

A message from the Editor *Jeff Moulins*

The focus of this issue of VelaVision is on the history of Vela Microboards: looking back to our beginnings; where we've been; where we are; and, looking forward to the adventures ahead.

Through my involvement in the Community Living Coalition, then as a board member with Interim Authority for Community Living, I have had a hand in the formation of Community Living B.C. I could not have accomplished this without the support of my Microboard.

Another major theme for Vela and the Microboards is the historically positive influence we have experienced here in British Columbia and internationally. This issue of VelaVision includes a map showing where Microboards are located in British Columbia and our current affiliates around the world.

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I often wonder what my life would have looked like without a Microboard. I'm sure it would have turned out much differently. My Microboard was one of the three original Microboards that was part of the 1989 pilot project. Thanks to Vela, and my participation in the pilot project, I have a great life.

My Microboard is so much more than a group of people that help me manage funding for services. They are my family and friends. We have fun together. We provide support to each other. These relationships are what provide the 'great' in my great life.

Now my brother and I work together in our own media consulting business. Other people with Microboards are going to school, volunteering or working in their communities. Many of the individuals with Microboards have positively influenced and/or changed the community in which they live. They are supported emotionally and physically to do this by the members of their Vela Microboard.

There are nearly 450 Microboards in our province. Further afield there are Microboards connected to Vela in Alta., Sask., Nova Scotia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Western Australia, Northern Ireland, and the Rep. of Ireland.

I have had the opportunity to speak in many communities in B.C., and beyond, about my experiences with my Microboard. It has been a wonderful experience meeting many of you and learning from each other. Other people have been able to tell their stories in other places. We all have the chance to be ambassadors for Microboards in our communities. Without the Vela "pilot project" Microboards might not have even existed in British Columbia. We would have never been able to influence services and supports in positive and empowering ways that all of us now take for granted.

Personally, I like to take opportunities to discuss the positive impact my Microboard has had in my life. This past



summer I went on a holiday to visit my mother and sister in the Eastern Kootenays. My mother asked me to talk with a young man in her hometown about Vela Microboards, especially mine. I told him what it had meant to me and my family. I'm always glad to have such opportunities.

To keep moving forward Vela, and all of us connected to Vela Microboards, must continue to communicate with people who we think might be interested in creating a Microboard and are interested

in making a contribution in their communities.

It is important to listen to both the person's words and their actions. What a person does can be more telling than words alone. Some people understand the philosophy and intent of a Microboard, however, there are still some that just do not get it. It's our job to help them understand what it means to each of us.

When we first started way back in 1989, even my brother thought Microboards would not last and it was too good to be true, but now he sings there praises!

The world for people with disabilities has become far more welcoming. I know Vela and the Microboards played a very important part in that change.

I look forward to thinking about what our future could bring!

The supports Vela offers to make the dream happen *Shelley Nessman*



One of the things that I have learned in my years supporting families is that often people's capacity to dream has been dulled by years of disappointment and having to settle when it comes to supports for their son or daughter.

I love playing the role of "Dream Ignitor"!

As a facilitator at Vela – I love playing the role of "Dream Ignitor"! When I am explaining the Microboard concept – people quickly see the potential to have some control and influence on what happens for their loved one and the sleeping dreamer starts to awaken!

Microboards can help people get back in touch with their creativity and give them the tools to make their dreams start to become a reality.

Planning can also help to start making dreams a reality. One planning tool we often use is PATH and this can be another step in visioning and then taking it to the next level by guiding people to make concrete and tangible plans to work toward achieving their dreams.

PATH and other tools that support person centred thinking lets us know we are not alone in our journey and that there are many people and resources around the table and in the community for us to tap into! It gives us reasonable steps to take and a timeline to take them in. Any good planning tool should do this!

The most powerful support that Vela utilizes is encouraging Microboards to network with other boards. By talking to each other-the collective wisdom that is held begins to take on momentum and come to the surface! We can all learn from each other as well as plant seeds of dreams for each other. There is such strength in our stories and our learning and in gleaning good ideas is from each other we are able to dream bigger and richer and better!

If you would like to connect, give us a call! We have many Microboard members who are ready and willing to share!



Microboards connecting at the 2006 Annual holiday pot luck dinner and dance



Recently I had someone say to me, "Well I guess you won't need to create Microboards once Individualized Funding is available in B.C."

I think this speaks to the lack of understanding about the real value in Vela Microboards. While many Microboards may request funds to support an individual that is not where a Vela Microboard's primary value is found.

The primary value lies in the relationships created through the formation of the individual's Microboard. The way those relationships support and sustain each person to have a self directed life, creating reciprocal relationships, and ensuring those relationships will sustain the person through the many changes and challenges faced in his or her life.

There are now about 450 Vela Microboards around British Columbia.

In the past six months alone, Vela has supported the development of over 50 Microboards. That is truly amazing when you reflect on the size of our team.

Our paid staff consists of three facilitator (one working part time), a ten hour per week administrative support staff and the Executive Director.

Needless to say we rely heavily on our board of directors for guidance and direct support. As an organization we could not have accomplished all that we

have if it were not for the dedication of this small, hard working team.

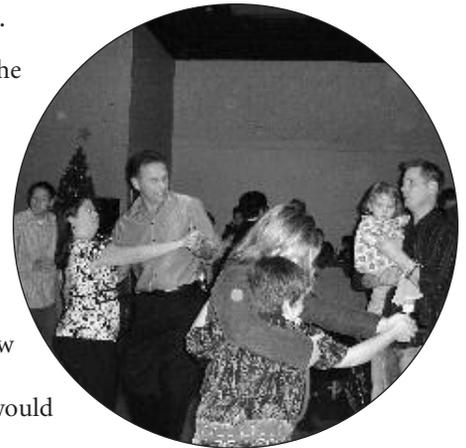
But we are only one part of the equation. The 'work' of creating and breathing life into each of the Vela Microboards is completed the individual members sitting on each Microboard. Vela's board and staff provide guidance, hands on assistance and tools. You as individuals sitting on Microboards provide the support and relationships that assist each individual to realize their dreams and direct their future. This is a tremendous contribution.

The focus of this newsletter is on our collective history and provides some reflection on examples of the accomplishments realized by all of us, Vela's staff, board, and most importantly the many individuals on Vela Microboards.

As mentioned one of the strengths of our organization is the hands on direct support provided by of all our staff and board members. However, this also creates one of our biggest challenges.

We are all busy 'doing' the work supporting the development of Vela Microboards. This doesn't leave us much time for reflection on the outcome of our collective efforts. For example, writing articles for the newsletter requires time and focus not often afforded our staff team.

I would like to invite any of you that may have an interest, talent, or curiosity about how to create a newsletter to contact us at Vela. Please join the VelaVision editing team. We would greatly value your time and talents. You can reach us at Vela's office (604) 575-2588 or via email at: info@Microboard.org.



Randy Wilson and his daughter Roxanne, Amanda Stark and her son Derek, John Sheehan and his daughter Sarah dancing to "My Girl"



Lori Emanuels, Shelley Nessum and Linda Perry at the YWCA 2006 Women of Distinction Awards where Linda was shortlisted for the Community Leadership award.

I'll never forget when I first heard about Microboards. Our local parent support group had been successful in obtaining funding for a project to forge connections between disability groups in our community. Linda Perry was the facilitator. At one meeting, Linda told me about Microboards and asked if I would be interested in facilitating Microboards on Vancouver Island. You can bet I was interested!

Jennifer was only sixteen at the time, but we were already planning for her life after high school. I realized I was tired of helping her to do things she enjoyed like cooking, doing arts and crafts and exploring new interests. After all, I'd been helping her for years. I was stale and she deserved a support person who was excited about what she wanted to do and had the energy I no longer possessed.

We wanted to give Jennifer the opportunity to experience life as a young adult away from her family, but couldn't figure out a way to do it, because of her extensive physical and health care needs. As Jen's health declined, she would need more and more specialized supports. There were no homes in our community or anywhere else for that matter, that could provide the level of nursing support she needed. So, when Linda told me about Microboards, I could immediately see how we could develop the specialized support she would need to live on her own. I realized that working for Vela would give me the background I needed to develop supports for Jen.

We really didn't know what we were doing! It took a long time to come up with a plan we could all live with. Jen's sister, Jessica, was afraid her staff wouldn't listen to her. Board members worried about medical

decision making, when I was not available. And, Jennifer herself was not happy about moving out. Her fear was certainly justified.

I'm sure many of you can identify with the frustration of not knowing what to do or how to move forward with an idea. What a relief when Board members start making suggestions and you realize they have some good ideas too. All of a sudden you realize that maybe, together, we can figure

Jen's roommate had very different needs than hers, but similar interests. This worked out well for both of them. Jennifer had one to one day support and Joanna attended a typical day program. Jen had nursing staff who assessed her health needs each day and were on call to her Licensed Practical Nurses the remaining part of the day. Her staff worked shorter hours so they wouldn't tire out providing her demanding physical care.



Joanna, Jennifer and Bonnie welcoming friends to their home

Jennifer and Joanna lived together for three years before Jen passed away. She was happy in her own home, able to do the things she wanted, when she wanted. She learned to trust her nurses and they in turn learned to listen her, even though her communication style was difficult to understand.

Jennifer and my relationship changed as well. I was tired of doing some of the day-to-day chores that are necessary when a person is totally dependent. Now that someone else was there to do that, we could spend time together shopping, going to the beach or just hanging out - things that previously required a great deal of effort or were just impossible without extra support. It was so odd to go shopping and walk beside her, instead of pushing her from behind. It was great to visit her and have her serve me tea and cookies, that she had made herself.

this out! Our ideas didn't always work, but I knew I could count on Board members to help find another solution when things didn't turn out as expected. That's the strength of having a Microboard!

Jennifer lived in her own home with a roommate, Joanna, a friend from high school. Unlike most group homes that place people with similar needs together,

Microboards have a history of breaking the mold and doing things that haven't been done before. Vela Microboards all over BC are still doing it today, putting in place supports that meet their family's unique needs.

We all have stories to tell that speak of daring and innovation. Please share your stories with Vela and inspire others.



Vela Microboard Association of BC has spearheaded many initiatives throughout the province, benefiting not only Vela Microboards but the greater communities in which we reside.

Vela has worked alongside numerous service providers to ensure that, if a Microboard chooses to subcontract with a like-minded agency this request is honoured. Cooperation between families, Vela and agencies helps to strengthen communities by providing local opportunities for employment and community involvement. This has huge economic benefits. Langley Association for Community Living, Spectrum Society, and Richmond Society for Community Living are examples of organizations that have worked with Vela to enable self-advocates and their families to meet their needs.

Speaking of communities, Linda Perry, our Executive Director has worked extensively throughout BC presenting a workshop entitled 'Families as Employers'. With the choice of individualized funding on the horizon this presentation is extremely relevant and beneficial to families. One of the advantages to community is that the person receiving supports is able to reside in

their home town regardless of how remote the region. The cost savings to funders is considerable and the ability for families to manage services and supports is empowering.

Vela's Plain Language Guide to acts, codes, regulations and standards for Vela Microboards is another example of a collaborative effort. This guide has given families a valuable tool in order to walk through the myriad of legal documents. The response and interest from various organizations and Government has been positive.

Vela has had the opportunity to work with a number of groups to assist in the development of their strategic planning. We always learn from one another and this has afforded us all with the chance to network and determine where we can work together on common interests.

Representatives from Vela's board and staff, along with PLAN and F.S.I. representatives were honoured to have the opportunity to meet with the Provincial Caucus in Victoria. We discussed issues on the forefront of families and self-advocates minds.

The work facilitated by Ms. Perry in B.C. and beyond brought Vela and the Province of British Columbia international attention and recognition around what constitutes best practice in self directed supports. This helps to ensure that Microboards will remain a viable choice for many individuals and families in the years to come.



Cathy Shannon getting into the Christmas spirit

Lori Emanuels, Linda Perry and Debbie Wilson visiting with moms from Western Australia in Vancouver to learn more about Vela and Microboards



Introduction

It's hard to believe that the first Vela Microboards began their journey nearly 18 years ago.

Many people connected to newer Vela Microboards haven't had the opportunity to learn about our collective history. It is interesting to see the bigger picture and get an overview of the role each of us plays in creating a wonderful, diverse group of Vela Microboards.

Vela Microboards are unique in the nature and focus of supports. Each Microboard has created a customized personal network involving family and friends and in partnership with an individual with special needs, works to assist the person to realize their dreams using principles founded in person-centred thinking and supports.

Planning for Microboards

But how did this all start? Vela Microboard Association started out in the mid 1980's as a non-profit housing society then known as Vela Housing Society. Vela Housing Society provided safe, comfortable, rental apartments to people with disabilities at affordable rates.

In the mid to late 1980's Vela's board of directors realized is that many of the people living in the apartments were in the community but not 'of' the community. As a group of volunteers we began to look for other ways to support meaningful relationships with a focus on individual strengths mutual supports.

The board spent time researching new and innovative work from around North America, Australia and Europe. We learned about a small initiative in Manitoba and contacted David Wetherow, the man responsible for that work.

Through discussions with David, Vela's board learned about the first two fledgling Microboards in Manitoba. After getting a grasp on the Manitoba experience, Vela's board members felt they had hit on an idea that would fit with the philosophy of our organization.

The board then spent time developing a foundation and philosophy for the Microboard



*Shanti Miller and members of her Microboard
visiting the set of Corner Gas*

experience in British Columbia. Vela proposed a small project to the then Services to the Handicapped Branch (STTH) within the Ministry of Health.

Year One

The emphasis of the project was to create networks of family and friends that would assist individuals considered "extended care" eligible to address their needs while also working to realize their hopes and dreams. This was all done through a commitment to customizing supports and services.

In collaboration with some forward thinking STTH staff, the first project to support the development of Microboards was launched in 1989.

The four people that signed on to be part of the pilot project were truly pioneers in the Microboard movement.

Shanti Miller and her Microboard, the Shanti Miller Friendship Society, created the first Vela Microboard. This was also the first Microboard established for a person with a complex dual diagnosis.

Jeff Moulins and Janet Drews created the first Microboard for a couple that was in the process of marrying. Their funding came from two different branches of government and they set precedent by creating a successful example for journal transfers.

Stephanie Brunner's Microboard was the first for a person with complex health care needs. They successfully assisted Stephanie in developing a customized communication system and in moving from the lower mainland to a community in the Kootenays, creating one of the first situations demonstrating successful portability of funding.

Each of these individuals and their Microboards had dreams and hopes that were far beyond the service world. Through the support of their Microboards each was able to create the life they wished for. This included enriching their worlds through friendship and natural relationships.

In those early years I was Project Coordinator, was often heard to say "We make our path by walking". This truly summarized the initial process.

Often progress required breaking new ground, challenging policies or procedures. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the three original boards, without their ground breaking work, our subsequent successes would not have been possible.

Year Two

Through word of mouth, the success of the original three Microboards spread through the community. The Microboards develop in year two of the project were for people and families that were drawn to the concept. They came to Vela requesting assistance to create Microboards.

This began an history of Vela Microboards being created through a process of attraction instead of promotion.

Year Three

In our third year, our work went Provincial. On Vancouver Island Jeanette Holder and her daughter Jennifer had heard about the experiences of Microboards in the lower mainland. They contacted me to explore the possibility of creating a Microboard for Jennifer. Their story is included in another article in this newsletter.

At the same time, Sherry and Holly McDonald from Fort St. John had begun to discuss their hopes and dreams for Holly as she was planning to leave high school. The local representative from the Services to the Handicapped Branch, in hearing their hopes for the future, said it sounded like they were talking about a Microboard.

I took what would become the first of many visits to the Northeastern part of B.C. to begin the development of Holly's Microboard.

Moving Further Afield

Through word of mouth the concept began to take off. Over the next few years Microboards were created in virtually every region of the Province.

Word began to spread beyond B.C. I was invited to speak in other provinces and several U.S. states.

Back in the lower mainland a strong group of parents in the Tri-Cities area began to look at developing Microboards for their children. Among this group was a family that was planning to return to Northern Ireland with their daughters, once they graduated from high school.

At the end of a planning session the Mom, Val McCarthy approached me and said once she was settled in Northern Ireland she would like to set up a Microboard for her daughter.

I, thinking I was being polite, responded 'be sure and give a call when you feel ready'. As I would learn, Val is a very determined person. She called about six months later. That began a seven-year relationship in Northern Ireland. This led to the creation of Vela Microboards Northern Ireland, Vela's first affiliate.

Today

As of the fall of 2006, there are between 400 and 450 Microboards in B.C.

Vela has affiliates in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Virginia. Currently there are two other U.S. states, a group in England and another in Western Australia with whom Vela is in discussion about affiliation. Vela has been expanding our supports. By

providing the workshop, Families as Employers, Vela has been assisting many families that are either currently accessing forms of direct payments and/or are considering accessing individualized funding.

Vela has provided information to other Canadian provinces several U.S. states, Holland, England Scotland, Italy and Germany

And of course we continue to assist Microboards in B.C. This would not be possible without our many partners.

While demand for our supports continues to grow, we often find ourselves being challenged by financial constraints as our funding does not match our growth. That said, we are very grateful to those that provide us with ongoing financial support.

Community Living B.C. provides much of our funding for those that they serve. We are very appreciative of this financial support.

We are also able to help Microboards that are not served by CLBC through gaming revenue. We are very fortunate to have a three-year license for bingo funds. Vela also relies heavily on membership and donations.

Twenty percent of our funding is currently generated through membership and donations. Without these contributions we could not manage our growth.

Your Roll

The tremendous growth and development of Vela Microboards would not have been possible without those involved with individual Microboards. You are the single most valued resource.

The relationships at the heart of each Microboard are also the relationships that make us collectively unique, innovative, community leaders.

Individuals and their Microboards teach us all, inspire us and motivate us. We are all stronger because of our relationships with each other. As a result our network continues to grow and remains strong.



Sherry and Holly McDonald at the 2005 Vela Microboard conference

Julie McCarthy and her Microboard, the first Microboard in Northern Ireland



Thank you to all our Funders & Donors

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Vela would also like to express heartfelt appreciation to Gabrielle Miller star of CTV comedies Corner Gas and Robson Arms for her ongoing assistance and enthusiasm as spokesperson on behalf of Vela and Microboards. Thanks as well to the cast and crew of Corner Gas for their support.



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Yes, I wish to become a member of Vela Microboard Association:

- I enclose \$25.00 for a non-voting Annual Family or Individual Membership
- I enclose \$35.00 for a voting Annual Family or Individual Membership
- I enclose \$ _____, which is what I can afford
- We enclose \$100.00 for a business, Organization, or non-profit Society Membership

I would like to make a donation to support the Vela Microboard Association:
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All donations of \$10.00 or more will be sent a tax receipt to the address provided above.
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