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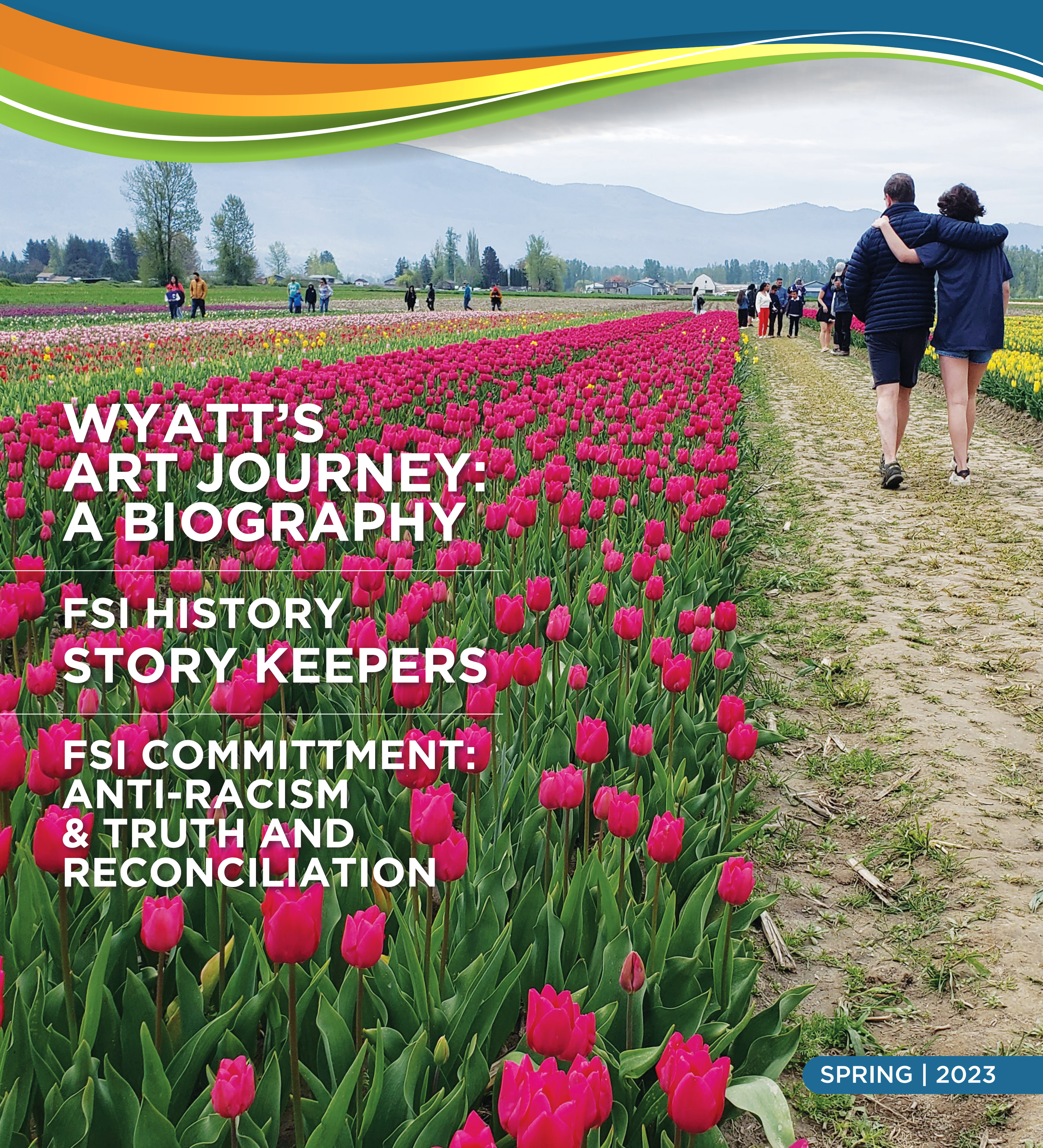
• **NEWSLETTER** published by **FAMILY SUPPORT INSTITUTE OF BC** •



WYATT'S ART JOURNEY: A BIOGRAPHY

FSI HISTORY STORY KEEPERS

FSI COMMITTTMENT: ANTI-RACISM & TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

SPRING | 2023

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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

Where is my strength, and when do I notice the strengths I have in common with others every day?

Everyone is a family member. We move through our lives in relationships with others. It is in this interconnection that we learn about being cared for, loved, protected, nurtured, and supported. It is where we experience being challenged to overcome and be the truest and best version of ourselves that we can be. When we begin our lives, we come to know comfort, delight, wonder, aspiration, fear, loss, shame, and heartache. We form an understanding of others and ourselves in relation to these feelings and ways of being.

Becoming a parent and family member has deepened and shaped my understanding of who I am, and what it means to have and grow strength and resilience. From the bonds I have formed to the choices I have made every day as a family member, the meaning of strength for me sits somewhere in between struggle and overcoming.

Someone once told me that adversity is what makes you stronger, but has anyone wondered whether moving between adversities and overcoming continuously, is what builds our capacity to become stronger? Has anyone thought about strength as something we do not accumulate, own, and get to keep to ourselves, but something that we are all creating and recreating every day when we interact with others in our lives?

When the theme of this newsletter was emerging, sharing our strengths, I wondered about these questions in my everyday experiences. I started noticing that beneath the surface of living, loving, working, solving problems, and hoping and dreaming for the future, there is a common thread of humanity in between struggle, heartache, loss, and overcoming.

In the moments that test us to keep going, to make good decisions or the best ones at the moment, to find hope when we go through loss and hardship, to be kind and nurture others, and to contribute in our own ways, there is something inherent within us that points us toward our overcoming. We find comfort and meaning in sharing our stories and experiences with others, and together we grow deeper in our strengths.

With an open heart and curiosity in my relationships recently, I have learned from others who have shown me what it is like for them when things are hard, not knowing if they are doing the right thing in how they parent and provide support to their child. I have learned about what it is like for them when they are empowered to speak up for their voice to be heard, knowing that it is okay to feel the way they do and that someone else is listening. I have heard that things can be very difficult, disappointing, not make sense or seem fair, and yet things get better. Families feel hopeful about having something to look forward to that is better than the day before and that it is a wonderful thing. Being able to tell your story and be heard without judgment is important. This is especially meaningful when even your own family members are not there to provide that love, support, and encouragement.

When I sat down to write this Editor's report, I reflected upon where strengths exist and coexist in my own relationships, and within my connections to families throughout the province. Strength shows up when you can be in the company of others when things are going very wrong, and you can tell your truth, discovering likeness in your shared adversities. ■

"Sometimes the most healing thing to do is remind ourselves over and over and over, that other people feel this too."

Andrea Gibson

Looking Forward:

FSI and the Evolution of Change

Families who have children with disabilities in British Columbia, face a number of challenges. One of the top challenges is navigating the complex and often overwhelming healthcare and support systems.

Many families struggle to access the services and resources their child needs, which can include everything from therapy and specialized equipment to education and respite care. Another challenge is the financial burden that often comes with raising a child with a disability. Medical bills and specialized equipment can be costly that are not often covered in our system of care.

Many parents of children with disabilities must also navigate complex government benefit systems. They must find their own respite and pay a top-up to the amount that qualified caregivers cost. Parents also spend much of their time attending to the educational needs of their children, or to the many calls to pick their kids up from school from a system that is not equipped or willing to support their children in a meaningful and inclusive manner.

> *"Families and their loved ones have tremendous ideas and know what works when asked."*

Parents experience many other facets of complexity that come with a price tag that our government social services fail to recognize or compensate, leaving parents to flounder, scrimp, and scrape, most of the time falling well below the poverty line. Finally, families may also face social isolation and stigma, as their child's disability can make it difficult to participate in community activities and events. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and exclusion, both for the child and their family.

Challenges We Face

Non-profit organizations in British Columbia, such as the Family Support Institute, that support families with members who have disabilities face several challenges that can significantly impact their ability to fulfill their missions. Primarily, these organizations face massive funding deficits, inadequate legislative or governmental support, and an increasingly complex social environment.

The first significant challenge is funding, which can be attributed to the decreasing charitable donations and government funding that non-profit organizations typically rely on to operate.

Secondly, non-profit organizations require supportive legislative policies that can increase their efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling their mission. However, legislative support in British Columbia is often inadequate, which makes it challenging for such organizations to provide the required services adequately.

Lastly, the social environment is increasingly complex, and with the changes in government policies such as in the Provincial Disability Support Programs, many more people are seeking support from these organizations, which strains their already stretched resources. As a result, non-profit organizations that support families with members who have disabilities face several challenges that can hinder their vital work, requiring a strong commitment to overcome them.

In the case of FSI, the way we support families is unique in all of North America. We deliver the majority of our supports through a volunteer peer mentor network of like-minded families who opt to support others by sharing their experiences and expertise. This model, in its delivery, adds value to what families receive, meeting them where they are at with what they need, when they need it. It enhances parent resiliency, connectedness, and reduced isolation as families realize they are not alone. Families learn from one another and share similar experiences. They gain strength and knowledge at the same time.

The volunteer mentors gain the same feelings of empowerment and trust as they connect and develop relationships. Our foundational way of supporting families in need is significantly impacted when governmental services are in flux, since the families we rely on to deliver Family Support are impacted equally by these shifts in services and supports.

We acknowledge that the families at FSI who provide family support across the province also need things that the families they support need, including access to childcare spaces, affordable and accessible housing options, inclusive education, and equitable access to assessments and funding, quality health care, and more. We are advocating for the needs of all families.

Looking to the Future

As FSI moves into the future, we will be focusing on family advocacy, meaningful peer support, mobilizing families, and building their capacity to speak on behalf of themselves and to come together with strength and collectively work to rebuild a system that meets their needs for their loved ones. This means deep engagement and coming from a place of curiosity. We will be talking through what is working, and what is not working as well, and building solutions together. Families and their loved ones have tremendous ideas and know what works when asked. We are committed to doing that alongside families. This, to us, is where the evolution of change begins. ■

SUPPORT CALL THEMES

At FSI, the themes of our support calls have not shifted significantly over the past 10 years or more, leaving us to wonder what needs to be done to make lasting changes in the programs that are utilized by those who need them the most in BC. The top 10 themes in FSI provincially, received by our family support team currently are:

1. **Lack of adequate funding** for children and adult services alike
2. **Limited access to appropriate mental health supports** for children, youth, and adults with disabilities and their families; strain in family relationships
3. **Limited access to respite support**; no breaks
4. Issues with **recruitment and retention of staff** when utilizing Individualized funding
5. **Stigma and discrimination** against individuals with disabilities, which can lead to social isolation and exclusion
6. **Wait times for services;** lack of access, or long wait times for assessments; families on the brink of crisis and breakdown due to prolonged times of waiting for referrals and assessments
7. **Exclusion**, segregation, and limited supports in educational settings (including lack of EAs)
8. **Limited access to Early Intervention supports**, leading to kids aging out of services before they enter the programs
9. **Financial breakdown;** poverty; costs associated with equipment; the strain of increased costs of having a person with a disability and no access to supports
10. **Housing;** no access to options for youth/adults; no residential options other than Homeshare; limited monitoring of Homeshare: aging families want options for their family members and there are none; evictions

A Message From Dominic Rockall

As I am writing this message, the first day of spring is just around the corner. Spring is symbolic of new beginnings and transformations.

As flowers start to bloom and everything starts growing spring is often described as a metaphor for starting fresh and starting over, like a reawakening after the long dark days of winter. Family Support Institute has gone through a few changes of its own this winter with several staff leaving the organization and new staff joining. While FSI is not "starting over", we have new people on the team, we are embarking on some new initiatives, and we are refocusing some of our priorities. With all these developments in mind, I feel like this is a good time to embrace the symbolism of spring as we navigate through the next few months.

New Strategic Plan

Coming off the heels of the Strategic Plan that was developed last fall the board and staff have been working hard to increase the impact of FSI and our capacity to support families. The Board and staff are aiming to increase awareness of FSI throughout the province; strengthen our programs; strengthen FSI's organizational capacity to be healthy and sustainable and to better serve families; raise the voices of families and people with disabilities to affect systemic change in BC, and to embed and embrace equity, decolonization, and inclusion in all aspects of what we do.

These are the Strategic Plan goals, and although we are finding new ways to achieve these goals, most of these are not new goals for FSI. These goals are the reason the organization was founded, they reflect the overall Mission of FSI, and they go to the core of our work, which is to help families in need.

One of the goals that is new, or at least expanded since the last Strategic Plan, and that I am very excited about, is to embed and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work. As an organization founded in the civil rights movement for people with disabilities, advocating for the celebration of diversity, the provision of equity, and inclusive communities, has always been at the forefront of our work. We are now expanding the focus of this work to view it through a lens that includes all groups of people that experience discrimination and acknowledges our history of colonization and treatment of Indigenous people. In doing this, our hope is that we will improve the work we do as both a service provider and an employer.

MCFD Framework

Another new initiative I am excited about is the work we are going to undertake for the Ministry of Children and Family Development to support the new direction they are going in with regard to CYSN services. MCFD is going through some significant changes themselves regarding CYSN services and the new CYSN Framework. It is encouraging that they are coming to FSI to support them in this, and it speaks to the quality of the work that we do across the province.

The board knows that the strength of FSI and of the quality of the work we do is due to the ongoing commitment, dedication, and efforts of the staff of FSI. Therefore, as part of our renewed focus, we are going to continue to ensure that the staff has all the support they need to meet the needs of families in BC, as we know these needs are changing.

Many years ago when I was a childcare counselor working with youth I remember saying that life was like sitting behind the wheel of a moving vehicle. Either you can grab hold of the steering wheel directing the vehicle where you want it to go, or you can let go, sit back, and see what happens. These days I am not such a fan of this metaphor because it seems to disregard all the systemic factors that can get in the way of "grabbing the wheel", such as poverty, racism, inequity, homelessness, etc. However, there is at least some truth in the metaphor in that people and organizations, and the world itself are not static entities. Movement and change are constant and inevitable.

We are also living in an interconnected world in which changes in people and organizations and communities all influence each other. The changes of the last few years are unprecedented in our lifetime, and we are still feeling the effects of those changes. Therefore, overall, we have many changes to manage now and that can be stressful.

At FSI, we will work our way through this change by following the principles that we always have. We will continue to support and build capacity in families; we will promote inclusion, celebrate, and support each other, build relationships inside and outside the organization, share knowledge, advocate for social change, and celebrate diversity. Along with these principles, and with compassion and empathy, we will work together as we always have, to support families and support each other through these changing times. ■

FSI Welcomes Patti Mertz as the New Director of Programs

Q&A by FSI's Possibilities Editor Robyn Kendurkar

What brings you to FSI as a family member with lived experience?

My beautiful daughter is about to graduate high school, get her driver's license, and start University. Years ago, I wondered and worried about how her life would be, as a neuro-diverse kiddo. We lived in a so-called "resource-poor" area for families with disabilities (Northern Vancouver Island), and struggled to learn about how to support her. We found FSI late in our journey, and really appreciate the love, support, understanding, and acceptance we have received.

What community do you call home?

I live on Gabriola Island, which is one of the Gulf Islands off the Nanaimo coastline.

Before joining FSI, what other roles did you have?

I had a long career as a Broadcast Journalist, news anchor, and radio morning show host. I was often asked to promote or emcee events for non-profit organizations, and so I got very involved in many as a volunteer and even board member. For most of the last ten years, I have led remote teams to achieve organizational goals. I enjoy supporting people in their roles by providing strong systems and processes.

What does support look like to you?

I feel supported when someone really hears me, and understands what I am going through. If they share their experience or point me to some useful resources, I feel like I am not alone. I feel empowered in supporting my child.

What do you feel are the ingredients for becoming an informed and empowered parent advocate?

It is helpful to have a certain amount of expertise in your area, learning about programs and services that can help other parents in that area. There is a willingness to stand by a parent's side, listening and sharing what you know. Kindness, compassion, and maybe a good sense of humor.

If an FSI volunteer could teach you one thing, what would you want to learn more about?

Our biggest challenge has always been getting schools to work with us, finding ways to make the curriculum more accessible to our daughter, and for her to be able to express her learning in novel ways. (She has a disability in written expression; her brain does not work with her hands like other kids' brains do). I would like to learn more ideas for the expression of learning and how to get the schools on board.

What is something unique you feel you bring to FSI and families across the province?

I guess I would say I bring strong communication skills. I hope to use these skills to share FSIs' mission with stakeholders across British Columbia.

When you were young, what did you want to "be when you grew up"?

I wanted to be a "writer" since I was a young child. I love words and have written poetry and short stories before eventually becoming a journalist. Now I get to write promotion materials, letters, and reports. I get to tell our stories to people that can help make a difference for families in the disability community.

Are there mentors who support you to challenge yourself, examine your beliefs and actions, and give you guidance with your biggest questions? What has been your greatest mentor moment for you so far?

I continue to learn from everyone I meet. I love to hear new ideas and perspectives. One of the greatest mentor moments I had, however, helped me learn how to lose. I remember passionately arguing my case for a change in an organization I worked for 25 years ago. I had a lot of respect for my boss, who listened to my arguments carefully. He then explained that sometimes the answer is going to be no. This was one of those times. I felt heard and respected. I was a little frustrated that I did not get my way, but it helped me understand that even though I do not always win, I can still be valued.

What do you believe being an effective listener means?

An effective listener should come to understand the speaker's position, asking questions if necessary. They should be able to see the issue through the other person's eyes.

Who inspires you?

I get inspired by other people all the time. A beautiful garden, a painting, and a photo of a sunset all inspire me. Other parents who are determined and fight for their kids with grace inspire me. I'm inspired by kids who let their light shine.

How do you practice self-care and self-compassion?

I feel better when I move, so doing hot yoga, hiking, or going for a run are all "self-care." I have also learned to lie down when I am tired (a lesson taught by Long Covid). That is my greatest act of self-compassion. Instead of powering through fatigue, as I used to, I give myself permission to lie down. I usually play gentle music or a Yoga Nidra video on my phone.

What is your approach to challenges?

I have always been solution-based. However, my daughter recently said to me "Why don't you stop trying to fix it, and just let yourself be sad?" Therefore, I am trying a new approach, letting myself process the challenge before I jump in and look for solutions.

What is the hardest or most difficult lesson you have ever learned?

Life. Is not. Fair. I am not sure why there is such a strong voice that yells in our heads "That's not FAIR!" However, it seems like I am not alone in having this expectation that if you are a good person and do good work, good things will happen to you. That is just not how life works. Sometimes, super crappy things happen. Horrible things, sometimes. I am learning to accept that while still living in hope.

What is your favorite podcast, blog, or YouTube channel?

I take in a ton of non-fiction content, so my favorite podcast is actually pure escapism: Zombies: Run! You are Runner 5, in a post-apocalyptic world. The story unfolds as you actually go for a run. The story is interspersed with songs from your playlist. You can even turn on "Zombie chases" that cause you to sprint during your run, in order to escape the zombies. I feel I must add that I am NOT a zombie fan girl.

What is the most exciting part of your new role as Director of Programs?

I am humbled and excited to be able to apply my life and work experiences in a role that, I hope, will help other families in BC. I do not have to leave my personal life at the door at FSI. It sits with me; in everything I do, helping me do it better. ■

> *"I would like to learn more ideas for the expression of learning and how to get the schools on board."*

An Honest Look at Accessibility at Community Living BC:

CLBC's Baseline Accessibility Report

When British Columbia made a new law – the Accessible British Columbia Act – to make our province more accessible, Community Living BC was excited at what this could mean for people with disabilities in B.C..

CLBC's mandate is to build communities with fewer barriers for the people and families we serve. The work we do with our sector is critical. Yet, there are always ways we can improve.

To find out where we wanted to grow, we needed to figure out where we stand now in terms of accessibility at CLBC. People, their families, our partners, and service providers were generous enough with their time to attend sessions and share feedback and stories on their experience accessing CLBC services.

We hosted five virtual workshops, engaged in conversations with our community partners, and received over 400 responses to an online survey. We wanted to hear what barriers people were experiencing in getting help from CLBC staff, getting to and around CLBC offices, getting information from CLBC, working at CLBC, and how they felt they were treated by CLBC staff.

We also did a robust internal review with an employee working group to look at accessibility through the lenses of employment, customer service, built environment, information and communication, procurement, and policy. Each CLBC service area working group completed an assessment to identify barriers and discover best practices from other organizations and governments.

Conversations around accessibility tend to center around physically accessible spaces. The people in our sector offer a different perspective on what reducing barriers can look like for all British Columbians. In addition, although physical accessibility was a common thread through our workshops, people in our sector experience barriers beyond physically accessing spaces.

Accessibility Themes

We heard from our consultations five main themes in how we can improve accessibility at CLBC:

1. **Relationships make all the difference:** People want consistent and understanding relationships with the staff that they are working with.
2. **Information needs to be shared in many ways:** Information offered in plain language, multiple languages, braille, and ASL. People shared that having a staff member or peer talk through information one-on-one was helpful.
3. **Time matters:** People asked for more one-on-one time with staff or peers to ask questions, learn about services, and understand information.
4. **Clear communication is key:** People want clear information about timelines, processes, and policies to be shared in a way that is easy to understand.
5. **Welcoming physical spaces:** People shared the need for physically accessible spaces for people who use mobility devices. Moreover, for staff who are there, to greet and direct people around offices.

Another important aspect of our report included looking at intersecting forms of discrimination. We recognize that people experience multiple and compounding forms of discrimination based on many aspects of their identity. People who face discrimination based on disability may also experience it based on gender, age, and ethno-cultural identity, among other identities. Full inclusion and reduction of barriers mean identifying, removing, and preventing barriers that reflect multiple forms of discrimination.

As it is helpful to hear from people in their own words, here are a few quotes from our feedback sessions and surveys. When we talked with people about how attitudes around disability can be a barrier, some participants said:

"Be patient, actively listen and work with me."

"Talk to the individual, not the support person unless they're not able to. Communicate calmly and slowly."

"Use Autistic friendly language."

"Don't use ableist language."

CLBC CON'T

When discussing how people receive information, we heard about the importance of plain language and accessible forms of communication:

"Information in our language from us."

"Change the jargon to common language."

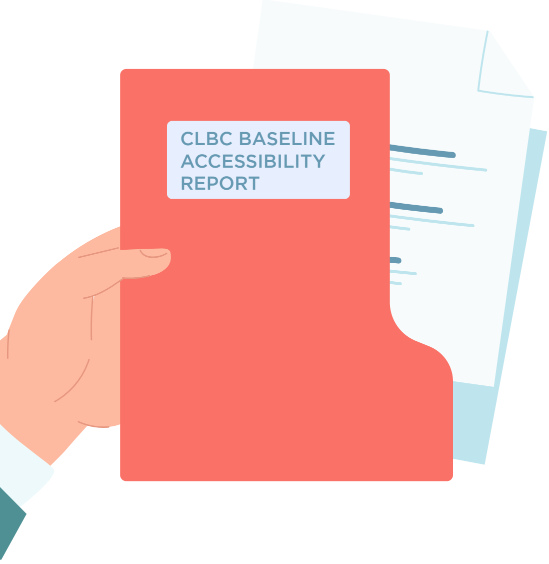
"Having someone else who has been through it all help me so I could understand what was going on."

"Language interpreters are critical!"

When speaking about the physical environment, participants said:

It is important to "feel valued and welcomed. It's not always about the what, it's also about the how."

We took what we heard from people and what we discovered internally and put together CLBC's *Baseline Accessibility Report*. The report will advise CLBC's Accessibility Plan. The proposed actions in the plan will be tested with CLBC councils and the Provincial Advisory Committee. It will then be published by September 2023. Along with the plan, CLBC is developing an accessible feedback mechanism to hear from the public on an ongoing basis on how we can improve accessibility at CLBC. ■



A Message From the Advocate for Service Quality

Since the last newsletter, my team and I have spent time meeting in person with Community Living service agencies in New Westminster, Surrey, and Victoria.

I have also met in person with individuals with a developmental disability, their families, service providers, health authority, and government representatives. We value these opportunities to connect with individuals, families, and community living organizations. We look forward to making these connections with other communities this year.

I have been in the Advocate for Service Quality role for a year now. Our office is in a unique position to listen to people who have issues with Community Living BC, to help people navigate CLBC's processes, and to refer people to agencies or organizations that can provide more targeted advocacy or assistance. On a daily basis, we become involved in cases requiring problem-solving and empathy. The reality is that many of the individuals and families reaching out to us are in situations requiring "thinking outside the box" and, often, different forms of advocacy than what our office provides. In many of the cases, we work on, my team and I work directly with an advocacy agency or organization, sometimes several, all at once. We are so grateful for these relationships, as the expertise and experience these external colleagues share is invaluable. The influence we have as separate organizations and our individual ability to effect change may be all it takes in a particular situation. However, when that is not the case, the power of our collective voice, expertise, and experience is something to leverage and celebrate!

Recently, these collaborations have included Inclusion BC, the Representative for Children and Youth, the Family Support Institute, Community Living Victoria, Foundry BC, and Health Authorities (please note: we welcome collaboration with all organizations!). Through the cases we are privileged to work on with these "external teammates", it is clear that, while each of us has different perspectives and skill sets, the overriding strength we share is our passion for and commitment to helping individuals and their families. My team and I sincerely hope that this comes through to the individuals and families we serve.

Nick Birch and Salima Jamal are Program Advisors at the OASQ and they are your first point of contact when you email us at ASQ@gov.bc.ca or phone us at 605-775-1238 or through Service BC at 1-800-663-7867. Our overarching goal is to get quality service for individuals and families supported by CLBC, by working collaboratively with all parties. Please connect with us if you would like help sorting out a problem. ■

Cary Chiu
Advocate for Service Quality

Representative for Children and Youth Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth

An Update from the Representative for Children and Youth

Spring is once again upon us and, as we look forward to warmer months, I want to share some of the projects we are working on at my Office.

Since I last wrote, a highlight of RCY's work has been the launch of the Skye's Legacy microsite, a site dedicated to resources about belonging. In January, RCY officially launched the microsite dedicated to Skye, a 17-year-old Dene girl who died as a result of the toxic drug crisis. We first shared her story in our investigative report, *Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging*. The new microsite holds resources and materials focused on the importance of belonging. On it, you will find materials such as reports, articles, videos, podcasts and more. These curated materials are available for you to view or share in workshops and presentations. Visit the microsite here.

FASD Report

We also released two reports last fall. The first was a short, graphic-based report on FASD – a follow-up to our Excluded report. *Hands, not Hurdles* is a condensed and easily digestible version of a more in-depth report on FASD that we released in 2021. The shorter report provides tips and other suggested resources for community practitioners including teachers, counsellors, recreational workers and clinicians.

Mental Health Report

The second was a commissioned report by the Child Health Policy Centre (CHPC) at Simon Fraser University examining prevalence of mental health disorders and effective treatments for young people in care. *A Parent's Responsibility* shows that young people in government care have dramatically higher rates of mental health disorders than the general population. Subsequently, I made six recommendations to government to take action on these findings.

> *"Skye's Legacy microsite has launched, a site that is dedicated to resources about belonging."*

Key Components

In February, RCY released a report prepared by Dr. Pat Mirenda on *Key Components* to provide valuable information to the Ministry of Children and Family Development as it moves forward with re-imagining the CYSN framework.

This April, my Office released another report alongside CHPC. In this commissioned report, *Toward Inclusion: The need to improve access to mental health services for children and youth with neurodevelopmental conditions*, I advocate for improved mental health services for children and youth with disabilities.

My Office also released two reports in April, *Advocating for Change* is a short report focusing on government's response to recommendations I have made during the past five years. The report takes a deep dive into how RCY measures progress and how effective government has been at implementing our recommendations. The *Missing* report presents findings by RCY on children and youth who are missing, "running from," or "hiding from," the care system. It also examines how the child welfare system and other child-serving systems have created conditions that lead to children being lost in care.

New Executive Director

Finally, we recently welcomed our new Executive Director for Reviews and Investigations, John Yakielashek, to RCY. John brings over 30 years of experience in social work, working with different organizations across B.C. as well as with MCFD. We are delighted to have him join our team.

Contact RCY

As always, families and youth looking to connect with an RCY Advocate, or anybody with general questions or comments, can contact us by email (rcy@rcybc.ca), phone (1-800-476-3933) or by using the secure and confidential form on our website *https://rcybc.ca/get-help-now/contact-us/*.

RCY Social Media

A great way to keep up with our Office is through social media – find us on Facebook (@rcybc or @rcybcyouth), Twitter (@rcybc or @rcybcyouth) and Instagram (@rcybcyouth). ■

FSI Releases New Anti-Racism and Truth and Reconciliation Commitment Statements

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 in 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, and 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, 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. ■

Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

The Family Support Institute of BC stands for Truth and Reconciliation. We commit to supporting Indigenous children, youth, adults, and families in the communities we serve.

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

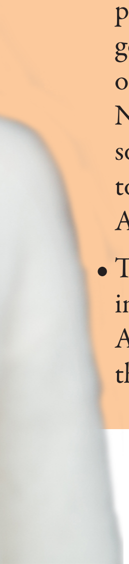
acknowledge that intersections of race and disability bring with them multiple marginalizations. We commit to creating equitable spaces with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous staff, partners, and community members and will raise our voices in efforts to elevate issues and strive for positive change.

- 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 place emphasis on fully implementing 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 to 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 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 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, including microaggressions.
- 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).

FSI's Truth and Reconciliation Commitment Statement has been developed with FSI's Board and staff from across the province, in consultation with the FSI Diversity committee and other stakeholder partners from Indigenous communities. ■



FSI Historian, Cathy Anthony

FSI History Story Keepers:

Remembering Our History

Belonging doesn't mean one, it means many. It means being a part of something bigger than ourselves, something united, something stronger.

Why is history important? Our family movement has been in place for decades and there is an important story to tell. Many of our pioneer families are no longer with us and those of us that lived some of the histories are older. So many younger families, professionals, and community members do not know the history of our movement and so we believe it is important to be the storytellers, share this history and pass the torch to newer generations. Our history cannot be forgotten. For so much was put in place for us to have the privilege of not having to live the experiences as others did.

In these last years, equity, justice, rights, diversity, and inclusion have been elevated and championed to a place of greater acknowledgment and understanding. Yet what I am often concerned about is that in these very important dialogues, it is infrequent that we hear about people with disabilities included as an equity-seeking group. Yes, we have moved beyond having people removed from the community and segregated in large institutions (British Columbia was the first province in Canada to close its last institution "Woodlands" in 1996). We have moved from only segregated schools being an option, to our children having the right to be educated in schools with their siblings and neighborhood peers.

> *"Our history cannot be forgotten."*

We have supports and services that have evolved over the years. Did you know that the At Home Program came about through the advocacy of families and allies in 1989? All these and many other doors that opened are a result of a collective of voices advocating to ensure rights and opportunities for our loved ones.

Yet today, advocacy remains at the heart of our ongoing rights movement to further new and different causes and ensure our loved ones live fulfilling and meaningful lives in the heart of their community. FSI grew to build a family movement and to ensure we had each other - connections to relationships that knew the lived experience, to be a collective voice, and to support and lift each other up as families on our unique journey. In these newer times of technology, we know it is so much easier for families to search out information, connect to other groups and meet through new virtual platforms.

Yet the value of building personal connections can forge lifelong friendships. I have been blessed with this as my experience, and I hear that this is true for many others. We found a place of 'belonging' with other family members who share a similar journey.

Across our generations, we have much to learn from one another. Being the "history story keepers" will remain a very important piece for us all and our legacy forward. Telling our stories and remembering our history is the way toward ensuring that our history will not be forgotten.

For my peers and me, our good fortune was to learn from those that went before us. ■

FSI Historian, Cathy Anthony

Sharing Our Strengths:

A Legacy of Family Leadership Created by Pioneers of Change

I have been a part of an amazing life and a powerful social movement for over 20 years now. This movement called "Community Living" is not a life that I would have imagined but one that I can say I am truly grateful to be a part of.

In this movement, I have found a shared passion and a rich and rewarding life existence with many who have been my teachers, my guides, my mentors, my soul mates, my inspiration, and my friends. My son Josh will be 21 this summer. Moreover, because of him, I have been blessed.

If you are like me, you can probably reflect back on a time, a time in our early days of discovering that our children had challenges, when the blow of that reality hit, and a sense of overwhelming uncertainty and aloneness kicked in. My aloneness was my weakness and it was only through the journey of sharing in connection with other families in similar circumstances that I found a strength I did not know existed.

I had a lot of learning to do and over time, I learned more and more about the history and journey of community living and about the strength, power, and leadership of families when they gather and share their strengths.

Reflecting on the past, I came to understand how thankful I was for our family leaders and the work that they were doing in the 1950s. I realized that if my son was born at this time, I would have probably been encouraged to have him in an institution. Instead, families began standing strong together saying no to institutional life for their children. These pioneer leaders began sharing their strengths and creating new options and directions for their families and the emergence of the first community-living societies were born. From local associations, they moved upward and 50 years ago, the BC Association for Community Living was formed.

> *"When the Family Support Institute was formed 20 years ago, it was a dream to build what it has become today."*

As the years passed families were inspired to dream bigger, to gather stronger, and to carry the movement a step further. And so it continues, generation after generation, year after year, families continue to share their strengths to create change to build a better life for their children and families.

It was not that long ago that I came to the realization that each of us is a pioneer of change as well. Our efforts today become a piece of the tapestry of tomorrow, and the fabric of the future.

For me, it doesn't seem that long ago that I became involved with the Family Support Institute, and with families in my community, where our work was focused on closing segregated schools, then segregated programs, and building today's legacy of inclusive education. It was a period of life that I remember feeling so hopeful and energized. In my community, we had a powerhouse of strong, committed families and supporters we brought alongside us who shared their passion and strengths to create change. We created meaningful and pivotal change. I have felt truly blessed that my son's education and school experience actualized in his neighborhood schools where he was fully included with his peers.. ■

Wyatt's Art Journey:

A Biography by RP Rona Sterling-Collins

"Wyatt's unique perspective on the world is enjoyable, colorful and a breath of fresh air."

Wyatt is a 25-year-old artist who has shown his creative talents since an early age. Wyatt is Nłeʔkepmx from the Nicola Valley (Merritt area). His parents are Rona Sterling-Collins and Don Collins. Wyatt was diagnosed at age four with autism. At the time, there were limited services for children with autism living in rural British Columbia. His Mother became educated about autism and other disabilities and became a strong advocate for him and other Indigenous children with disabilities.

Although Wyatt navigates the complexity of autism, he has a positive and cheerful outlook on life. Wyatt took art courses in high school and displayed some of his artwork. He graduated in 2016. Wyatt enjoys art, music, swimming, bowling, golfing, and being outdoors.

Shortly after Wyatt started his Community Living BC adult program, his mom arranged for an Art Mentor to work with him. CLBC invited Wyatt to participate in contributing to their promotional material as an Indigenous Self Advocate in 2018. As a Self-Advocate, Wyatt is proud to share his story, photo, and paintings with others.

He started acrylic painting in 2017 and discovered his niche and unique style in Abstract Expressionism. He has excelled in using fluid form and drip painting techniques in an environment with no limits to size or content. Wyatt paints with a clear focus that allows him to show emotion through his uninhibited brushwork. His art explores the use of pictographs as part of his Nłeʔkepmx heritage, travel to Mexico, and use of vibrant color and adventurous application methods. Wyatt has held three of his own Art Shows since 2017 and participated in two additional community art shows with the local Nicola Valley Art Gallery. He was also invited to display his artwork in Vernon in 2020 at the Kama? Aboriginal Arts Collective Exhibit.

Wyatt's unique perspective on the world is enjoyable, colorful and a breath of fresh air.

WYATT'S TRIBUTES

"Red Dress Series"

Wyatt's style of abstract expressionism allows for his unique perspective in creating this body of work and awareness In Honour of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Red Dress Series explores mixed media, the use of vibrant colors, and adventurous application methods but most importantly, it portrays the importance of raising awareness about MMIWG. There are seven different paintings as part of this series with the Red Dress Painting (three dimensional with the cloth red dresses hanging on the painting) as the key painting.

"All Children Are Loved"

Wyatt painted two Nłeʔkepmx pictograph-inspired designs called "All Children Are Loved" that have become tributes to Orange Shirt Day – Truth and Reconciliation Day.

These paintings are a dedication to the children's unmarked burial at Kamloops Indian Residential School and to survivors. The first one is inspired by the Nłeʔkepmx pictograph Sun with Children. Wyatt's family had orange t-shirts and hoodies designed which are available for sale with a percentage of the profits being donated to the Orange Shirt Society. Wyatt also made a donation to the Interior Early Years Conference held in April 2023 by providing 230 Conference Bags with one of his designs.

His second design is inspired by the Nłeʔkepmx Eagle (215 fingerprints added to represent the unmarked graves) and this design was used exclusively for the Lower Nicola Band School (Wyatt's home community) for hoodies for the students and staff.

T-shirts and hoodies are available for pre-orders

Nłeʔkepmx Sun
"All Children Are Loved"

Nłeʔkepmx Eagle Design
(currently exclusive)

"Every Child Matters"

Wyatt had the honour of doing an exclusive painting for CLBC for orange t-shirts for Truth & Reconciliation Day. His painting is entitled "Every Child Matters".

Inspirations include children on the red road; in Indigenous culture, the red road signifies a spiritual path and being connected to everything, respecting all of our relations, Mother Earth and Father Sky. It reminds us to honour our ancestors. It is walking the right path in life and believing in a power higher and greater than ourselves. Wyatt included the sky, a rainbow to honour all people from all walks of life, and mother earth. He painted pictographs in the sky. He added fingerprints along the red road to represent the children of Indian Residential Schools. ■

Q&A with artist Wyatt Sterling-Collins

Q: *What is your favorite thing that you use for making art?*
A: Paints.

Q: *Is there something you are thinking about creating next?*
A: Beautiful butterflies, wildflowers, or a pond scene with frogs on canvas.

Q: *Are there places you would like to see your artwork displayed?*
A: Nicola Valley Art Exhibition.

Q: *What is your favorite painting or series of paintings?*
A: Pictographs.

Wyatt has selected a couple of paintings to display in this article.

We have original paintings for sale, t-shirts, hoodies, and art cards and you can contact Rona Sterling-Collins at rsterlingcollins@gmail.com for more information.

Title: Aspen Forest

Title: Owl – Skalulah

Authors of Note:

FSI Celebrates Resource Parents and Authors Susan Dunnigan and Rachelle Rasolofo-Czerwinski

Life's richness lies in exploring possibilities on an uncharted, rocky path. Surprises await every traveler. When disability impacts a family, balancing life's opportunities with risks becomes far trickier. So much is at stake!

Without a Roadmap

I am a parent, retired social worker, advocate, author, and new Family Support Institute volunteer. During particularly stressful times involving my son, I crave a reprieve from disability-related demands. I need time to catch my breath, stabilize and recalibrate my compass. Can you relate?

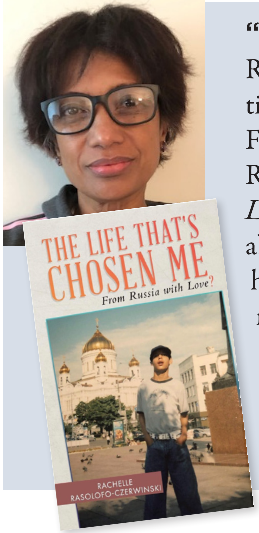
Uncertainty lives within every parent who raises a child with a disability. When suddenly flung into unpredictable terrain, control retreats, and doubt blossoms. Having strong values and a clear vision helps keep parents on course.

Challenges abound. In our less-than-welcoming world, parents feel besieged when advocating for sons and daughters. Unconditional love fuels parental determination, effort, and perseverance. Sometimes parental fuel runs on fumes—it's inevitable and can happen frequently. At least that's been my experience of 40 years as a parent.

I am eternally grateful that raising a child with a developmental disability fused my professional and personal worlds. Decades of disability-focused social work taught me much about society, systems, and people. However, the most valuable learning came from walking alongside my son. We have always pursued the elements of an ordinary life for Matt. Risks, rewards, and vulnerability are constant sidekicks. Always jockeying for position, they adeptly swap spots in a heartbeat.

All families stumble, stall and fall on their journey. While falling is easy, recovery takes energy, commitment, and grit. I sometimes compare my family's experience to a rollercoaster ride. It's been both scary and exhilarating. By routinely daring to seek better, we pulled back the veil of limitations. That revealed a world of endless possibilities. Oh, the lessons we learned!

As often happens with parents, I was encouraged to write a book about our journey. After ten years of starts and stops, *WARRIOR ANGEL Beyond Disability: A Family's Quest for Ordinary* finally became a reality. Available in print, electronic, and audio versions, the book unapologetically shares scorching honest stories about the full spectrum of our wild and worthwhile journey. No holds are barred. If curious, check out sample audio and video clip readings on my website, www.seekingordinary.com. The website also features monthly blogs that relate to disability and the quest for belonging...as one of us. Forever curious and intrigued by possibilities, I continue to explore what the landscape of life offers. How about you? ■



"The Life That's Chosen Me"

Rachelle Rasolofo-Czerwinski, one of FSI's long-time Resource Parents and recipient of our 2014 Family Support Institute Celebration of Families Resource Parent Award has published a book *"The Life That's Chosen Me"*. Her book is a family memoir about her two years in Russia with her, then-husband, and two sons, one of whom lives with multiple disabilities.

The book has received many positive reviews, one of them from Jule Hopkins, FSI recipient of the Celebration of Families award in 2023 in the Community Member category. Jule says "You tell your story so eloquently and honestly. You are an excellent writer and storyteller. I was very moved by your story. I have always admired you and if it was even possible after reading your book, I admire and respect you even more."

Rachelle's book is available on Amazon, Goodreads, Chapters-Indigo, Walmart, and others or through Rachelle directly for $20 plus shipping if applicable and she can sign it for you!

Reach out to Rachelle by email at czerwinski@hotmail.com to get your copy.

Poetic Thoughts

Collective Wisdom

Remember time before this trip began; for history informs the present.
Patience, surely, sorely needed. Grown or gathered along this unexpected path. They explore,
Foraging, finding along the trail
Sustenance to share
Inviting others to pause and join the meal.

Relationships up this rocky road shift and change. Hold hands where needed.
Perhaps a picturesque Hallmark-hazy nature walk was imagined…
Fantasy, that. Reality banishes fairy tales.
Sudden lurch.
Instant whoosh of adrenaline; assumptions were a miscalculation.

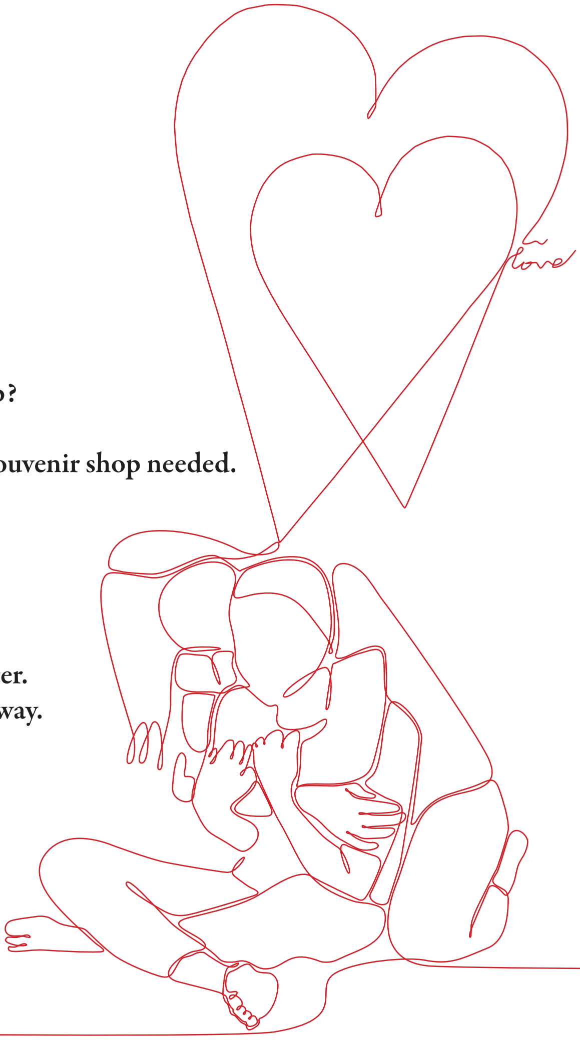
Rounding a bend reveals an incline so steep we gasp and brace:
Precipice. Dizzying. Path-side-
Formerly unseen and unforeseeable – it leans us off-level, lop-side.
Stabilizing as best we can,
Intuitively reaching out for support.

Realization that this hike will not net a bright, gushing *"Wish you here!"* to post.
Probably no postcards on this particular wilderness expedition. Maybe next trip?
Fortunate to cross paths with some who know what "been there" means, whilst
Searching for firm footing and finding footprints to follow. There is a gift. No souvenir shop needed.
Inhale.

Re-route or rest. Grace for today.
Perspectives can shift.
Familiar anxiety in unfamiliar terrain ameliorated by a hand extended.
Soft pivots may avoid hidden ankle-twisting fissures; may avert unwitting disaster.
Intentionally traveling together this rough road less traveled, as way leads on to way.

Rooted in our history and hope: collective wisdom. And willing to share it.
Present. Resourceful parents supporting parents.
Friendly
Stimulating
Interactions. Family Support Institute.

Written by FSI Resource Parent Doreen McIntyre



She said, "I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart I usually make the right decision. I've learned that even when I have pains I don't have to be one. I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug or just a friendly pat on the back. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn. I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou