

PSSIBILITIES

• NEWSLETTER published by FAMILY SUPPORT INSTITUTE OF BC •



**CHAMPIONING
CHANGE:**
A Self-Advocates Journey

**THE HISTORY OF
DIVERSITY**

**FSI WELCOMES OUR
NEW INDIGENOUS
PRACTICE ADVISOR**

FALL | 2023

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As a provincial organization FSI acknowledges that our work spans across all of the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Indigenous territories in BC. Therefore, we respectfully honor all First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, as well as their ancestors, who have lived here and cared for these lands. It is with gratitude that we can live, learn and do our work in the province now known as British Columbia.

Possibilities is the quarterly newsletter from Family Support Institute of BC (FSI). The mission of FSI is to strengthen, connect and build communities and resources with families of people with disabilities in BC.

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Editor's Report

When I think about the role and impact of family support, I reflect on the values that guide families in the care of their family members, and of one another. In this edition, we will hear about the profound significance of supporting each other, embracing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and honoring Truth and Reconciliation. We will celebrate the immense value of peer support.

A commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is the pathway to a vibrant and supportive community. Embracing diversity means recognizing, respecting, and valuing the differences that every individual and family brings to our shared space. This includes differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and more. By encouraging an inclusive environment, we make sure that all voices and contributions are not just heard, but genuinely valued, and respected. This commitment goes beyond an ideal and becomes a lived experience, deepening our understanding and strengthening our support networks.

The journey of Truth and Reconciliation begins with our actions, by starting where we are. By weaving in the principles of Truth and Reconciliation into our work, and our relationships, we contribute to healing and building stronger connections within our community. It is an ongoing journey of learning and unlearning, listening, and being open to having meaningful and difficult conversations to create a future based on mutual respect and understanding.

Family Support Institute's volunteer Resource Parents and Peers are at the center of our organization. Their time and commitment make a difference in the lives of individuals and families across British Columbia. Volunteering not only offers essential support but also builds upon a shared purpose. It nurtures connection

and belonging among families, uplifting the values dearest to us all.

The values core to the purpose and work of FSI are shared by the disability community, our partners, and allies. These values include respect, compassion, inclusivity, collaboration, accountability, cultural sensitivity, trust, continuous learning, accessibility, advocacy, self-determination, choice, and equity.

An inclusive and culturally aware community recognizes, respects, and values diversity. It's a place where people from various cultural backgrounds feel included, appreciated, and respected for their unique identities, traditions, languages, and beliefs. Individuals feel acknowledged, listened to, and understood. In a culturally aware community, diversity is celebrated; inclusivity is promoted; there is open dialogue and understanding; cultural competence is encouraged; there are accessible services and spaces; there is collaboration and cooperation; biases and prejudices are addressed; and there is cultural education and awareness.

As I am unfolding in my journey of learning about Truth and Reconciliation and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I am curious, with an open heart and an open mind. I welcome others to walk beside me as they unfold on their journey of understanding history, acknowledgment and apology, healing and restoring relationships, equity and fairness, and inclusive practices. ■



“Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.”

Jacqueline Woodson



The Power of Families: A Journey to Inclusion and Diversity

In British Columbia, families have significantly shaped society's perceptions and support for people with disabilities over the past century. Families created change by uniting, utilizing their determination, wisdom, and profound understanding of their family members with disabilities.

This article highlights how collective family efforts and advocacy have influenced policy changes, societal norms, and the fundamental concept of inclusivity. Family Support Institute recognizes the journey of families in BC in advancing inclusion and disability rights and is committed to ongoing learning and work towards Truth and Reconciliation and anti-racism.

The progress in addressing how we treat people with disabilities comes from the collective efforts of families over the last century. Fueled by love and understanding of the unique needs of their family members, families united to make society more respectful and inclusive. The persistence of these families is at the core of advancing disability rights. Despite numerous challenges, they have continuously advocated for improved lives for their family members. Through years of hard work, they've championed changes, challenged biased ideas, and demanded equal rights.

The wisdom of these families comes from experiencing their family members' challenges. They understand the needs of their family members and have valuable insights into policies and support systems that would best benefit the disability community. Their knowledge and commitment to advancing change have been key in shaping laws, educational methodologies, and societal perspectives on disability and equality.

The impact of families uniting goes beyond individual lives; it has transformed entire communities and nations. This important work of families continues as new generations uphold the values of compassion, respect, and equity, building on the progress that has been made and working toward a future where there is equity for all.

The Disability Rights Movement: Making Inclusivity a Reality

The 20th-century disability rights movement reshaped society's perceptions and treatment of individuals with disabilities. It sought to challenge and change societal perceptions and treatment of people with disabilities, free from a historical practice of unfair judgment and exclusion.

The Role of Families as Advocates

Families were changemakers that brought this movement forward. Parents, siblings, and extended family members fiercely advocated for the rights and dignity of their loved ones with disabilities. They organized groups, advocated for new laws, and made people aware of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Families played a powerful role in advocating for equal rights, accessibility, and an end to discrimination, laying the foundation for a more inclusive future.

“Families’ knowledge and commitment to advancing change have been key in shaping laws, educational methodologies, and societal perspectives on disability and equality.”

Fighting for Equal Rights and Accessibility

Central to this transformation was the pursuit of equal rights. Advocates wanted laws that stopped discrimination and ensured equal chances in jobs, schools, homes, and public places. They also championed things like ramps, elevators, and accessible transportation to ensure full participation in society for people with disabilities.

A Transformative Legacy

The Disability Rights Movement redefined laws, policies, and societal perceptions, creating a more inclusive society that values individuals with disabilities for their abilities. Even though there is still more work to be done to ensure that disability rights and equity are upheld and protected in laws and policies, there is hope in the continuing collective advocacy of families and individuals.

The Self-Advocacy Movement

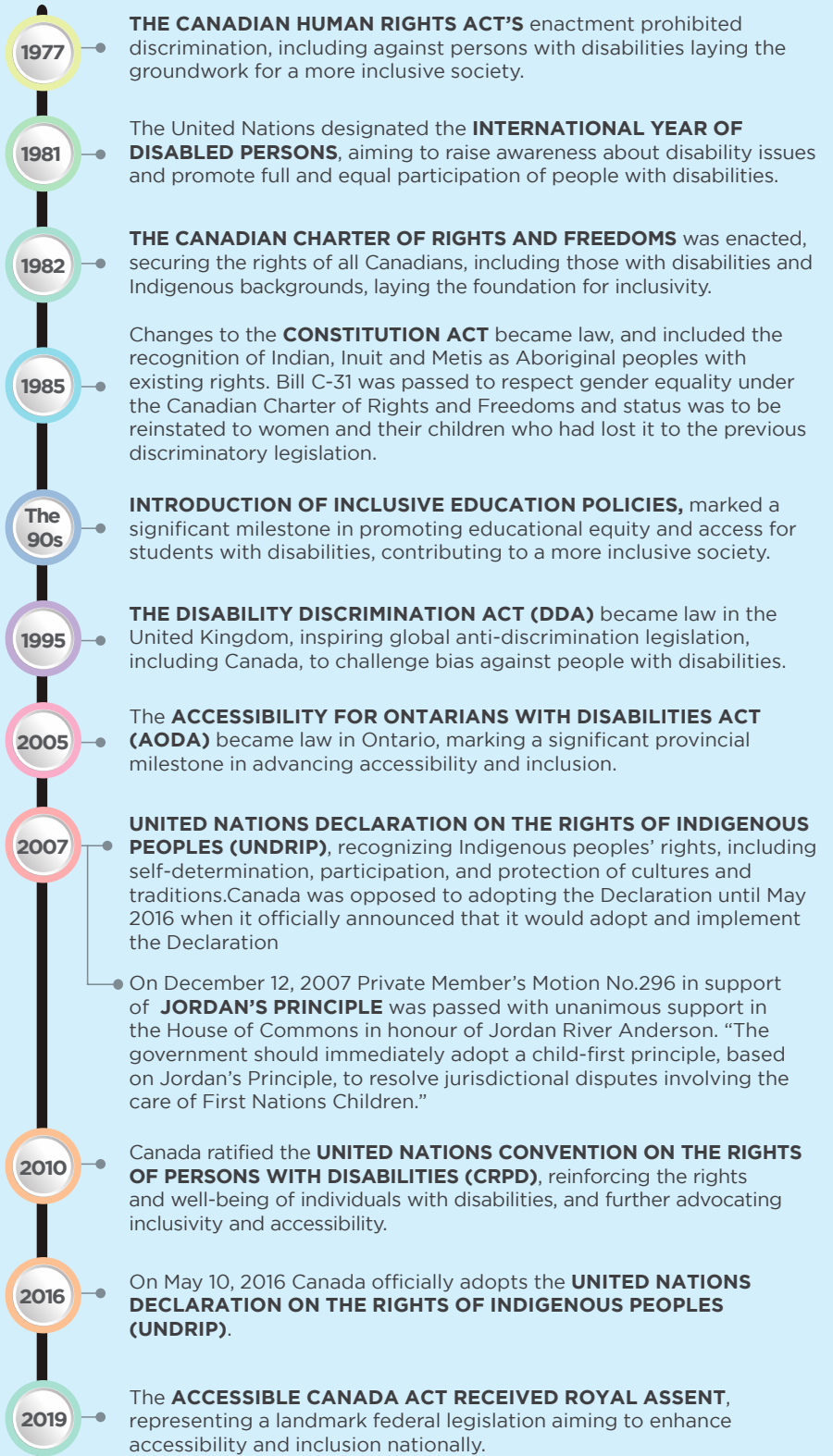
The self-advocacy movement is a fundamental progression in disability rights, bringing about a significant shift. It empowers individuals with disabilities to speak up for themselves, assert their needs, and advocate for their dreams. In the past, society often downplayed the voices and choices of individuals with disabilities, keeping them dependent and limiting their decision-making power. The self-advocacy movement emerged as a powerful force to challenge this.

Validating Through Self-Determination

The self-advocacy movement is all about self-determination. It recognizes that individuals with disabilities have the right and ability to make choices that affect their lives. Families, understanding the importance of self-determination in growing independence, actively support and encourage self-advocacy initiatives.

FAMILY AND INCLUSION OVER THE YEARS

The role of families in shaping inclusion spans almost 50 years:



They create an environment that boosts the voices of their family members, giving them the confidence to advocate effectively.

Families as the Primary Source of Support and Encouragement for their Family Members

Families play a critical role as the initial support system for individuals with disabilities. They often act as the first advocates, alongside their loved ones as they navigate the world. Understanding the transformative potential of self-advocacy, families encourage their members to develop the skills necessary to communicate their needs and desires. They provide the support needed for self-advocacy to flourish, offering guidance, encouragement, and a platform to practice and refine self-expression.

Supporting a Society of Effective Self-Advocates

The self-advocacy movement aspires to create a society where individuals with disabilities can effectively express their needs, influencing decisions in their lives. This movement has changed societal perceptions, affirming that individuals with disabilities are capable advocates for their own needs and aspirations. By supporting individuals to

voice their concerns, preferences, and goals, society becomes more inclusive, understanding, and responsive to the diverse needs of all its members.

The Power of Peer Support and Shared Experiences

In the challenging journey of advocating for their loved ones with disabilities, families discover strength in peer support and sharing experiences. Connecting with other families who navigated a similar path offers a profound sense of understanding, empathy, and shared wisdom. This peer-to-peer support creates a safe and nurturing space where families can openly discuss their challenges, seek advice, and celebrate milestones together.

Building Empathy and Understanding

One of the remarkable benefits of peer support is the opportunity to connect with others who can relate to similar unique experiences, emotions, and challenges. Peers offer a genuine understanding and empathy that is found in their shared experiences. This empathy helps families feel heard, and validated in their journey, giving them a sense of unity and togetherness. Sharing experiences with other families provides a

place for the exchange of insights, solutions, and practical steps for effective decision-making and problem-solving. This collective wisdom gives families the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the complexities of caregiving and advocacy.

Advocating for Truth and Reconciliation

The Family Support Institute of BC (FSI) stands as a champion of advocacy, with a commitment to justice,

equality, and inclusion. The organization commits to promoting Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and confronting the persistent issue of racism in all its forms.

FSI acknowledges the historical injustices endured by Indigenous communities in Canada, including BC. By embracing the Truth and Reconciliation process, FSI is actively acknowledging and working towards healing the pain experienced by Indigenous peoples. This commitment involves growth in understanding, dialogue, and meaningful actions to bridge historical divides, creating a society that values differences, honors cultural heritage and Indigenous rights and encourages understanding and respect among all people. FSI understands that the journey towards justice, reconciliation, and anti-racism is ongoing. The organization remains dedicated to learning, growing, and evolving in its approach to these important issues in educational initiatives, partnerships, and collaborations to enhance its understanding and capacity to create positive change.

Confronting Racism:

FSI firmly condemns racism in all its forms, recognizing its role in perpetuating discrimination and injustice. Through a dedication to anti-racism, FSI actively works to dismantle structures and attitudes contributing to racial disparities. The organization advocates for policies and initiatives that promote respect, inclusivity, understanding, and unity in the community. You can learn more about FSI's commitment statements on pages 8 and 9.

From the origins of the disability rights movement to the ongoing commitment to truth and reconciliation, and anti-racism, we will create a world where the rights and aspirations of individuals are honored. ■



A Message From FSI's Board President Dominic Rockall

This Fall, as we head into the cold weather and vibrant colours of the season, I would like to highlight some important initiatives happening at FSI.



One of our main strategic goals at FSI is to build our organizational capacity and I am excited about all the ways we are doing this. Building capacity is about strengthening and developing our team and so the Board and leadership have made this a top priority. The heart and soul of FSI is without question the dedicated employees and volunteers who are committed to providing support and resources to families across British Columbia. As a parent of a neurodivergent child, I know first-hand the experience of feeling lost for answers and wondering where I can go to get help. Even as someone who works in the sector, there have been times when our family has had to work through challenges or faced situations to get through which we could not do without help. And while it is helpful to have a social worker or facilitator to call, they do not always have the answers. Often it is other parents who have been the most helpful.

That is why the work of FSI is so important and more specifically why

the staff of FSI are so important, and why, as leaders of the organization, we are focused on supporting team development. We want to ensure the employees and volunteers feel supported and prepared so that families can get the support they need when they call FSI.

By the time this newsletter comes out the in-person staff gathering will have taken place, along with the first in-person Board meeting since Covid. I am grateful these are happening and looking forward to connecting with everyone in person. These in-person meetings are crucial for building team cohesion and developing relationships with each other. Collaboration is at the core of our work, and building a strong, cohesive team is crucial. By organizing in-person meetings and providing opportunities for team development, we aim to ensure that everyone at FSI feels valued and appreciated.

Our commitment to team development extends to our Board of Directors as well. They play a critical role in guiding the organization's mission and vision. By nurturing collaboration and teamwork within the board, we are striving for unified and impactful leadership.

One of our proudest achievements this year has been our collaboration with Indigenous leaders in British Columbia. FSI recognizes the importance of cultural humility and cultural safety when working with Indigenous families and individuals. We now have an Indigenous Practice Advisor on staff, and I am looking forward to the support we will get from our new Indigenous Advisory Circle. These individuals will provide

invaluable guidance in supporting us to understand Indigenous perspectives and increase our capacity to use an Indigenous lens when developing programs and providing services.

Another highlight this year is the Child and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Family Voices project. This research initiative, funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), is aimed at understanding

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the unique needs of families in British Columbia. FSI partnered with The Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship to implement this project. Through the CYSN Family Voices project, we are working to gather valuable insights and feedback from families. The goal is to provide MCFD with the information they need to develop effective services and support systems that will meet the needs of families in BC.

In conclusion, I look forward to working with the Board of Directors and staff on these initiatives to make a positive impact on the lives of families across the province. ■

Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

The Family Support Institute of BC stands for Truth and Reconciliation. We commit to supporting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, adults and families across the province.

We are guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which establishes the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples and protects them from discriminatory policies and practices. We call for an end to the systemic inequities faced by Indigenous people and their communities. As a provincial organization that supports individuals and families with disabilities we recognize and acknowledge that intersections of race and disability bring with them multiple marginalization. We commit to creating equitable spaces for Indigenous peoples, Indigenous staff, partners, and community members and will raise our voices in efforts to elevate issues and strive for positive change.

- We acknowledge that Indigenous peoples have suffered under colonial and postcolonial policies.
- We believe that to work respectfully with Indigenous nations, we all need to be aware of the collective impact that intergenerational trauma continues to have on Indigenous children, youth, adults and families and the intersections of disability and identifying as Indigenous.
- We need to learn and understand our shared history in a way that moves us towards a stronger and healthier future, with relationships rooted in mutual understanding and respect.
- We acknowledge and support the “Child Welfare” recommendations in their entirety knowing the prevalence of Aboriginal children in care.
- Given the FSIBC mandate of supporting children with disabilities, we emphasize that it is the Federal and Provincial governments responsibility to fully implement Jordan’s principle, and ensure that culturally safe supports and public services are also provided to Métis and Inuit children and to all Indigenous children living off-reserve in urban centres not covered under Jordan’s Principle. ([TRC Calls to Action 1-5](#))
- We stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples as we call upon all levels of government to provide annual reports or any current data requested by the National Council for Reconciliation so that it can report on the progress towards reconciliation. ([TRC Calls to Action 55](#)).
- Through this advocacy we will stand in solidarity to call for statistics of aboriginal children in care, and hold them accountable to the reasons for child apprehension, and give equitable access for culturally appropriate health support. ([TRC Calls to action 55 i-vii](#))
- We know that by supporting Indigenous peoples and their right to self determination and choice, we strengthen society overall.
- We also know that our ability to provide transformative spaces and meaningful opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders to forge new pathways together is a crucial contribution to Truth and Reconciliation.
- We are guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which establishes the individual and collective rights of Indigenous peoples and protects them from discriminatory policies and practices, in particular we will advocate for stronger health policies to protect Indigenous people with disabilities in the Health systems ([TRC Call to Action 23](#)), and to for a government that will undertake reforms to the criminal justice system to better address the needs of offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder - FASD. ([TRC Calls to Action 34 i-iv](#))
- We recognize that we have a lot to learn about Indigenous rights, laws, governance systems, cultural identities, languages, and worldviews, and contributions to Canada’s history.
- We strive to be open, receptive, and respectful.
- We challenge ourselves to check and unlearn ingrained assumptions.
- We will Build knowledge and awareness of Truth and Reconciliation at FSI by offering learning/unlearning and capacity-building opportunities for staff, board and volunteers that will increase understanding of Indigenous peoples, cultures, languages, communities, histories, the impact of colonial actions, intergenerational trauma, and the role that we can play in walking the path of Reconciliation ([TRC Calls to Action 92iii and 62i](#)).
- We will seek meaningful and sustained relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, locally, provincially and nationally, based on equality, good faith, and mutual respect, to work collaboratively towards equitable, accessible, and culturally relevant and responsive services for Indigenous children, youth, and families ([TRC Call to Action 66](#)).

Commitment to Anti-Racism

As BC's only peer support organization for individuals and families with disabilities, the Family Support Institute of British Columbia Society is available to anyone in the province, of all backgrounds, in every region and every city. Built on the principles of Mentorship, Inclusion, Belonging, Support, Knowledge-Sharing, Equal Rights and Equitable Opportunities combined with the foundation of Respect, Encouragement, Working Together and Speaking Out - we are guided by teamwork and collaboration.

As an organization we:

- Stand against systemic racism, prejudice, discrimination and injustice.
- Recognize and acknowledge the unique and multiple marginalizations that people with disabilities and racialized people experience.
- Will not tolerate the long-term repercussions of racism.
- Stand against intergenerational trauma and call for support for the people impacted by this.
- Hear from individuals who are impacted by the struggles of poverty, unemployment, disability or are involved with the justice system, and stand by them as they seek the support necessary to overcome the discrimination, racialization and marginalization they are faced with.
- Often see firsthand the effects of systemic racism and discrimination, and stand by them and add our voices to theirs in solidarity.
- Have witnessed families/children/youth/adults who have been the target of violence and persecution by institutional forces, and will continue to support these people, to guide them through the trauma of this violence, and to make space for people to be heard and to thrive.
- Know we can always do more. As a provincial organization, we will do all we can to educate ourselves and stand strong and speak out for enhanced support.
- Will provide more training and tools that will help people recognize their privilege and learn how to be effective allies.
- Will align with anti-racism training and resources for our provincial team.
- Will ensure we incorporate anti-racism and anti-discrimination practices into all provincial initiatives and programs.

We have seen the long-term benefits of investing in people and their communities. We will continue to use our provincial platform to advocate for increased funding and prioritization of children/youth/adults/families and community engagement at all levels of government and within law enforcement agencies across BC.

FSI will always be committed to change and we welcome others to join us in speaking out against discrimination in all its forms. Together, we will continue to remove barriers and create opportunities for all individuals and families.





It Takes a Community

Ensuring the well-being, dignity, and rights of individuals with disabilities

To live a good life in community, everyone relies on what I like to think of as formal and informal safeguards.

Safeguards are actions that are done on purpose to help protect people's quality of life, keep them well, and reduce the risk that they could be harmed. Formal safeguards are usually put in place by governments, and established through laws, rules, services, and policies. Informal ones are created through regular contact with family, the building of relationships, expressions of caring, looking out for one another, in keeping each other and our communities safe.

Community Living BC (CLBC) has a formal responsibility to ensure the safety and quality of services we fund. We have structures in place that include how we select service providers, our staff's requirement to regularly visit (monitor) agency services, and terms and conditions in our contracts with providers. Other formal safeguards include our policies, guidelines, standards, critical incident reporting, and our complaints process.

But CLBC also has a role in supporting informal safeguards. It is people's regular connection to their friends, family, neighbourhood, workplaces, and other community activities and venues that keep them safe, while also contributing to quality of life. We understand for many people with lived experience, creating informal networks can be challenging. Over the years CLBC, along with FSI and other partners, has developed resources to empower people to build informal networks. This includes the [Start with Hi campaign](#), [ICanBeSafeOnline](#), and [safeguards](#).

[rights and responsibilities](#) resources, and [MyCommunityBC](#).

CLBC's new L.I.F.E. service (Learning, Inclusion, Friendship, Employment) also supports individuals to create safeguards by finding valued roles in community, building friendships and strengthening their informal support networks. The service combines support for people interested in employment who also want to connect to their community, pursue life-long learning, and build meaningful relationships. CLBC is working to expand this service across the province. You can learn more here - [The L.I.F.E. Service - Community Living BC](#).

CLBC joins FSI and other partners in our belief that the people and families we support have the right to pursue lives with connection in communities of belonging. They have a right to feel safe wherever they live and when they go to school, work and play. We know formal safeguards alone cannot achieve this. Informal safeguards enhance and enrich lives, a sense of connectedness, and keep people safe. It truly takes a community to make this happen. ■

"We need to belong intimately to a few people who are permanent elements in our lives. A life without people, without people who belong to us, people who will be there for us, people who need us and who we need in return, may be very rich in other things, but in human terms, it is no life at all. All the complicated structures we create, are built on sand. Only our relationships to other people endure."

- Rabbi Harold Kushner



Our Way to Truth and Reconciliation:

FSI welcomes its first Indigenous Practice Advisor,
Laranna Scott, to the FSI Leadership team

We are thrilled to announce a significant addition to the Family Support Institute of BC (FSI) team – our new Indigenous Practice Advisor.

The expertise of our Indigenous Practice Advisor will help us to create an inclusive space, actively working against racism. Our Indigenous Practice Advisor helps guide FSI toward Truth and Reconciliation. We recognize the unfair treatment Indigenous communities face, and having an advisor focused on understanding, respect, and collaboration is important.

“The creation of the Indigenous Practice Advisor role is a momentous step in our journey toward a more inclusive and culturally respectful organization. It is an embodiment of our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and our ongoing work to eradicate racism in all its forms,” says Angela Clancy, Executive Director of FSI.

What the Indigenous Practice Advisor Does:

At the heart of our Indigenous Practice Advisor’s role is the development of a plan that celebrates cultural diversity. This plan acts like a roadmap to make sure that FSI builds strong connections with families, partners, and communities throughout British Columbia. By weaving in Indigenous perspectives, traditions, and values, we will work together to create an environment that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

The cultural diversity work plan is like a flexible guide to create an inclusive environment within FSI. It helps us interact with families, partners, and

communities in a way that encourages understanding and respect. This plan strengthens our commitment to cultural safety and healing-centered care.

Our Indigenous Practice Advisor will support the FSI volunteer peer network of Resource Parents and Resource Peers. These dedicated peers are the center of the work of FSI, supporting families with members who have disabilities.

The Indigenous Practice Advisor will be there for RP’s to offer her support and guidance to them as they navigate the unique needs of these families, making sure that the support that is provided is culturally sensitive and inclusive.

The relationships guided by our Indigenous Practice Advisor will be built on principles of healing-centered care and cultural safety. By working with sensitivity and awareness, we aim to build trust, respect, and understanding with everyone involved. These relationships are essential for reaching our goals of supporting families and creating a community that values diversity and inclusivity.

We are very happy to welcome our first Indigenous Practice Advisor, Laranna Scott, to the FSI team.

As a mother, educator, and advocate, Laranna is passionate about supporting families with children and family members with support needs. “I am honoured to work with FSI in this new capacity and excited about being on this journey together!” she says. She has



served as a volunteer Resource Parent (RP) since 2019. Métis herself, Laranna holds a certificate in Early Childhood Education and diplomas in Special Needs Education and Infant-Toddler Education, culminating in a Bachelor of Arts degree in Child and Youth Care from the University of the Fraser Valley.

Laranna has been actively involved in Indigenous advocacy and care for the past 25 years and in 2017 received the Aboriginal Child Care Recognition Award from the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society. She has been a member of the Human Early Learning Partnership’s (HELP) Aboriginal Steering Committee through the University of British Columbia since 2014 and is on her third appointment as the Interior Region parent representative on MCFD’s Minister’s Advisory Council for Children & Youth with Support Needs. We look forward to the positive impact her wisdom and guidance will bring and we invite you to join us in welcoming Laranna to her role and the FSI team.



Once Laranna has settled into her new role, the Possibilities newsletter will dedicate a section to the work of the IPA regularly, starting with the next edition.

In alignment with our commitment to inclusivity and cultural respect, we are pleased to announce the creation of the Indigenous Advisory Circle. This 13-member Circle will collaborate closely with our Indigenous Practice Advisor, providing invaluable guidance and making recommendations related to training, the process of weaving culture throughout our organization, and ensuring that our work remains culturally safe and accessible to all individuals.

More information about the development of FSI's Indigenous Advisory Circle will be shared in the next publication of the Possibilities newsletter. ■

The Office of the Advocate for Service Quality Presents its 2022/2023 Annual Report



The Office of the Advocate for Service Quality presents its 2022/2023 Annual Report, showcasing its unwavering commitment to ensuring exceptional service provision across the province for individuals and families supported by Community Living BC.

The full report is available for download at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/supports-services/advocate-for-service-quality> or via the BC Office of the Advocate for Service Quality's website <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/supports-services/advocate-for-service-quality>.

Contact the Advocate

If you have a developmental disability and need help getting quality service, or need help sorting out a problem, you can contact the advocate by email at ASQ@gov.bc.ca or by phone at 604-775-1238 or through Service BC at 1-800-663-7867. ■

Cary Chiu
Advocate for Service Quality



Supporting Youth and Families Across BC



Thank you to the Family Support Institute of BC for your incredibly valuable work in building resources that support communities and families of people with disabilities throughout British Columbia. As BC's Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, I am honoured to partner with you to promote inclusion and equity for people with disabilities and their families.

We all know that families in BC are facing huge challenges right now. Young people are facing more pressures than ever with the impacts of climate, social, and economic uncertainties, and many are experiencing heightened anxiety and depression. More than ever, families in our province require access to supports and services when and where they need them. We know this is particularly true for those caring for children with support needs.

Young people are the future of British Columbia, and we are committed to helping them thrive. That's why the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions is putting extra focus on promoting wellness, prevention and intervening early to help youth avoid having small problems take root and turn into big ones. We are doing everything we can to deliver the care and treatment that meets the needs of young people, so they can live full and healthy lives.

To rise to the new challenges coming out of the pandemic, we are taking action to improve mental health and addictions supports – including better access to treatment and recovery. Through Budget 2023, we are investing \$236.42 million in new and expanded substance use care for youth and young adults. More than 28,000 children and youth receive community-based mental health services each year.

We are expanding access to mental health care programs, such as those provided by Foundry, with free

counselling and support for young people. With 16 locations open across the province and more planned to open soon, in the last year alone 17,567 young people received care and support through Foundry. Other important services for young people include crisis support, improved emergency-room care and discharge planning for treatment and recovery services.

In addition, children and youth are now able to access more prevention and early intervention supports, such as the Early Psychosis Intervention Program, as well as recovery and aftercare treatments. Across the province, 122 new professional positions have been created to support youth including therapists, clinicians, social workers, harm reduction coordinators, epidemiologists, nurses and nurse practitioners, outreach workers, counselors, Indigenous patient navigators, and liaisons.

Another way we are improving services and experiences for children, young people, and families is by creating unique new Integrated Child and Youth teams in 20 school districts across the province. These integrated teams work to fill gaps in mental health and addiction support, remove roadblocks, bring service providers together, and provide a door to the care that youth need. What makes these teams exceptional is that everyone on the team works in a coordinated way to figure out the best possible way to support a young person's unique needs including connecting them to the care

they need, when and where they need it – at school or in the community. As we know, the earlier we provide support, the better the outcome.

I am very proud that during the month of October on World Mental Health Day, Vancouver Coastal Health launched On Your Mind, a child and youth mental health public awareness campaign. The campaign focuses on early intervention like identifying signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, as well as providing families, caregivers, and other involved adults with access to relevant mental health information, support, and resources. The website, www.vch.ca/onyourmind, is available 24/7 to provide resources at all times. Young people in British Columbia deserve services that meet their unique needs. This campaign plays an important role in connecting youth to the mental health resources they need early and removes barriers that can lead to young people suffering in silence.

If the last few years have taught us anything, it is that going at it alone doesn't work. We are all in this together, and our government is determined to help everyone in the province build a better future. There is more to do, and we will get there by working together. I am committed to doing this work and aligning with the work of the Family Support Institute of BC to build resources for communities and families of people with disabilities throughout British Columbia. ■

Advocating for Equal Opportunities and Respect for All: Championing Change

Amanda Hall, a 35-year-old woman living in Nanaimo, British Columbia is a dedicated advocate for equal rights for all in the disability community, exemplifying independence, an unwavering commitment to employment, and active community engagement.

She enjoys living in her suite which she acquired in 2004 through grant funding from the Victoria Foundation, allowing her to maintain independence while residing at home. She is eagerly looking forward to upgrading the kitchen in her suite in November, having saved her own money to cover half of the renovation costs. Her life remains incredibly busy as she manages multiple jobs, volunteer work, advocacy, and self-care, all while navigating life with Williams Syndrome.

Throughout the week, Amanda fulfills various roles at different workplaces, including Winners and HomeSense. At Jolly Giant Childcare, where she has served as a secretary for 13 years, she manages her responsibilities diligently. Additionally, once a week, she undertakes the task of delivering newspapers within her community, acknowledging that, "it is challenging work going up the driveways".

One of Amanda's key roles is with BC People First Society – Self-advocates supporting self-advocates - as a Membership and Self Advocate Liaison. In this role, she makes phone calls and sends emails to reach out to people and discuss becoming involved with BCPF, while also gaining skills and experience in advocating with levels of government about issues affecting people with disabilities.

BCPF has been the independent voice of self-advocates in BC for over 40 years. The values held by BCPF include freedom, choice, respect, dignity, and inclusion. Members support one another to speak up for themselves and share their advocacy skills.

With her strong advocacy skills, and desire to help others, Amanda has found a way to share her values with others by writing blogs, one of which is shared in this article. She has been interviewed by over 500 people, teaching people how to write a blog. In October, Amanda conducted a Zoom presentation about "How to Write a Blog Post, Fact-Check and Research Your Story" at a conference hosted by BCEdAccess and BC People First.

Amanda regularly attends a Coffee House gathering in Nanaimo where the group meets in person once a month. So far, they've had six meetings. Amanda notes, "Many self-advocates find these discussions positive, helping them express needs like transit assistance." Coffee houses like these take place all over the province.

Another way that Amanda supports connection and community building for self-advocates is by being a Community Living BC Welcome Workshop leader. Since the inception of Welcome Workshops, Amanda and her mom have trained new individuals to organize these workshops, welcoming self-advocates and helping them in understanding CLBC services within their communities. Welcome Workshops are about community connections, planning choices, and working.

Amanda, as an individual receiving CLBC support, also enjoys making connections at dances organized by the CLBC Community Council twice a year, on Halloween and Valentine's Day.

Building relationships with community leaders is an important action toward creating social change and inclusive communities for all individuals. Amanda is deeply engaged in her community. In January 2023, she was invited to a Community Council event for International Day of People with Disabilities to talk about Housing and Disability Benefits. Notable guests included Lisa Marie Barron, Nanaimo-Ladysmith Member of Parliament, and Sheila Malcolmson, the MLA for Nanaimo and BC's Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, alongside representatives from the local School Board, self-advocates, Amanda's sister Christina, and Amanda's Special Olympics Bowling team. The event involved watching a video about the

*Did you know?
A Coffee House is a social
gathering where people
visit, have conversations,
and enjoy coffee or tea
together.*



closure of a Canadian institution for people with disabilities, followed by a discussion.

Despite her busy schedule of work and volunteerism, Amanda prioritizes self-care and taking time for the activities she enjoys. She dedicates an hour to working out on Tuesdays and Fridays and engages in powerlifting on Wednesdays and Fridays. Her current personal bests include squatting 85 pounds and deadlifting 115



pounds, to reach 120 pounds. Amanda participated in a Powerlifting competition in October and as a result of her commitment to her physical fitness, along with her perseverance, she won first place. Her recorded numbers for the competition were:

Squat: 85 lbs or 38.5 kg
Bench: 60 lbs or 27.2 kg
Deadlift: 125 lbs or 56.7 kg

Amanda independently enjoys cooking desserts, specializing in Apple Crumble and cheesecake.

On Sundays, Amanda greets attendees as they enter the church.

Within Special Olympics, Amanda actively participates in powerlifting, bowling, and snowshoeing. Her accomplishments include receiving awards for track and field, achieving first place in the 200-meter run, and second place in the standing long jump. She plans to play soccer in the spring of 2024. ■

AMANDA GENEROUSLY OFFERED TO SHARE A BLOG SHE WROTE FOR BC PEOPLE FIRST TO INCLUDE IN THIS ARTICLE.

Human Rights - by Amanda Hall

People with diverse abilities get restricted in what they can do because of low income, and not enough accessible and affordable housing.

There are not enough jobs and still some sheltered workshops, all people deserve to get a living wage and equal pay for equal work. While most institutions in British Columbia are closed, some still exist in Canada. Parents put their children into an institution because they did not feel they had an option. I am grateful to the families and self-advocates who have helped close most of the institutions.

Many levels of government – federal, provincial, and local - are aware of the housing issues but are slow to make changes. In British Columbia, the benefits for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) are not enough to cover rent. As one of my friends puts it, "If you earn too much and go over the allowable amount, the whole PWD for the month will be taken away."

Not being accepted for who you are: some people still use the "R" word because they do not know how to talk to people with diverse abilities. Some people are still afraid of people with diverse abilities because they do not know how to talk to them. Employers, I think, feel intimidated and the individuals will not do a good job or they will not be reliable. I am fortunate I have a job with equal pay.

I have five jobs but I do not think I will ever make enough to rent my own place. The rent amount from PWD needs to go up or rent to go down and be affordable and accessible for all.

I sit on the Community Council for CLBC with parents and other self-advocates. We have presented to our local city council and the Nanaimo accessibility committee, and we've written letters to other city councils. We hope to present to them this year too, focusing on inclusive and accessible housing, accessible sidewalks, and more braille. All levels of government need to be aware of the issues with people with diverse abilities. We talk to people about BC People First, making them aware of the advocacy work they do on our behalf.

This matters to me because it is unfair, all people deserve to be treated equally and with respect. We have the right to live, work, and play as other people do. I would like everybody to know that they're not alone in facing these issues.

Human rights should not be taken away from people with diverse abilities. They have the human right to choose their activities and enjoy themselves. They can go places and have fun!! Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes it clear that every individual in Canada – regardless of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, colour, sex, age, or physical or mental disability – is considered equal. This means that governments must not discriminate on any of these grounds in laws or programs. ■

References "Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Oct. 2023, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_15_of_the_Canadian_Charter_of_Rights_and_Freedoms

New Resource



Introducing a New Website for Families/Caregivers and Youth

CDR | Child Development & Rehabilitation InfoSource

The new [Child Development and Rehabilitation InfoSource Website](https://www.cdrinfosource.ca/) (CDRInfoSource) has been launched! We created the website in collaboration with families, youth, healthcare professionals and clinical experts to be a trusted source for development, rehabilitation and support information and resources for children and youth with neurodiversity and/or disability in British Columbia. It includes links to Family Support Institute resources and services to assist families in finding the support they need.

We are asking families and youth, healthcare professionals, educators and others working alongside this community to:

Explore our new website:
<https://www.cdrinfosource.ca/>

Tell us what you think by survey:
<https://rb.gy/enaqm>

Share with others

We will use your feedback to make the website better for our users.

About Us

[The Child Development and Rehabilitation InfoSource website](https://www.cdrinfosource.ca/) was created by the Child Development and Rehabilitation Evidence Centre, a virtual knowledge translation centre established at the BC Children's Hospital, a part of the BC Provincial Health Services Authority in

partnership with BC Children's Hospital Digital Lab. We created the Site in collaboration with families, youth, healthcare professionals and clinical experts to be a trusted source for development, rehabilitation and support information and resources for children and youth with neurodiversity and/or disability in British Columbia.

Our website content process:

The Child Development and Rehabilitation InfoSource website content was informed by needs identified by youth with neurodiversity and/or disability, families/caregivers, healthcare professionals and others who work with children and youth with neurodiversity and/or disability in British Columbia. The content was vetted by clinical experts, and where

appropriate, in consultation with our Family and Youth Advisory Group, Indigenous Health Advisors and partner organizations. Content is reviewed regularly to ensure the information is accurate and up to date. If you would like more information about our process for developing or reviewing content, or have feedback you would like to provide to us, please don't hesitate to email us at CDRInfoSource@cw.bc.ca.

Our supporters:

The Child Development and Rehabilitation Evidence Centre and the development of the Child Development and Rehabilitation InfoSource website are funded by the BC Children's Hospital Foundation. The Site is maintained with support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development. ■



The new **CDR InfoSource**  has launched

Searchable website with **development and rehabilitation resources** and services for **children and youth with neurodiversity and/or disability** for:



Families



Children & Youth



Clinicians



Educators

www.cdrinfosource.ca



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!



bit.ly/3MsYs0x



WE'LL MEET YOU THERE

Share your story,
your way.

COMPLETE OUR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
SURVEY TODAY!



THE
**FAMILY VOICES
PROJECT**

HELPING SHAPE THE
FUTURE OF CYSN SERVICES



The Family Support Institute of BC (FSI) is embarking on a community engagement journey to gather stories on what has and has not been working in the current system for Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN). We want to hear from you on how CYSN services and supports in BC can be improved so that our children and youth can get the help they so critically deserve. We will be gathering your stories and experiences in person and online, in a way that best works for you.