by Lucas Gates

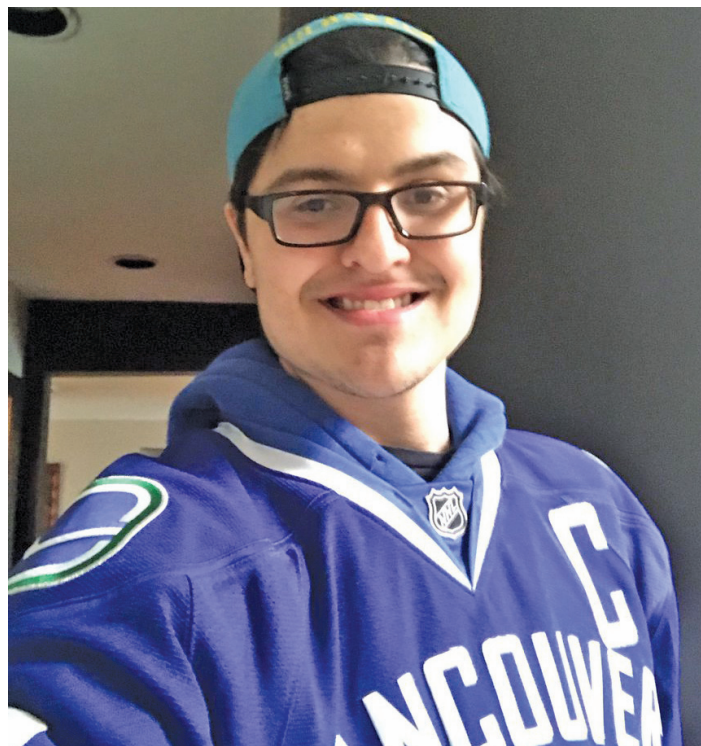
Today, I'm extremely proud to be a person on the Autism spectrum. I can just simply be me, without the usual judgement and stigmatization back when I was a kid. The world today is opening up to inclusion and acceptance. Normal doesn't quite cut it anymore. Attitudes today are adjusting to accept everyone, not just people who are neuro-typical.

As a 25-year-old living on the spectrum, it hasn't always been easy, but that didn't deter me from helping others. When I was first diagnosed, resources were scarce. First grade teachers didn't have a grasp on what Autism was.

I've had people put me down, be negative and say things like I would never get a job, never take the bus or be completely independent. Today, all three of those statements are now moot and here's why:

1. I'm working at the Pacific Autism Family Network as an Ambassador of the Richmond Hub.

2. I take the bus to and from work, and I'm teaching my younger sister how to take transit.



Above:
Lucas uses his own story to encourage others to be proud in their own identities, and to never feel ashamed of being different.

3. I'm doing things independently from my parents, despite the fact I still live at home.

Today, I can be open about my diagnosis. Employers are starting to warm up to hiring people with diverse needs. Think of that - being open about your diagnosis might make a workplace better than it was before!

My advice to others is being you is a good thing. Don't shelter yourself because you feel ashamed of being different. You are you! And we all have a right to be included. So, believe me, if people put you down, don't believe their nonsense.

Be yourself, and don't live under other people's expectations. Just show them who you really are!

Left:
Lucas's story was featured through the STORYHIVE initiative supported by Telus. You can watch it on Youtube by searching for "Autism: Behind the Lens."



One person - many roles

by Julia Ansbacher

Burnaby

My name is Julia Ansbacher. Below is a word cloud that describes my identity. For this article I brainstormed and wrote down the many roles that make me who I am. Have you done a word cloud before? Try it! Sit down with a pen and paper (and a friend, if you want) and write down your roles, experiences and interests.

This exercise made me feel good about myself and reminded me that I am important to other people too. While each role may not be unique, when put together they make up who I am.

My life started in New Zealand, in a small city called Dunedin. I lived there until I was a toddler and then my family moved to Canada. Although I have been in Vancouver since I was a child, I am still connected to family in New Zealand.

Currently I share an apartment with my best friend, have loving, supportive parents and good friends in my life.

I am a fighter! I have lived through a five-month hospital stay and a diagnosis of non-ketotic hyperglycinemia (NKH). The doctor said I was a miracle to be diagnosed at the age of 33 and survive. I look for opportunities to raise awareness about this rare condition and have raised funds to help find a cure.

I care about human rights and services for people with diverse abilities. I don't really like labels because I think they are limiting. I look for opportunities to create awareness and get justice for all people, especially people who live with a low income.

I am Julia.



Julia created a word cloud to express the different aspects of her identity:

Diverseability Humour Friend Loving
 Counsellor No Labels Unique NKH
 Miracle Fighter Sister Public Speaker
 Peace Maker Inspiration Poet Julia
 Entertainer Love MC Animal Lover New Zealand
 Daughter Me

Surrey

Choosing my own direction in life

by Julia Hutton

My name is Julia Hutton and I am a self advocate with Milieu Services. I provide advice and mentorship to individuals with diverse abilities. I also sell pictures in a gallery called Blue Lotus/Smart Frames. I have also worked at the Cloverdale Country Farms and Applewood Tea Shop.

I am proud of many things, but what stands out most is how proud I am of my independence. I have grown from constantly relying on someone for support, to now choosing my own direction in my life. This growth has given me a strong reason to be a proud.

People have always been the central aspect of my life. They have helped me to become who I am today. My support staff have helped open my eyes to the opportunities out there and encouraged me during the rough patches. They have helped me pull through the big decisions and even offered a home until one was found.

I have had employers who have reminded me about confidence and living life to the fullest. I've had colleagues encourage me to take a step forward further out of my comfort zone and go places I've always wanted to go on my own. I have caregivers who worry about me



Above:

Julia is most proud of her independence and credits the people in her life for helping her develop her pride in herself and her accomplishments.

and take care of me through the good and the bad times. I have friends, with and without diverse abilities, who have helped me discover what's on the safe side and what is not.

All these people have helped me to become proud of who I am - of having my own style and being able to earn on my own money and direct my own life. I can go out and do what I want, when and how. I set my own goals and achieving them makes life all the more exciting and challenging.

I encourage everyone not to be afraid of trying something new. It's a great feeling of accomplishment and helps pull you forward to the next challenge ahead. So live life to the fullest and be who you are!

Living, learning and taking pride in my diverse ability

by Christian Burton

I take pride in my diverse ability. I am proud to be an athlete with Special Olympics. I am proud of the services I receive from CLBC. I am proud to work doing things that make me feel happy to be me.

But it can be difficult at times living with a diverse ability. It can be difficult when people only look at you as one thing, being disabled. This is especially hard when it comes to being independent and trying to make a difference in community.

In elementary school, I spent only 30 per cent of my time inside the resource room while the rest of my classmates were in regular classes. I worked on my studies with little to no adaptations. I did have an Educational Assistant to help me, including breaks when my stress and anxiety would get the better of me.

By high school things changed. I was put into the life skills program where, by mistake, I was kind of segregated from regular classes. In grade 9 they put me into grade 8 courses. I started to understand this placement was due to my disability. This was hard. Throughout those years I learned to advocate for myself and other students who didn't like being segregated.

When I got older, I was proud to show my skills with photography, computer technology, and being able to comprehend more sociological thinking to problems.

Now, I am 23 years old. I'm a university student taking non-adapted courses. I'm going for my Faculty of Arts certificate and taking sociology classes. I'm also working for CLBC as a surveyor of employment services. I'm proud to be me.



"I am proud to work doing things that make me feel happy to be me."

CHRISTIAN BURTON

Langley



Community Event

Above:

Self advocates gathered at Camp Luther for last year's Self Advocacy Leadership Retreat, and are looking forward to another educational and enriching retreat in 2018.

Self Advocacy Leadership Retreat marks 19th year this October

This fall, the annual Self Advocacy Leadership retreat will again bring together self advocates from across the province for workshops and networking opportunities.

The multi-day event, previously hosted at Edenvale, has recently moved to a larger venue at Camp Luther Retreat Centre in Mission. The larger event space will accommodate the group of attendees who come together to plan their own lives and discuss the future of the self advocacy movement, as well as rights and other issues and topics that are important to them.

Find registration details at www.SelfAdvocateNet.com.

Event Details

Location: Camp Luther Retreat Centre,
9311 Shook Road, Mission, B.C.

Date: October 19 – October 21, 2018
4:30 p.m. Friday to 12:00 p.m. (Noon) on Sunday

Cost: \$260 (price includes tax) per person, which includes 2 nights and 3 days accommodations, healthy meals, registration, all workshops, recreation, and FUN.

Questions? Please call and register with Gregg Schiller at **604-688-7001** or GreggSchiller@shaw.ca

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