



**President's Report
Annual General Meeting
November 26, 2021**

As the year 2020 came to a close with the realization that Covid 19 would be with us for at least another year, we welcomed 2021 with the miraculous news that a vaccine would soon be available to us all. Our rather bleak winter now had a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel.

In community living, the Reimagining Community Inclusion initiative was back on track after the provincial election hiatus. Simultaneously, monthly teleconference updates from CLBC and Public Health kept us informed on safety for all, vaccinations and keeping folks happy and mentally resilient.

Though few of us have ventured much beyond our front gate and the grocery store, through the magic of Zoom and teleconference the year 2021 has been filled with planning, informing, advocating and creating relationships that will take us beyond the pandemic and onto a hopeful new future.

Here are some of the activities in which FamilyNet has participated.

1. CLBC Covid - 19 Teleconference Information Sessions

In January, information and support continued for the benefit of everyone in community living through teleconference calls with Ross Chilton, CLBC CEO, Michael Prince, CLBC Board Chair and Dr. Danielle Behn Smith, Provincial Deputy Health Officer. Upwards of 100 people on each call had questions answered and factual information provided. We were reminded that the goals remain the same: protect the most vulnerable from Covid - 19 and the health care system from becoming overwhelmed.

The vaccine is truly a miracle, and over the next few months we learned how this protection would be made available to all British Columbians. Seniors in congregate care would be first in line followed by folks made vulnerable due to their compromised immune system. In January, we knew that Dr. Bonnie Henry was well aware of the vulnerability of people with Down Syndrome and that an accommodation for these folks and others in community living would be coming soon.

Despite many challenges, I think it can be said that the public health system – and in particular Dr. Daniele Behn Smith - served folks in community living very well. Thanks go to advocates within and outside the system, making sure that the needs of our folks were understood and addressed.

In addition to health supports, CLBC promoted flexibility in the provision of community supports, allowing family members to be paid as support workers during the time when congregating in community living programs would have been very dangerous.

Clearly, the policies of CLBC and Public Health have contributed immensely to the safety and resilience of folks served by community living.

2. Reimagining Community Inclusion Planning Group

After a considerable hiatus due to the pandemic and the provincial election at the end of 2020, the work of this planning group resumed in January with a review of where we are and where we want to go.

As the FamilyNet representative on this committee, I asked for a statement of values or principles that would be part of all activities, initiatives, goals and objectives arising from the RCI report and its work, including:

- Safeguards
- Easy access to the system
- Choice – Self-determination
- Open communication
- Creative and common-sense approaches to challenges and change
- Respect for families and parents

The Planning Group identified four areas of greatest need and potential benefit with which to focus our efforts, and members chose the working group in which they wished to participate:

- Employment
- Housing
- Indigenous Supports and Services
- Health and Mental Health Services

The plan for 2021 was to utilize the Theory of Change model to identify outcomes, activities, indicators and actions that would be required to move us toward the ultimate goal of Community Inclusion. The membership of each Working Group

was augmented by others in the field who had much to offer. We met weekly from April to the end of June.

On October 14, 2021, the Inclusion BC Summit held a detailed reporting-out from the four Working Groups.

Some personal observations from the 16 meetings attended:

- The pandemic has reminded us of the importance of home. Folks who were in good living situations did okay during Covid, but folks living alone suffered isolation and loneliness. As Dr. Bonnie Henry said, “We are all in the same storm but not in the same boat.”
- Technology helped to keep us connected and safe to a significant degree.
- We need to proactively work with community partners such as municipalities, town councils, non-profit housing organizations, BCHMC, developers and all levels of government and ministries.
- We became more aware of the need for good health services including dental and mental health supports. And we need to develop better relationships with local hospitals.
- We need to document successes now and provide road maps for others. For instance, there are many examples of families creating inclusive housing for their sons and daughters, often in partnership with agencies, funding bodies and other families. Documenting these success stories can help others achieve their dreams as well.
- We need to identify those things that are easiest to accomplish and move quickly in order to have some early wins. For instance, Portable Rent Subsidies from BCHMC worked well in the past. They allow individuals to rent an existing apartment and move when things change as they almost certainly will - a much easier and vastly quicker solution than the glacial speed involved with the planning and building of inclusive housing – which is also necessary if we are to achieve our goal of accessible and affordable housing for all.

Important Issues to Address:

- **Funding:** Is there a need to increase government funding or is there an ability to be flexible with the funding we now have?
- **Safeguards:** Regardless of how creative and forward-thinking our plans, safeguards remain a critical component for folks in order to have a safe and happy life.

- **Care Coordination:** In the past, one of the roles of the Social Worker was the coordination of care. Individuals knew that their Social Worker could be contacted for any facet of their support. This role needs to be reinstated.
- **Continuing Oversight and Evaluation:** Now that there is an extensive and detailed plan, a body constituted from members of the working and planning groups needs to continue to measure progress and ensure coordination of activities. Gaps and overlaps in service are far too common in any enterprise. *(Note: Since the writing of this report, many of the issues above have been discussed and will be addressed in the CLBC plan to move forward.)*

3. Inclusion BC Family Advisory Committee

This advisory brings together family members of teens and seniors from all areas of the province along with staff of related organizations to provide input and feedback to Inclusion BC on the issues that are important and how they might be addressed.

Some topics addressed include:

- The lack of mental health services in BC and the critical need that exists
- Planning for the Inclusion BC Conference scheduled for May 2022 in Surrey and key priorities such as Health and Mental Health services, First Nations, Housing and Employment
- Reporting on current issues being addressed by staff of Inclusion BC
- Planning for Aging – a topic of concern for all families but one that rarely is satisfactorily addressed; some families have tentative plans in place; others don't know where to begin.

4. Conclusion

The year 2021 has been one of discussion and planning and hoping for better things in community living while keeping our loved ones safe, happy, engaged and resilient.

The goals and intent of the Re-imagining Community Inclusion initiative are moving forward with enthusiasm, good will and competence from all participants in the process.

We have some very good ideas for where we want to go, and a strong and respectful partnership among families, service providers, advocacy organizations and government to help us get there.

As always, the BC FamilyNet continues to support:

- Multi-level safeguards for everyone served by community living

- Care Coordination to ensure no one slips through the cracks
- Easy access to the system and flexibility when change is needed
- Open communication among all partners.

And finally, as family members who have been involved in community living for up to 60 years, we know that much of what has been discussed and debated is not really new. We have wanted and worked toward all these things for our sons, daughters, sisters, brothers and friends for a long, long time. So what's different? Significant progress appears to be on the horizon and the commitment of the Ministry and CLBC is evident, promising and much appreciated.

Linda Derkach, President
November 26, 2021