

The Citizen

Connecting people with their community



COMMUNITY LIVING
BRITISH COLUMBIA



Celebrating Community Living Month

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Rick Mowles, CEO

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OCTOBER IS COMMUNITY LIVING MONTH, A TIME TO CELEBRATE AND

recognize the achievements and contributions of self-advocates and their families to their communities. Events, recognition activities and celebrations are taking place across the province. In this month's issue of *The Citizen*, you will find stories about some of these celebrations, like the One Day Together event in Victoria and Start with Hi events in Kelowna, Vancouver, Abbotsford and Victoria.

Community Living Month is recognized each year. This year we also have a number of municipalities proclaiming the month, including Victoria, Fort St. John, Quesnel, Kelowna, Vancouver, Prince George, Courtenay, Comox, Dawson Creek and Campbell River. These communities and others have also met with CLBC staff, self-advocates and Community Council members over the last year to talk about how we can work together to build more inclusive communities, and create more opportunities for individuals.

This month also marks the one year anniversary of the move of children's services back to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and of the introduction of legislation that created a new stream of eligibility for CLBC supports called the Personalized Supports Initiative (PSI). I want to recognize and commend the work of CLBC staff, service providers and community partners who have worked hard this last year to ensure families and individuals have been supported, and new working relationships and services are identified for adults eligible for the PSI.

It is also a time to acknowledge the growing leadership we are seeing across BC. Self-advocates have shown the range of their abilities, interests and skills by developing, implementing and leading CLBC funded Self Advocates Seeding Innovation projects, and participating in Community Councils. Staff are finding new approaches and working in new ways with communities to ensure people have choices about how they live, work and play. Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs and other community partners have demonstrated their interest in supporting and including people by helping to promote employment and community connections.

Community Living Month is a chance to acknowledge that communities are made up of individuals. I invite each of you this month to recognize the role we play in building inclusive communities and to reach out to others so they understand how they can help build "good lives in welcoming communities" for adults with developmental disabilities. ■

Networking for change

By Tanya Norman



Tanya Norman shares her experiences as a self-advocate.

MY NAME IS TANYA

Norman and I am a self-advocate from Powell River. I live with my fiancée Andrew. We are planning a wedding for next May which is very exciting for us both. I work at a local service provider in my community. I love to play softball too. The most important thing to me is advocacy and being a leader in the advocacy movement. This is an essay I wrote about being a self-advocate and a leader:

What is self-advocacy? To me, self-advocacy is going out and making sure that your voice is heard on issues that are going around either in your town or in the province. Being a leader and learning to advocate for yourself or your group is a great skill. Learning to speak up can be hard for people especially if you are shy or have fears.

I have learned that being a leader and standing up for my rights as a person with challenges can be hard but if you can get a group together and brainstorm ideas, the world can be a place of understanding and rewards. Before I ever was a

self-advocate or knew what a self-advocate was, I explored and got connected and tried to get different issues solved.

Advocating for ourselves can be a difficult process but if you ask for help you will get things done with knowledge and understanding.

There are struggles but there are also rewards in advocating. Where you want to get to is having a network around you to help you and show how much you care about your community, your life, and someone else's life that you care for.

I myself am happy to be able to make someone's day by doing something nice for them and just helping them out in times of struggle or in troubled times. As I start to learn more and more about advocacy I just want to get out there and tell my story. My journey, and how I became so caring and understanding of where people are coming from in their lives, can inspire other people and so can yours.

I want to see people's lives being impacted with the

support and the power to be able to stand up and be advocates in their communities and in the province. It is so important to get your voice heard and to be strong and to keep demanding change in the community.

Knowing our abilities and being satisfied with our leadership will bring us success and great accomplishment in your advocacy and your community.

Keep up the good work and keep telling your stories. ■

Inside Voice is published in each issue of *The Citizen*. If you are interested in writing for this column, please call Chris Rae at 1-877-660-2522 or email editor@communitylivingbc.ca

Community Living Month takes flight

EARLY ON THE MORNING OF OCTOBER 6, 2010, CLBC staff, Community Council and family members, self-advocates and special guests held events in four communities across BC to celebrate Community Living Month and promote CLBC's public awareness initiative 'Start with Hi.' Participants handed out Globe and Mail newspapers and Start with Hi stickers and bracelets at busy locations in Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna and Abbotsford.

The events were organized as part of CLBC's public education partnership with the Globe and Mail to increase awareness about the importance of inclusion and building safe,

welcoming communities for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The events were a great success with plenty of Start with Hi stickers, bracelets and papers handed out in each community. VIPs, including representatives from the local Fire and Police Departments, City Councillors and Mayors were on hand to show their support of CLBC and help spread the message "Start with Hi...and see what happens".

In addition to these events, a number of municipalities across BC proclaimed October as Community Living Month.



Above: Inspector John Craig and Constable Mike Russell hand out papers on the corner of Douglas and Fort Streets in Victoria.



Above: Vancouver Community Council member Yuko McCulloch, son Charlie (right) and friend Fraser (left) at Burrard Skytrain Station in Vancouver.



Left: Bryce Schaufelberger and Arlene share the message of Start with Hi in Abbotsford.



The proclamations, which were signed by Mayors in Victoria, Fort St. John, Quesnel, Kelowna, Vancouver, Prince George, Courtenay, Comox, Dawson Creek and Campbell River, declare:

“Community Living Month celebrates the achievements of people with developmental disabilities, including independent living, workplace accomplishments and community and social participation. Community Living Month also recognizes the hard work of individuals, families and community members to create inclusive communities and opportunities for all British Columbians with developmental disabilities.”

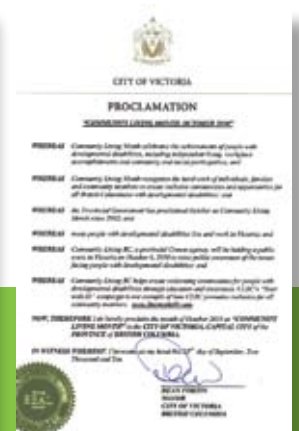
These communities and others have also met with CLBC staff, self-advocates and Community Council members over the last year to talk about how we can work together to build more inclusive communities, and create more opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities.

To learn more about these events and see more photos, please visit:

www.StartwithHi.ca

www.facebook.com/StartwithHi

www.flickr.com, search for “startwithhi” ■



Right: Proclamations by Kelowna, Vancouver and Victoria recognize Community Living Month.



Left: The Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (centre), joins Rod Sutton, Penny Soderena (back row), Lynn McCormack and Ruth Stanton (front row) to celebrate the proclamation of Community Living Month by the city of Prince George.

Sharing her story

By Randall Anthony

A CONVERSATION WITH TRACY JO RUSSELL OF KAMLOOPS IS A PROFOUND LESSON IN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “differently-abled.” Engaging and passionate, Tracy Jo was a natural choice for ambassador for Community Living BC’s “Start with Hi” initiative.

Launched province-wide in June 2009, the initiative is a reminder that acknowledging others by saying “Hi” helps make people feel included and makes it easier for them to ask for help if they feel threatened or unsafe.

Tracy Jo is one of six self-advocates featured in the multimedia initiative. She appears on the website (www.startwithHi.ca), on posters and in a video. In addition to spreading the word in her hometown of Kamloops, Tracy Jo has visited Castlegar, Nelson and Trail. In Kelowna, she met with the mayor and local MLA to hand out posters and buttons to the public, and in Nelson, she appeared with the local hockey team, the Nelson Leafs.

“I travel and fly by myself,” she explains. “If I get lost, I ask someone to help me get unlost. You have to go past your own comfort zone if you want to do stuff.”

Loneliness and isolation are common problems among individuals with developmental disabilities, says Tracy Jo. “I’m very lucky – I’m very outgoing, and I know how to make friends. But some people with disabilities don’t know how to do that.”

Many people aren’t sure how to approach people with disabilities in their communities, which is one of the reasons Tracy Jo is so excited about sharing the initiative. “It’s working already,” she says. “People come up to me to say hello. Many people are afraid of the unknown, but if you just start with hello, you never know what might be next. If they don’t respond, go on to the next person.”

She feels very fortunate to have met and shared her message with many great people in her travels. “We’re helping to educate the public that people with developmental disabilities aren’t much different than they are. We want to be able to work, to have a full-time job. When I was hired at Safeway eight-and-a-half years ago, I asked them not to treat me any differently than anybody else. My boss, Brendan Martin, saw that I could do the work and he hired me.”

In 2006, says Tracy Jo, 45 people with developmental disabilities climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, all the way to the top. “We had one person in a wheelchair climb all the way to 19,000 feet. There’s nothing you can’t do if you put your mind to it. It just takes some people longer to get to where they need to be.”

During the month of October, Tracy Jo and her fellow self-advocates will be sharing the “Start with Hi” message at events in their communities. “Don’t be afraid to say hello,” she says. “You never know, there might be a friend, right there in front of you.” ■

Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd (left) and City Councillor Michele Rule (centre) join Tracy Jo to spread the message of Start with Hi during Community Living Month.



Getting together and giving back

CLOSE TO 200 PEOPLE GATHERED IN downtown Nanaimo's Gyro Park under sunny skies to celebrate Community Living Month with a BBQ and kickball tournament fundraising event. Funds were raised through donations for hot dogs, chips, granola bars and drinks, and for the dunk tank, a popular activity for the event.

"Kickball is the main attraction for the event but everyone loves the chance to dunk someone they know," said Nick Borzel, a CLBC facilitator in Nanaimo and favourite at the dunking tank.

Kickball teams are coordinated through the local service providers, and this year saw the introduction of new players from Carmichael Enterprises and Skills for Life, a program for transitioning youth. In all, there were six teams with a CLBC facilitator and analyst participating on each team.

The September 29 event has been held for the last four years, and is the result of teamwork between CLBC and local service providers Nanaimo Association for Community Living, Nanaimo Supportive Lifestyles, Skanna, Claytree Society, and Explorer. The group organizes the event and the teams, and chooses a local charity each year that will receive the funds that are raised.

This year, it is the local food bank, Loaves and Fishes, which is benefiting from close to \$600, over 100 cans of non-perishable food and two pieces of art for a silent auction to provide additional funding. Many of Nanaimo's self-advocates work or volunteer at the food bank.

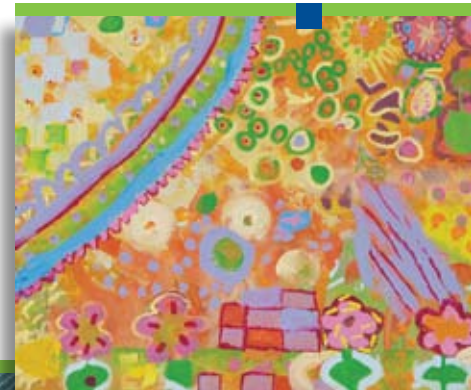
Volunteers and donations were also important to being able to hold the event. Service providers and CLBC staff cooked food, helped coordinate the kickball tournament and were dunked in the dunk tank. Nanaimo Association for Community Living donated the food for the BBQ, Explorers helped get the dunk tank, and Vivid Photography documented the event with photos.

"It's a fun event and a great way to connect people," says Nick. "Next year, we'll be looking for a bigger venue so more people from the surrounding area can participate."

To view all photos of the event, visit vividphotography.smugmug.com/Sports/Kickball. ■

Right: Art was auctioned off to support the local food bank.

Below: The Carmichael team celebrates their victory in the kickball tournament.



All in a day's work

By Randall Anthony



Andrew Csyani's enthusiasm and hard work have made him a valued employee at Wok Box.

FOR EMPLOYERS IN THE SERVICE

industry, finding motivated staff is a constant challenge. But the management team at the Wok Box in Surrey may have discovered a key to overcoming that challenge: by focusing on Andrew Csyani's contagious enthusiasm, admirable work ethic and great potential – rather than his developmental disability – they've found a committed, long-term employee.

For Andrew, having a job that he likes makes all the difference. On Thursdays and Fridays, he takes public transit to the popular restaurant on King George Highway where he started as a bus person. "My job was cleaning tables, sweeping floors and being polite to customers," he says. "I always say, 'Hi. How are you?'"

A recent graduate of the Douglas College Culinary Arts program, Food Handling Level 1, Andrew has now been promoted to cooking some of the Wok Box's famous stir-fries, something he says he enjoys very much.

While his enthusiasm and hard work have made him a valued employee at the Wok Box, he was initially connected with his employer through an employment service. Community Living BC supports employment that help people with developmental disabilities make the most of their strengths and abilities. The employment service, Milieu, works with businesses to match the skills and interests of individuals who want to work with the staffing needs of their company.

The program, founded on the philosophy of inclusive employment, provides individuals with developmental disabilities the opportunity to work at jobs they enjoy, be paid real wages and feel valued as employees. For Andrew, having a job provides some

financial independence, the self-esteem that comes from a job done well, and the opportunity to enjoy the company of people he wouldn't otherwise meet.

Andrew is very clear on what is required to be a good employee. "I need a good attitude, and to do my best. I stay focused, and don't get distracted," he says. "My boss says, 'You're a star – you work so hard.' That makes me feel proud."

Andrew is just one of thousands of people with developmental disabilities in British Columbia who have the ability and desire to work. Like most people, they view work as an important part of life – a portal to a sense of belonging, satisfaction and a way to be develop friendships and be social.

CLBC supports the concept of inclusive employment, which is founded on the idea that community workplaces should reflect the makeup of the people who live in the community. The agency is working to ensure that every person with a disability who wants employment has the opportunity to be employed.

For both employers and people with developmental disabilities, making that connection can be the beginning of a very rewarding relationship. Unlike many of his co-workers in Vancouver's service industry, for example, Andrew isn't dreaming of a breakthrough movie role. Though he's working hard to achieve future promotions at the Wok Box, when he's at work, he is exactly where he wants to be.

Asked about his goals for the future, he says: "I'd like to keep working here. I like the work. And the people are really nice." ■

A dedicated team member

“It’s the people, both the ones I work with and the customers at the theatre.”

— Greg, on what he likes most about his job

GREG WAS REFERRED TO INFINITE Employment Solutions (IES) when he was 18. He is considered one of the most enthusiastic people around who strives to do the very best job that he can no matter what is asked of him.

While at AiMHi’s Infinite Employment Solutions, Greg and his Career Counselor focused on a work environment that would allow Greg to showcase his skills and abilities. When an opportunity presented itself to work at the Famous Players movie theatre, Greg did not hesitate to jump in and accept the challenge of employment.

Although he was excited about the opportunity of employment, Greg was nervous about being accepted for who he was. He quickly learned that he was accepted and quickly became part of the team. With the support of the Infinite Employment Solutions Career Counselor, his Job Coach, his family, and his new co-workers, he was able to overcome all his fears about working with new people.

When Greg first started with his new position, a Job Coach from IES was there to assist and support him to learn his new job. After his first day at work he was so much more confident. He was proud of being a member the Famous Players team. The Job Coach continued to assist Greg until one

day he spoke up saying he no longer needed their support anymore because he could do the job on his own.

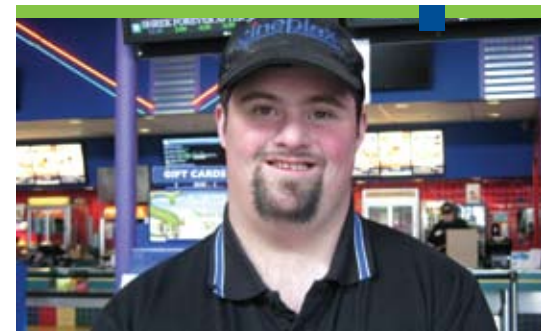
In order to work independently Greg also had to learn how to take the city bus and how to read the bus schedule. He does this all now with ease.

Greg’s parents are very proud of him. When Greg and his family are out together they are often stopped by people who recognize Greg and they congratulate him on his quality work helping people at the theatre. After a day’s work, Greg always tells his parents which friends came over to say “Hi” to him at work.

When asked what he likes best about his job, Greg will tell you “It’s the people, both the ones I work with and the customers at the theatre.” Greg is very proud of himself and of his work.

It has not always been easy. He has made small sacrifices to make work his priority, missing out on parties and dances, but work comes first for Greg. He has also found time to continue with Special Olympics as he is a dedicated athlete. He has simply learned how to balance his work and sports commitments.

Greg sees the value of work, he likes earning money and enjoys meeting



Greg is recognized in his community for his quality work as a member of the Famous Players team.

and talking with the public. “It’s my job. I am responsible for making it be successful,” he says. Greg’s attitude and hard-working work ethic reflect positively on him and his co-workers in turn treat him with the respect he deserves.

Last year was an important one for Greg as he was named ‘Employee of the Month’ in August and then in December was named ‘Employee of the Year’. This public recognition simply underlines the commitment Greg made to his career. He is a conscientious employee who brings a positive attitude to work every day. ■

The meaning of friendship

FOR FRIENDS MATTI JEFFREYS AND Nathaniel Vossen, a shared love of music has formed the foundation of a lasting friendship. Nathaniel, a DJ, first met Matti while playing a concert in the Comox Valley. “I could see him in the audience dancing and doing these amazing movies. He was so full of energy and shouting for every song I played. After that I made a point of going to say ‘Hi’ to him.”

After their first meeting, Matti and Nathaniel then connected again through a program called Best Buddies at North Island College. Best Buddies is a national organization that helps match students and people with intellectual disabilities in one-to-one friendships based on their common interests. In the fall of 2009, a group of students and community members, with support from L’Arche Comox Valley and the Friendship Project, established a local Best Buddies chapter at the college.

Matti and Nathaniel were one of the first matches in Comox. They spent the past year hanging out and having a blast together in their community. One of their outings took place when Nathaniel invited Matti for a visit backstage at a hip hop festival taking place in the community. This was an amazing experience for Matti who met musicians from across North America.

“It’s just such a neat friendship that they share. Nathaniel has introduced him to many of his friends and they’ve gone to concerts and magazine launches together. It’s really opened the door to the local arts community that really interests Matti,” says Jay Townsend, Facilitator of the Friendship Project.

“We definitely have a shared love of music, that’s one of the key things in our friendship. It’s a huge outlet for Matti,” says Nathaniel. “At a show, if I’m on stage, friends will keep an eye on him and make sure he’s fine.”

“I feel like he’s my cousin, like we’re related. I make him laugh and we have a great time together. It’s pretty cool,” says Matti.

During the summer, the two friends were nominated for, and won, the Best Buddies Spirit of Friendship Award from among 5,000 program participants nationwide. The award honors those who encompass the true meaning of friendship. “I was shocked when I heard we won because I just didn’t feel like I’d done any work. We just have fun together and enjoy each

other’s company. I guess that’s the point of friendship,” says Nathaniel.

The organization flew the pair to Toronto where they accepted their award at the Best Buddies Annual Gala on Sunday, September 12.

“Nathaniel has really connected with Matti in huge ways. Matti feels that he can be himself in good and bad times and that Nathaniel accepts that, which is what a friendship is all about,” says Amy Lynn Taylor, Program Manager for Best Buddies.

“It is my hope that this will be a lasting friendship and that they will continue to inspire others,” says Steven Pinnock, Executive Director of Best Buddies Canada.

Although their time in the Best Buddies program has ended, Matti and Nathaniel continue to meet and spend time together regularly. “Our friendship has continued on, which is really great,” says Nathaniel.

Today, there are 200 Best Buddies chapters across Canada, in most major cities and rural areas. For more information on Best Buddies at North Island College, please contact Amy Lynn Taylor at: amylynn@bestbuddies.ca or L’Arche Comox Valley at: larchecomoxvalley@telus.net.

To learn more about Best Buddies, visit their website at www.bestbuddies.ca. ■



Nathaniel (left) and Matti (centre) accept the Spirit of Friendship Award.

Social networks address vulnerability

By Randall Anthony

EVERY DAY, MORE THAN 175 MILLION users log into Facebook. They're curious about what their friends are doing; they share funny videos; they write about how they're feeling and why. It's a virtual village square, a place to connect with others from the comfort and security of home.

For Community Living BC – a provincial crown organization that delivers supports and services to people with developmental disabilities – social networks such as Facebook are an increasingly valuable tool. With a successful Facebook page and a Twitter account already online, CLBC is launching two new Facebook pages for self-advocates and families this month, in celebration of Community Living Month.

Social networks provide a welcome opportunity for people with developmental disabilities to meet new people and spend time with friends and family. This is especially important for those who may be isolated either geographically or due to limitations of a disability. Individuals with literacy and visual limitations are able to access information from CLBC using audio, images and video through sites such as YouTube, Vimeo and Flickr.

Jenny Chang and Cheryl Fryfield are two of a growing number of people with developmental disabilities who are using social networks to stay in touch.

Jenny has worked as a receptionist at the CLBC office for the past four years. She gets along well with the people in her office, she says, because they treat her with respect.

She enjoys bowling and plans to sign up for softball in the Special Olympics next year. But when she's not busy with sports or work, you might find her on online.

"I've been on Facebook for about a year," she says, adding that she enjoys chatting with her friends on Facebook's instant messaging service and MSN Messenger.

Cheryl also works part time at CLBC, and often comments on CLBC's 'Start with Hi' page. "Facebook keeps me busy at night when I'm bored," she says, laughing.

Using Facebook reconnected Cheryl with a high school friend that she'd lost touch with many years ago. "We had a falling out. But she [found me] on Facebook, and we're talking again. She came to visit last month."

But a global community has its dangers, too, and Cheryl is grateful that she knew enough about online safety to avoid falling for a scam last year. "A friend mentioned that he had a daughter in another country, and I'd heard a lot about [scamming activity]. Everything was fine for a while; then he told me that his daughter had had an accident, and his credit cards were frozen. He asked for money, so I blocked him."

Being careful hasn't diminished her enjoyment of being online. "If I get upset, I put a message on my Facebook status about it, and I get support," she says. "The other day I put a message on saying that I was being interviewed [for this article], and people were happy for me. I get support and good feedback."

When her mother moved to a seniors' home and Cheryl moved into her own home a few months ago, Facebook helped her overcome her feelings of loneliness.

"Just be careful who you talk to," she advises. "Don't give any money to any strangers, and if you feel you're being harassed, block that person." ■



“One Day” brings community together

UNDER SUNNY SKIES ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2010, CLOSE to 600 self-advocates, families, children, seniors and service providers gathered for the second annual One Day Together event to play softball, have a BBQ, play games and make new friends.

The event was held on the fields behind the Juan de Fuca Centre in Colwood, BC. In addition to the food and softball, there were a range of activities for attendees, including face painting, clowns, bean bag toss, a dunk tank, ring toss, banana fling, basketball, hockey and bowling. The Colwood Fire Department was also there and entertained the crowd by firing their water cannon, and giving tours of the fire truck. Organizers also tried to make the event as green as possible by providing recycling and compost onsite.

Heather from CLBC’s Start with Hi initiative helped to launch the day by saying a few words and throwing the first pitch. Cliff, also a Start with Hi self-advocate, was there and invited people to come visit the Start with Hi booth, where people could pick up bracelets, pins and posters, and play a networking game that supported the event’s theme of making new friends. Later in the afternoon, Brian Price, an Olympic medalist, spoke about the importance of living one’s dreams and building friendships.

It was also a day full of music. Self-advocate Michael Langridge was DJ for the day, and played music ranging from jazz to heavy rock. In the afternoon, the Punjabi Dance Troupe entertained people with their lively dancing, self-advocate Peter Bourne sang and played guitar, and a local band, The Pony Club, provided dance music.

One Day Together brought together a community, but also demonstrated how big things can happen through co-operation. Event organizers included Becon Support Services, Community Living BC, Community Living Victoria, The Cridge Centre for the Family, Integra and Kardel staff who worked tirelessly for several months to put on an exciting event. A local Starbuck’s donated coffee that Self-Advocates for a Brighter Future, an advocacy group,



The Punjabi Dance Troupe entertains attendees at the One Day Together event in Colwood.

sold at their booth to help raise funds. Thrifty Foods, a local grocery store, donated hamburgers, hotdogs, chips and drinks for the BBQ. St. John’s Ambulance provided paramedics and first aid. VI Rentals donated a generator, Budget Rentals the flat bed stage, Island Farms provided a freezer and ice cream, and Bone Creative also donated graphic and website design support for the event. Local community members, like pharmacist Ron Liew, also made cash donations to support the event.

The day was summed up by the words of one self advocate. “I’m having so much fun!” It was an opportunity that built and strengthened the community. ■

Innovative thinking

By Randall Anthony

COMMUNITY LIVING BC SUPPORTS innovation that advances citizenship of people with disabilities in B.C. This year, CLBC recognized the innovative work of Barb Goode, one of the earliest community organizers among people with disabilities.

In 1986, Barb's efforts led to the Supreme Court decision that prevents the sterilization of people with intellectual disabilities for non-medical reasons; in 1992, she became the first Canadian with a disability to speak to the UN General Assembly.

But it is perhaps the less momentous achievements of Barb's career that will be her most lasting legacy: a profound change in the way our society values and treats people with developmental disabilities. In her travels to places as far-flung as New Zealand, Kenya, Jamaica, Italy and Amsterdam, her messages of self-advocacy and full citizenship for the disabled have reached a global audience.

Barb doesn't describe herself as an activist, or consider her accomplishments particularly special. "I always just did what I wanted to do," she says. "I've just been trying to get along like anyone else."

She has been an enthusiastic volunteer since she was 12 years old. During the landmark Rights Now project, her grass-roots community organizing was a powerful force in breaking down stereotypes about people with developmental disabilities.

Throughout her life, she has been inspired and encouraged by her parents,

she says. "They always told me, 'Don't quit. Just keep going. Believe in yourself.'"

Although "they're in heaven now," Barb knows they are proud of her for recently winning a WOW!clbc award to recognize the difference she has made for so many people. "I miss them. But I still hear their voices every day."

The annual WOW!clbc Recognition Award is awarded by CLBC in recognition of the contributions honourees have made and continue to make towards ensuring community inclusion and full citizenship for people with development disabilities. Every year, CLBC honours exemplary individuals in British Columbia who have made significant contributions to "good lives in welcoming communities."

Today, Barb sits on six different volunteer committees, where her creativity is matched only by her passion to contribute. "I don't want to be a token member, just being quiet and looking pretty. I want to be involved. I never want to retire."

One of the causes she is most passionate about today is the adoption of 'plain language,' making all forms and documents that people with developmental disabilities must complete or read more accessible. She's quick to ask, "Can you break that into two sentences?" when a question is unnecessarily complex.

"There are so many forms that people with disabilities are expected to fill out, and when they get something wrong, the forms are sent back," she says.

Although she's been recognized by world leaders and compared to heroes such as Terry Fox and Rick Hansen, Barb is very humble about her work.

"I still don't see it as being that special." As her parents told her, she says, "You just have to do what you want to do, even when other people think you can't. You just keep trucking along." ■



Barb Goode has inspired others through her contributions.

Connecting families

By Sylvie Zebroff, CLBC Family Partnership Advisor

FAMILIES-IN-TOUCH FOUNDER

Donna Long takes a sip of her coffee and smiles. “I didn’t have a clue what developmental disability was, until I had Lucy. As soon as she was born the doctor just said ‘she has Down Syndrome’. It all started from there.”

Her daughter Lucy Long was born November 17, 1997, and since that time Donna has learned a great deal about disability, advocacy and the very real need for families living with disability to make connections. Donna and her husband Phil Long have been raising Lucy and her two older brothers, James and David, and have been foster parents to many others. Despite her busy family life, Donna also took the unique step of developing “Families-in-Touch” or FIT, a family e-mail network connecting families and individuals across the BC Interior.

FIT began over 10 years ago, with a cluster of Kelowna parents of children with disabilities sharing activity information via email. “We’d plan group trips to Old MacDonald’s Farm, things like that”, says Donna.

The small circle of friends sending the occasional e-mail has now grown to an email exchange and information sharing group with between 150 to 200 subscribers. Concentrated in the Central Interior, but with readers as far-flung as Toronto, Donna emphasizes that FIT has little editorial comment. It is, she says, more of an email information hub about disability in the widest sense, but with a regional Okanagan flavour.

It is also a labour of love; Donna oversees and maintains this e-mail network with no external funding. The circulation of e-mail information is done on an unscheduled but regular rotation.

“Usually, as the information comes in, it soon goes out again,” Donna laughs. The FIT e-mail list has grown over time, and almost entirely through word-of-mouth and members forwarding e-mail referrals to others.

“Families pass it on to other families; we’ve even got some disability professionals on the FIT list that want to stay in the local loop.” Donna points out that the mailing list of subscribers is never shared. Families and individuals can, of course, forward any information they would like circulated, but Donna discourages commercial promotions or information related to retail or sales events. She welcomes workshop information or disability-related and not-for-profit fundraising or person-centered events and activities.

The connections don’t stop there. Now in its 10th year, FIT also sponsors a regular in-person event, the Families In Touch Breakfast is for those families who have a family member with a disability. Taking place the second Friday of every month at a local restaurant, Donna regularly sends out e-reminders to FIT subscribers and hosts the casual breakfast and coffee drop-in for families looking to make further personal connections.



Donna Long developed the Families In Touch network.

The atmosphere of these breakfasts is easy and open, “We all get that families face all kinds of challenges to get out on a regular basis”, Donna observes, “Really, it’s come as you are, when you can. One of the nice things is that everyone who comes here gets that.”

After so many years, how does Donna keep going? “I do get tired,” she says. “I tried to take a year off, but the whole thing is addictive. Things keep changing. People keep wanting to connect.” She won’t speculate on the future of FIT, except to say, “It’s become its own entity. Years ago it was just a baby of an idea, now it’s moving into adolescence. I do think younger parents need to start getting involved more, to keep the momentum going. At some point it will be time to pass on the torch.” She smiles, “See you next month for breakfast.” ■

New friendships forged

WE ALL RELY ON OUR PERSONAL CONNECTIONS TO help us feel like we belong in community. In Vancouver, loneliness has been identified as one of the key issues for self-advocates. Many find it hard to meet people, or if they do, to sustain the relationships.

Mara St. Onge, a Vancouver Community Council member, is a social activist who took the challenge head on. Mara has a keen and personal interest in helping self-advocates connect. She has been a homeshare provider for two women – Julie and Kori – for over 10 years.

It was Mara's role as a fundraising chair at the Langara Family YMCA that helped spark a solution that truly reflects what can happen when community partners work together. Mara developed and created the "Chill Mixer", an event that provides a venue for self-advocates to connect with new people. The YMCA agreed to provide the space, be the contact for RSVPs, and help publicize the opportunity. Julie and Kori helped with all aspects of organizing and helping out at the event. Council members and CLBC staff helped circulate the information to their networks. Mara also found help in unexpected places. Office Depot, after hearing what she was doing, charged her a fraction of the cost to photocopy the event flyers.

After several months of development, the first "Chill Mixer" was held on August 19, with Mara, Julie and Kori hosting a group of 11 self-advocates from Burnaby, Tsawwassen and Vancouver. Since networking with new people can sometimes be intimidating, Mara had people begin by playing a meeting game. In this game, each person writes their name, contact information and interests on a slip of paper and passes it to the person on their left. The game continues until everyone has shared their information with all the people in the room. These slips of paper then become an address book to keep and use. At the Mixer, this game was followed by other games, laughter, snacks, dancing and pizza, which was a big hit. Feedback from participants included: "This was a great idea!", "Looking forward to getting a note or a call", and "This helped me feel less lonely."

"I wanted to give self-advocates one night to get together to grow their connections," said Mara. "I also wanted people to see that organizing this type of event is possible, and that it can create and sustain relationships."

Mara is now working on putting lessons learned, her experience organizing the event, and the tools she used into a booklet that can be shared with others who are interested in holding a "Chill Mixer" in their area. As follow-up, she is also sending each participant a postcard as a reminder to connect with someone in their address book.

"It's great! I know some people have already received calls," said Mara.

If you are interested in holding a "Chill Mixer" in your community, contact Mara St. Onge at 604 842-9220 or marastonge@telus.net. ■



Julie, Mara and Kori help people connect in a comfortable environment.

Social media engages community

SOCIAL MEDIA SITES SUCH AS Facebook and Twitter provide a welcomed opportunity for people to make friends, meet people with similar interests and engage in community activities regardless of geographic location. In recent surveys, CLBC found that families were asking for easier access to information and other families. Self-advocates wanted to feel more connected to other self-advocates in the province.

Based on this information, CLBC has created two new Facebook pages. One is designed for families, and the other for self-advocates. These sites will inform self-advocates and families of community events and groups that may be of interest and will allow people to share stories and experiences with others throughout the province and even around the world.

CLBC has also added a Twitter account where individuals can get information on events, links to great articles and much more.

Using sites such as Facebook and Twitter does not come without risks and CLBC takes online safety seriously. There are ways to share stories and make friends while being safe. Please make sure to have family members and close friends on your Facebook page and turn on privacy settings. Through education and collaboration we are working

with people to ensure a safe online experience.

Come and be a part of the conversation! Join our Facebook pages:

[CLBC Connections! – A place to meet for self-advocates in BC](#)

[Families Connect – A forum for supporting developmental disabilities \(CLBC\)](#)

Facebook.com/StartwithHi

Follow us on Twitter:
[@CLBC_connect](#)

Read and share stories of inclusion at:
www.StartwithHi.ca

If you need help joining CLBC's social media sites, or have a story of event you'd like to share, please e-mail: Lisa.Porcellato@gov.bc.ca. ■



CONTACT US

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If you have a story suggestion or feedback on the newsletter, E-mail editor@communitylivingbc.ca.

Questions

If you have a general question about CLBC, e-mail info@communitylivingbc.ca

The Citizen is published every two months by CLBC's Communications department. It is your information source for news that's relevant to the individuals and families CLBC supports. The views and opinions expressed in *The Citizen* are not necessarily those held by CLBC. We are always on the lookout for inspirational stories about people in the community. If you know of an event that others might like to know about, an issue that invites debate, or news worth reporting, let us know. While we appreciate story ideas and submission, *The Citizen* reserves the right to edit content for accuracy, grammar and space, but strives to maintain the integrity and voice of the author.

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