

For Everything There is a Season

by Al Etmanski

Helen Keller, an inspiration to generations of North Americans, said it best. *'Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.'*

For the last two years, British Columbians who care about persons with disabilities and their families have embarked on their own daring adventure - to reform, no that word is not strong enough, to transform our community living system of funding and programs. When the transformation is complete it will catapult British Columbia to the front of the line in its commitment to the full engagement of our friends and family members with disabilities in community life. International observers confirm this is one of the most progressive initiatives on behalf of persons with disabilities and their families anywhere and will set a new standard for all governments to live up to.

The changes occurring within the Community Living sector of the Ministry of Child and Family Development have at least two unique features:

- 1.** The vision and values reflect the wisdom, insights, and experiences of our movement. It is inspired by a view of a good life, of having individuals with disabilities recognized as full contributing citizens.
- 2.** It was proposed and is being directed by individuals, families, service providers in an unparalleled partnership with government.

First, a bit of history. Family leaders began preparing for the eventuality of a provincial Liberal government, 4 years ago. They studied 'reform' oriented governments in Ontario and Alberta to understand how to work with the new administration. A careful analysis of their policies, suggested a change in governance was destined for the Ministry. It was also clear the new government would be looking for solutions that 'got government out of the way' and promoted community innovation and accountability. Further, that they would be amenable to funding solutions that would enhance the capacity of individuals and families to direct their own solutions.

We realized we had a choice — to wait until the new government came up with their own plans to achieve these objectives or to engage with them and inject our vision and values into the core review process. We chose the latter calculating that change was inevitable. The real choice was between which vision, our vision or that of the bureaucracy, would be implemented.

For years, as advocates we have petitioned, criticized, proposed, implored and urged successive governments to listen to us. 'Individuals and families know best.' 'Please take our advice.' 'Just give us the tools and we'll make the system more flexible and accountable.'

This time somebody in government listened: Gordon Hogg. If you were to take a look at the Minister's policy documents written in the last two years, you would read about his:

- vision of the full participation of individuals with disabilities in society
- respect for the ingenuity and resilience of individuals and families and
- commitment to remove government roadblocks and allocate funding that enhances the capacity of individuals and families to direct their own solutions.

These are not documents that characterize individuals and families as victims or as needy and incapable. They acknowledge our resilience and anticipate the role of government to supplement or enhance rather than interfere and supplant.

However, words are not enough.

Consider some of the issues the Interim Authority is working on:

- More choice, flexibility and accountability to individuals and families including Individualized Funding for those who choose it;
- Structural reform to ensure regular and meaningful input by individuals and families in the governance of the new system;
- A province wide system of individual and family support offering independent planning support;
- Provincial tax credits that properly recognize the extraordinary costs associated with disability and the contributions by family members to those costs;
- One system for children and adults with developmental disabilities;
- An end to waitlists; and
- Service innovation including home ownership and meaningful initiatives to address the needs and concerns of senior parents.

Since they are still in the planning stage, the Interim Authority does not yet have the authority to implement. However, the very fact these issues are still being aggressively pursued is a major accomplishment.

However, their biggest achievement has been to minimize the impact of restraint and funding cutbacks on our community living sector. At a time when courthouses and hospitals have closed; and services in other sectors have been reduced, our leaders in the Interim Authority have been successful in retaining critical resources for community living.

There is a time for advocacy. And there is a time for giving thanks. PLAN would like to express our admiration and appreciation to all those associated with this unprecedented initiative. Thanks, first of all, to the Honourable Gordon Hogg for his moral and political leadership. In addition, the Board of the Interim Authority deserves our praise for putting their reputations on the line; committing hundreds of voluntary hours a month; remaining firm on financial matters and for keeping our dreams alive.

Helen Keller wasn't naive. She endured more than her fair share of bumps and knocks. She knew the danger of doing nothing. Our community living leaders are not naïve either — they live in the real world. Aside from their personal connection to individuals with

disabilities, they carry our hopes and concerns on their shoulders. They take their responsibilities very seriously and with great courage. They know they must remain vigilant and bold and they must stay engaged.

When the stakes are high, so are the risks. Fortunately individuals and families, know all about risks. We know the risk of doing nothing. And we know adventure in this instance is preferable to doing nothing.*

“And the day came when to remain tight in the bud, was more painful than the risk it took to bloom”
Anais Nin

If you would like to...

...Thank members of the Board of the Interim Authority you can locate their addresses at: Interim Authority for Community Living B.C. at: **www.interimauthorityclbc.ca**

or phone:

Vancouver: 604.660.3450 or

Toll free: 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to the Interim Authority for Community Living B.C. at **604.660.3450**

...Thank Minister Gordon Hogg:

His email address is **Gordon.Hogg@gems3.gov.bc.ca**

Telephone: 250.387.9699

Facsimile: 250.387.9722

Mailing Address:

PO Box 9057 Stn Prov Govt Victoria V8W 9E2

You may copy your correspondence to the Premier.

His email address is **Premier@gov.bc.ca**

Telephone: 250.387.1715

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Mailing Address:

PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E1

...Additional information contact:

Community Living Coalition **www.communitylivingcoalition.bc.ca**

Ministry of Children and Family Development – Community Living Change Site:

<http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/change/cla.htm>