



**A message from the Co-Editor** *Maria Glaze*

*Greetings Everyone!*

The holidays are a time of year when our family often acknowledges organizations and people who make a difference to our daughter and family. We might do that through making a donation, a gift of appreciation, or by hosting a special celebration and inviting friends and community partners. It's a time of year we find ourselves reflecting on the amazing people that are an integral part of our daughter's wonderful life. We hope you enjoy this issue of VelaVision where we share stories about people, partnerships, and collaboration.

posting and find out! Our staff and volunteers at Vela have been posting useful information for people who are interested in Microboards and Individualized Funding. We are enjoying our partnership with our Facebook friends through the "likes," comments, and stories. Through our Vela page, you'll find out about upcoming workshops and events, along with helpful tips on topics such as being an employer, emergency preparedness, and even a few inspirational stories and videos. You can find us at <http://www.facebook.velacanada.com>. Join us and please feel free to hit the "share" button to circulate Vela's postings with your Facebook friends.

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Why is our Vancouver Island Vela Facilitator, Jeanette Holder, sitting in this container? "Like" us on Facebook, view the October 15th

We are very close to announcing our new Vela website. We'll have general information about Vela, Vela Microboards, and Individualized Funding, and will have links to brochures that can be downloaded. We'll also have important documents and resources for Vela Members. If you haven't become a Vela Member yet, fill out the membership form on the back of this newsletter.

*All of us at Vela send you our best wishes for a wonderful holiday season.*

Sincerely,  
*Maria Glaze*  
Maria Glaze, Co-Editor



*Caitlin was born and raised in the Kootenays and moved to the Lower Mainland to complete her degree in Child Development Psychology. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends whenever*

*possible. Working with people with disabilities all her life, Caitlin started out by helping with her disabled foster siblings. In more recent years, she has worked for individuals that have their own Microboards, giving her a deeper understanding of the difference that support and service can make in the lives of individuals living with special needs and their families. Caitlin began working for us in 2008 in the Lower Mainland.*



*Happy 40th Birthday Jeff!!!*

On November 17, 2012, I had the privilege of attending Jeffrey Lafortune's 40th birthday celebration. It was a wonderful afternoon filled with catching up with old friends and celebrating life. We were entertained by many incredible individuals who shared their talents to honour this big milestone in Jeff's life through song, dance, and reliving memories from the past.

There were tears, there was laughter, and there was extraordinary joy brought about by coming together to celebrate an amazing individual, and his equally amazing mother Cathy, who have both come so far and surpassed everyone's expectation of what Jeff's life would ever be. When Jeff was born, it was into a room full of people whose faces immediately signalled something was out of place, and yet no one would tell Cathy what was wrong. After he was diagnosed as having a disability and was given a shortened life expectancy, Cathy was told it would be best to simply put him into an institution to live out his short life in the manner that individuals with severe disabilities were expected to live at that time.

Cathy did go to look at the institution they had suggested and came back from that visit declaring she would never put anything she loved, much less anyone, in a place like that. Cathy was determined to keep Jeff at home and as an integral part of their family unit. It was because of this determination that Cathy and Jeff became part of a small group of advocates who pushed the government to find alternatives for individuals with complex health care needs and developmental disabilities who wanted to be in their communities rather than in an institution.

Cathy and Jeff, along with this group, were one of the driving factors in creating a small department within the Ministry of Health that was often referred to as 'The Branch.' This department was responsible for finding solutions to help individuals, such as Jeff, with complex and high care needs to remain in or return to their homes and communities. The work they put in helped to lay the framework that we have today that supports many families in keeping their loved ones at home.

A big part of Jeff's solution to keep him at home was his Microboard, The Jeffrey Lafortune Support Society. It was established in 1992 by a small group of his family and friends in order to assist Jeff in obtaining his best life. With the support of his Microboard, Jeff has been able to remain at home, remain healthy, and most importantly, remain happy. His life has not been without its share of challenges, but those have been overshadowed by the numerous triumphs that have also been a part of Jeff's life.

Jeff has accomplished so much more than anyone ever expected he would and has made a deep impact on the lives of countless others. Indeed, I would not be working within the disabled community for an organization like Vela if it had not been for knowing Jeff and growing up alongside him and other extraordinary individuals with special needs. It has been my experience that most people within the disabled community have joined because their lives have been touched by someone

extraordinary who has been labeled as 'disabled.'

Within his own community Jeff plays a vital roll at Selkirk College, where he received an Honorary Diploma in Human Services in 2011 to recognize his contribution and accomplishments at the school. He has worked as 'co-professor' with instructor Jane Green in the Classroom and Community Support program since 1998, where he welcomes a new group of students every year and exposes them to what disability can look like and how powerful these individuals can be. Beginning at Selkirk in 1993, he participated in Social Service Worker program classes before the CCSW program came into being.

Jeff's life has been full of love and happiness. He has contributed more to those around him and his community than he will ever realize. He and his family have set an excellent example of the kind of rich and fulfilling life an individual with a disability can live when given the opportunity and dedication to fight for a good life. Happy 40th Birthday Jeff! Thanks for everything you have given to me and to others by enriching our lives!



*Sisters Teri and Michelle share a special moment with Jeff...he thanks them on behalf of his guests for the amazing decorations and food!*

Cathy and Jeff would like to extend heartfelt thanks to the many people who made Jeff's Fabulous 40th so special by attending, contributing, sending greetings and gifts, etc. Special thanks to our entertainers, including former Vela President Cyndi Dillen Pelletier!



*Spellbinding*

Cyndi's breathtaking version of "I Can Only Imagine," Kyla's amazing original song inspired by Norm and Emma's Credo for Support, Mike and Ben's original video musical presentation, and Annalisa's awesome dancing all uplifted our guests!

We were so happy to see so many of the people who have helped to make our community a welcoming and safe place for Jeff in so many ways, including educators, advocates, those elected to serve, classmates, dear friends, and of course, all the members of our wonderful Microboard. Thank you, Norm, Larry, Kris, Argon, Tanya, Teri, and Michelle!

A caring community makes all the difference!!! All cash gifts will go to a Selkirk College bursary fund in Jeff's name, ultimately to assist a worthy student in the Classroom and Community Support Worker (CCSW) program each year.



*Inspirational*



*Terry is the parent of two children, Drew and Bree-Anna. Terry lives in Prince George with her husband, Gord, and daughter Bree who has Cerebral Palsy. To meet Bree-Anna's many issues Terry has helped create and*

*become involved in many groups and organization over the years. These include local groups such as Parents Helping Parents; PG Therapeutic Riding Society; Open Doors (for students with special needs) at the College of New Caledonia; and Northern CLBC Council. Provincially she has volunteered with the Family Support Institute; the evolution to CLBC; Advisory Council to CLBC; and the Family Focus Society, to mention a few. Terry joined our team in 2008 to work with families in Northern BC.*

In the middle of June 2012, Pam Danchuk, the Microboard and Individualized Funding liaison at the local Community Living BC (CLBC) office, called me. She told me that she had been asked to find 3 programs in Prince George for the CLBC board of directors to go out and visit when they visited Prince George on July 17th and 18th. She said that she thought it was important that a Microboard be one of those programs and asked if I knew of one that might be interested. I thanked her for calling me and told her that I would have to talk with Linda Perry, Vela's Executive Director, and I would get back to her. Linda and I agreed that it was an excellent opportunity for Vela and Microboards to establish a personal connection with the CLBC board, hoping they will have a better understanding of the work Microboards do and the close personal ties that are at the heart of Vela's work.

The next step was to find a Microboard that was willing (and

able) to host the event scheduled for 8:00 AM on the 17th!!! This early time was because their board had a full day and evening of events planned during their short time in Prince George. That's pretty early to have strangers walking through your home, especially when there was also the expectation that the Microboard's board members and staff be in attendance as well. Wow, who the heck could I ask to do all of this??? I talked to a few other boards around town, but they couldn't get board members and staff there for that early timeframe. I believe that you should never ask someone else to do something if you aren't willing to do it yourself, so after discussing it with my husband Gord and the rest of our daughter Bree-Anna's Microboard (who weren't too impressed with the time, so I had to promise all kinds of things to get a good turn out), I let Pam know that Bree's Courageous Spirit Society would be glad to host the CLBC board at our home.

For 2 days before the event I had Gord outside cutting and trimming the lawn, sweeping the sidewalks and driveway, and generally tidying up while I weeded flower beds and washed windows - I won't even tell you how much work we did inside. My Obsessive Compulsive Disorder was in full swing those couple of days, wanting everything spotless for CLBC's arrival. We cleaned things that the CLBC folks would never see, but I wanted all the space looking good, especially Bree-Anna's room, as it was created through a Giving In Action renovation grant and is a critical part of what it's taken to keep Bree at home with us for so long.

Most of the members of Bree's Microboard work. Those who were



*Bree, Terry and Denise Turner, CLBC Board*

able to make the early start made arrangements to start work late that morning so they could attend the gathering. The staff that weren't scheduled to work the morning shift altered their private schedules so they could be there, too. We have one sister-in-law who lives 25 minutes out of town, so she had to be up extra early to be at our house before the CLBC board arrived. My youngest sister has 2 kids under 3 ½, and she knew it would be a challenge to get out the door and to our house by 8:00AM with both babies, so Gord and I kept our nephew overnight so she only had her little daughter to get out the door in the morning!

On the morning of the big day it was warm and sunny, and 7 of our 11 Microboard members, all 3 of our staff members, and of course, Bree-Anna, Gord, and I greeted the CLBC board when they came off their bus and into the house.

Coffee and muffins were offered, and Denise Turner and I both spoke. I talked about why we chose a Microboard for Bree-Anna, and Denise spoke about how different it



ard Chair

was that they were coming into a family home and not an agency setting. Lots of great dialogue was exchanged, both as the larger group and then later in smaller one-to-one chats where a Microboard member or a staff member chatted with individual members of the CLBC board. They spent an hour with us, and we think it was very successful. Members of the Microboard talked openly with the CLBC board about their ongoing vision for Bree's life should something happen to Gord and I, and about how being part of this Microboard has impacted and enriched their lives.

As the CLBC board left, Gord stood at the front door handing out Vela newsletter to each person - their take-away reminder of what kind of work Vela does and how a Microboard can provide individuals with options and opportunities.

Within a couple of days of the CLBC visit to our home, I contacted Doug Woollard to see if the pictures Gord took with the board in them could be used in a story for our newsletter, and

you will find some comments sent along by the CLBC board in this article as well. It was a great experience for our board, but for Vela too, I think.

Here are few comments from members of Bree's Courageous Spirit Society and her staff about the experience:

**Carmen Turnbull – MB member**

*"It meant a lot to meet the CLBC board and to tell our story from the Microboard's point of view. I felt like we were showing them the reality side of Bree's Microboard so they could put a group of faces to it. I felt like they understood our Microboard better after meeting us personally."*

**Kim Pigeau – MB member**

*"I was really impressed with how many CLBC board members came to the house and how they really wanted to hear what we had to say about our vision for Bree-Anna's life."*

**Jennifer Kivi – staff support**

*"I chatted with one of the CLBC board members about the kind of support I provide to Bree and it gave him a better understanding of the level of her care needs."*

**Nicole Demman – MB member**

*"I was impressed by their (the CLBC board member) feedback; they seemed a little surprised how involved the Microboard is in Bree's life and how we plan for her future. The CLBC person I spoke with was genuinely interested in the Microboard and Bree's life because of it."*

**Janelle Wright – staff support**

*"It was a great opportunity for the CLBC board to see what it's like for this family".*

**Sandi Ernst – MB member**

*"A great opportunity to put faces to the entity we hear about but know nothing else about them as people, and their work for CLBC."*

**Colleen Tuson – staff support**

*"I thought it was important that they got to see the reality of how the Microboard works and how many people it really takes to support Bree-Anna."*

**Terry Robertson – MB member**

*"It was an amazing opportunity to have the important people in our daughter's life (her Microboard and support staff) talk to the people who guide the direction of the organization that supplies the funds that support her choices and dreams. We want to thank the board for including us in their busy day."*

Here are a few comments from the CLBC board members who came to our home that morning:

**Norah Flaherty, CLBC Board member**

*"It was wonderful for me to experience the warm and caring group of individuals that surround Bree-Anna. It was obvious that Bree-Anna is gaining much, yet also giving back to these individuals and their families in ways we will never truly understand."*

**Ernie Malone, CLBC Board member**

*"Such a welcoming and compassionate home. It is inspiring to see that the Microboard and through it, the family, friend and caregiver support is providing quality of life for Bree-Anna."*

**Denise Turner, CLBC Board Chair**

*"The stories you shared so candidly were truly inspiring. Each of you individually, and all of you collectively (extending out to your own family members) really embody the true meaning of inclusion."*



*Kim has been an active advocate for the inclusion and citizenship of persons with disabilities for most of her career. Beginning as a support worker for a local association for community living at age 16 she has taken*

*many roles within the field including supporting a young woman in community with a Microboard; assisting in the development of a Microboard for a woman widowed and without supports; and now as a Director of Vela. Kim lives in Langley with her husband and sons, aged 9 & 12. Her youngest son lives with a genetic condition called DiGeorge Syndrome as well as congenital heart disease. She is not a stranger to some of the challenges parents face in finding community supports and helping build happy, productive lives for their children.*

Since 2011, Vela has engaged in a process to determine how we can continue to do the incredible work we do at the funding level we currently receive. In the non-profit world, this is an age-old question. However, since 2008, when non-profits and charities began to see a decline in donor support and an increase in competition for donor dollars, this question has been taken a lot more seriously. Here at Vela we are looking more critically at our business. How can we meet the demands of our growing and changing client base? How do we build innovation and remain on the cutting edge of technology, supports, and education? Where can we be more efficient? How will this work when government funds are tight and the competition for donations is fierce?

Vela's goal is as it has always been – to deliver quality supports to people with disabilities and their families across BC free of charge. But something has to change, because our economic world has changed and so

have our communities. Sole dependence on government funding is not an option, and I would dare say, no longer a responsible one. We need to take care of ourselves a little and begin asking our communities to understand our value, and within that understanding, to help us continue to do the work we do so well. We need to come to the community table as partners.

We looked toward two options: building a social enterprise and creating a fund development office within Vela. As we explored each, we quickly learned that Vela's infrastructure could not sustain a social enterprise. We run a lean machine and simply do not have the resources to develop and run a new line of business. We turned to fundraising experts that help non-profits and charities first build the infrastructure needed to fundraise, then help them go out into the world and raise money. This was an uncomfortable process for our team. They asked us hard questions about who we are as an organization, who we are as a Board, why we need to fundraise, and who would want to donate to us. Not easy. Also, we were asked to go to our own personal networks to find out from folks, "Do you know what Vela is, and are we an organization you would donate money to?" What we found out was pretty tough. Outside of the community living sector, people do not know who we are or what we do. What was worse – we found that we couldn't explain ourselves to those people either. In 15 seconds or less, Vela is an organization that...? What?

In September, Vela formed the Community Relations committee to begin looking at Vela's public image, messaging, and brand. We are also looking at ways we can introduce ourselves to the communities in which we do business and build awareness, membership, and eventually our donor base. As we land on the doorstep of 2013 and continue to work through the questions and tasks before us, we are looking to you, our members and folks that know us best, to guide us along on our first mission – developing our public image. If you could take a few minutes to think about what Vela means to you and how you would tell anyone about what we do, we would be very grateful. Please email us at [info@velacanada.org](mailto:info@velacanada.org) with your answer to these two points:

- 1) What are three words that come to mind when you think Vela Microboard Association?
- 2) Finish this sentence – "Vela Microboard Association is an organization that..."

Recently, you received a letter from Gabrielle Miller sharing her family's Microboard journey alongside her sister Shanti. Gabrielle asks that we all consider taking out or renewing our Vela memberships and donating if possible. We hope you take these steps ensuring Vela can continue supporting individuals and their families in BC.

*On behalf of the Community Relations committee, thank you to everyone who generously donated funds, time, and energy to Vela in 2012. We wish you all very happy holidays!*



Judy resides on a secluded island with her husband and two daughters, both of whom have Microboards. Judy is a visionary and for many years has actively promoted equal access and full inclusion for all.

As a young mother of rather “typical” kids, I never realized that there was something out there awaiting me in my future as an older mom with kids with labels, with “disabilities,” “challenges,” and “special needs.” That something was the concept of THE PROFESSIONALS, and they (and we, I guess) would be “THE TEAM.” And so, from the very beginning of having kids with labels, we also had partnerships with an abundance of partners, and with them an absolute cornucopia of intelligence, know-how, ideas, inspirations, experience, prejudices, biases, etc.

Our family, like so many, has had memorable partners, and our lives have most often been supported and enriched by them. The Victor Street Team was amazing; the dear director of Special Ed., Tom Watson, supported our kids from the very beginning clear up to his too-early death, when they were by then young adults; Partners in Communication; S.E.T. BC and C.A.Y.A., both with Lois Turner, Rachel and the early beloved physio, and Karen, her present invaluable replacement, the best of the seating teams at Sunnyhill, and our own Beth, Gerald Harris - the genius of vision from the beginning and still now inspiring and elevating our understanding to the day, the T.A.'s and support folk at school and at home, and the occasional dedicated teachers of the non-typical child. It has been an amazing bunch of people and years, only partially listed here due both to space and memory lapses. In addition, we were part of many teams whose ideas fizzled and sputtered out – things parents like us couldn't find a way to fit into a day – or didn't want to – or ideas that just didn't work in our family (laundry had to come first!) or just didn't feel like what we are about.

Every so often over the years, we have been visited upon by an authority with an agenda that was not our own, who left us reeling with the shock that they neither understood who we are nor what our lives are about.

The first of these was when the school staff of

*Long term partnerships with supportive associations such as TASH, BCACL, PLAN, FSI, Vela and CLBC have had an extended and profound influence on our lives and on our daughters' experience in the world. These are multi-layered partnerships, both with the group as such and with individuals in the group with whom we share deep and lasting friendships.*

our tiny local school suggested (at a meeting they called at our home, sitting around our dining room table) that we consider their idea: that we would simply NOT enroll Amber in kindergarten as we planned – it would be a lot easier for everyone!! When they left, Michael and I felt like we'd just been slashed open. Amber did enroll, did attend kindergarten, did enjoy school, especially in the primary years -- and yes, this all created many more teams and partnerships and many of them were helpful and supportive.



*Michael and Judy with Latisha and Amber*

Thirty years of parenting a family member – or two! – with labels has also brought people who might never otherwise be known to the family right into the intimate business of the family. These might be medical or legal folks, social workers, physios of other teams, nutritionists, educational sorts, “professionals” of every stripe. Not all of these folks were “invited” by our family, but invited or not, over the years we have had benefited from practical ideas, gadgets, skills, understanding and at the best, mutual trust and partnerships. Sometimes, however, the people we receive into our home are about as welcome as the common cold and as big a headache. It is our experience with some of the people that makes us wary when we are informed that someone new is being sent to

visit us for some bureaucratic reason or other, by some governmental agency or ministry or other, with an agenda not our own.

So it was last spring, when we were asked to receive a young woman whom we had never heard of or met, that we felt the stirring of dismay born of some of the less positive experiences we have had with uninvited “guests.” When Thirza arrived on the ferry, we were pretty well prepared (you know, clean house, laundry hidden, scrubbed faces, expectant countenances...) What we weren't

prepared for was the interest, genuine interest, in Amber and Latisha and our lives together. It was a delight to show this young woman our dreams – the girls' new home, (STILL in process!), the passive solar and energy-efficient stuff, the details of each special accommodation we'd made for each specific need for Amber or Latisha, and also we shared our hopes for how the dream could finally come true in that home.

When we sat around our old dining table going through the bureaucratic paperwork stuff, it became clear to me that Thirza somehow understood what we were about, and this was no knee jerk bureaucratic response, but a genuine understanding. This is not easy to explain, but what followed is. I don't remember the exact words, but we were talking about how we were building the house (we hadn't qualified for much financial support for it at all) and she looked at me and told me she understood that it was all about LOVE. The emotion coursed through me as I realized that this stranger, foisted upon us, could see me, could see that it was about love, and that she judged it as wonderful, as positive. I began to cry and said something about what a relief it was to me to be truly seen by her and that it was good. We shared a tender moment of understanding and tears, and then she left to make the last ferry as planned.

I never will forget how it felt to have had such a true moment of Partnership thrust upon us by a bureaucratic imperative. It was a healing moment, and one of unforgettable joy!

## THANK YOU

*Thank you to all our Funders & Donors*  
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*Did you know it has never  
 been easier to donate to  
 Vela?*

If you would like to support Vela's work helping Microboards and other families committed to creating person centred, innovative supports just visit Vela's web site: **www.Microboard.org** and click the Donate Now button on the home page. Follow the instructions and it's done!

We would like to thank all of you that continue to assist us with your generous donations. Vela could not continue to provide assistance without your generous support.



*We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia*

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

- I enclose \$30.00 for a voting Annual Family or Individual Membership
- 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:  
 \$25.00     \$50.00     \$100.00     \$250.00     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

All donations of \$10.00 or more will be sent a tax receipt to the address provided above.

Please mail your donation to;  
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