



**President's Report
Annual General Meeting
November 4, 2020**

To say that the year 2020 has been a year of highs and lows is a gross understatement. By the end of February, the world knew that something very unpleasant was on its way and we had no idea of the consequences to our lives. Soon schools were closed, distance education and working from home became the norm. And we had a new hero – Dr. Bonnie Henry who asked us to Be Kind – Be Calm – Be Safe. And so most of us did and we were – mostly - thanks to her. In a confusing paradox, meetings and initiatives were first cancelled, then resurrected as virtual events, moving us from meeting in-person to phone and then videoconferencing.

For families in community living, the rest of this story is yet to be written, for the end of this pandemic is not yet in sight. We continue to be vigilant, supporting our family members, trying to keep everyone safe and active and healthy.

1. Inclusion BC Family and Self-Advocacy Advisory Retreat – Loon Lake

On February 29 and March 1, on behalf of FamilyNet, I attended this joint meeting of the Family and Self-Advocacy Advisory Committees. The following priorities were identified:

- Collaboration – the need for health, mental health, education and MCFD as well as advocacy organizations to work together
- Choice – balancing risk and self-determination and safety
- Partnerships - through advocacy training for everyone
- Safeguards – creating multi-level supports and safeguards for everyone.

As well, we discussed the recent report on the tragic death of Florence Girard, a 54-year-old woman with Down Syndrome who died in October 2018. Charges had just been laid.

We vowed to follow this situation and work to ensure that it does not happen again.

To quote a news release from Inclusion BC at that time:

We must be diligent to ensure that safeguards are in place and best practices are followed to protect the people we love and for all vulnerable people in our community. The provincial government must fund housing and support options that build meaningful relationships with neighbours and friends who can provide an advocacy voice and additional informal support/oversight. Every person has the right to a safe home, all the necessities of life, access to healthcare and the security and comfort provided by the connections of a strong, caring community.

This has been one of the major goals of FamilyNet over the past ten years – the need for multi-layered safeguards so that folks in community living can enjoy the same comfort, security and enjoyment of life that we all expect and deserve.

2. Implementation of Re-Imagining Community Inclusion

Toward the end of 2019, with the tabling of the final report of the Re-Imagining Community Inclusion initiative, individuals and their families served by community living waited patiently – and hopefully - for next steps. A small working group was formed. Chaired by Ross Chilton and Karla Vershoor, the group quickly expanded to include parents/family members. Thus FamilyNet joined the initiative.

Work came to a grinding halt as Covid-19 took over our lives. The committee morphed into focusing solely on keeping people in community living safe with all hands on deck. Weekly teleconference calls included Minister Shane Simpson, CLBC CEO Ross Chilton, CEO Michael Prince and Dr. Danielle Behn Smith, Deputy Provincial Health Officer. This initiative did an admirable job of mobilizing everyone to address concerns of families, friends, advocates and staff. We discussed and resolved many issues ranging from health and safety, Personal Protective Equipment, staffing, support for families, mental health issues. One critical result was a directive to hospitals that at least one family member could be in attendance should a person with a disability become seriously ill. Dr. Behn Smith was an amazing advocate in this situation and deserves our grateful thanks for stick handling this to a very successful conclusion. Unfortunately, the availability of mental health supports has not yet been successful. As well, families are still bearing a huge part in supporting their family members through this pandemic that has no sight in end.

3. Weekly Informational Teleconference Calls for Families and Individuals

Concurrently, weekly calls were held for anyone to dial in. At times there were hundreds of people on the calls being kept informed on the community living

response to the pandemic by Ross Chilton, Michael Prince and Dr. Daniele Behn-Smith.

4. CLBC Round Table on Aging – September 17 and 18

Eventually this round table was resurrected from its April 1 cancellation. Participants in the videoconferences included every ministry, agency and advocacy organization in the province – 50 people in all – with the exception of the Ministry of Health. Key themes that emerged include the need for:

- Safeguards
- Creative residential options
- Collaboration with all the players, especially Ministry of Health

It seems that not much has changed over the years.

5. Progress on Hold for the Election

When the writ was dropped, all planning and committee work came to a halt. We look forward to picking up where we left off and moving forward very soon.

6. Conclusion

The year 2020 started off well, and then became the challenge of our lifetimes. The Ministry and CLBC is to be commended for a very creditable response to the coronavirus – along with families, service providers and advocates. We hope now that work will continue, with greater emphasis on supporting the mental health well-being of people in community living as we go into a long winter with Covid cases rising.

7. Grateful Thanks to the Honourable Shane Simpson

We are very grateful for the tenure of the Honourable Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development. He has done an outstanding job of breathing new life into community living and leading us all to a place where we might have an opportunity to realize some of our hopes and dreams for our sons, daughters and family members. We are very sorry that the Minister has chosen to retire from politics.

Linda Derkach, President
BC FamilyNet Society