



Board of Directors

Brad Bizzell
Renee Brown
Chris Burton
Martin Daniel
Diann Eaton
Faye Garrett
Judy Gwazdauskas
Matt Hudgins
Kate McCoy
Robert Metz
Susan Miller
David Pitonyak
Joanne Weyers

Staff

Charlie Fox
Mac McArthur-Fox

***Never doubt
that a small
group of
committed
citizens can
change the
world; indeed,
it is the only
thing that ever
has.***

~Margaret Mead

CIRCLES OF FRIENDS: ACCEPTANCE, BELONGING, & COMMUNITY

A Newsletter from *Community Opportunities*

Community Opportunities is formally affiliated with Vela Microboard Association of British Columbia and continues to learn through lessons shared by our friends at Vela Microboards.

Shanti's Story

As told to her sister, Gabrielle Miller. Shanti's Microboard is supported by Vela Microboards.

When I was 18 and looking forward to becoming an adult, my mother and I were told I would need to move from the children's group home I lived in. This was good news to me because I didn't like living in a group home.

My mom and I were very upset when we were told the only place the social worker could find for me to live was an extended care ward in a hospital. I didn't want to live in a hospital. I wanted the same things as other people wanted when they were becoming adults. I wanted to have my own place. I wanted to try new things. I wanted to make more decisions in my life, I wanted a boyfriend, and I wanted to travel. I wouldn't do any of that if I was in a hospital.

So my mom started to look for someone to help us. After she made a lot of phone calls she talked to Linda Perry from Vela Microboard Association. Linda was just starting her work creating Vela Microboards. It was 1989 and there were no Vela Microboards in B.C. at that time. Linda met with my mom and me and we all decided that I would have the very first Vela Microboard.

We didn't have any information to go on, so we had to learn together how to create a Vela Microboard. So we spent lots of time talking about who

I trusted and would want to help me by being on my Vela Microboard. It was really important that those people were people that respected me and I respected them. So we met with old friends and members of my family and started to talk about what I would like my life to look like. We did lots of talking and planning. This took a while because I had been living in the group home for several years, and I hadn't seen very much of the people I grew up with. It was wonderful for me because I had missed these people and spending time having fun with them.

After several months, with Linda's help, we developed a plan. We worked closely with the staff from The Services to the Handicapped Branch and they provided funding for our proposal. We incorporated the first Vela Microboard in B.C. under Provincial Non-Profit Societies Act. I called my Vela Microboard the Shanti Miller Friendship Society. Linda and I found a place for me to live in Richmond. I chose Richmond because it is flat and I use a wheelchair to get around. I like Richmond. With help from other Microboard members, Linda, my mom and I also hired staff to support me in my new apartment. At first I had a hard time figuring out who would be the right people, but with lots of help from my mom and Linda, I learned how to hire staff.

Since that time I have realized a lot of my dreams. I wanted a boyfriend and so started to date. After I had lived in my own place for about a year, I met a man that I really liked. We dated for a year and then he asked me to marry him. I was thrilled. We had a beautiful wedding, and I moved to his home town.

My Vela Microboard helped me with all of this. We planned the wedding, we also figured out how I could move and how to set up supports for me in my new town. Even though I had moved to a town over four hours from the Lower Mainland, my Vela Microboard members continued to be involved in my life and they came to visit me often.

Sadly, my marriage didn't work out. So after a while my Vela Microboard, with Linda's help, supported me to move back to the Lower Mainland of B.C. I couldn't have done it without them. They helped me through a very sad time. But my Vela Microboard members stayed with me, cried with me and laughed with me, until I started to feel better. We picked a wonderful agency, Community Ventures Society, to help with the transition of my services. They helped me to hire staff and to find a place to live. We were very

grateful to have the agency help us for a time. Once my Vela Microboard felt ready to take over the running of my services, we again did all the planning, hiring and managing of my services.



Shanti with, from l-r, sister Gabrielle Miller, and fellow board members Lori Emanuels and Linda Perry

At that time, I also decided to expand my Microboard so I chose to ask Linda and one of my former staff, Lori Emanuels, to sit on my board. We are

now traveling buddies. Each summer Lori, Linda and I head out on the road together. We always have lots of fun. Sometimes my mom joins us and we go to visit my sister Gabrielle on the set of her TV show, Corner Gas. That is one of my very favourite holidays.

Today I have a Vela Microboard that is an essential part of my close network of family and friends. I live in a home I love. I have staff that I have chosen and I trust them. My days are scheduled in a way that makes sense for me. I also do some traveling and public speaking about Microboards so that other people can hear about how great my life is.

I can't believe that if my mom hadn't been so strong back when I was 18, I would have spent the last 20 years in a hospital. What a difference family and friends can make!!! I love my life and my Vela Microboard.

Become an annual contributor to Community Opportunities ~ join the *Life Like Yours* campaign! Contribute \$100 or more annually and help ensure every person with a disability is a valued, contributing member of our community. See the enclosed envelope to make your donation.

A Brief History of Vela Microboards

by Linda Perry, Executive Director,
Vela Microboard Association of
British Columbia.

Introduction. It's hard to believe that the first Vela Microboards began their journey nearly 20 years ago. Many people connected to newer 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 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-centered 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 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 and 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 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. They set precedent because their funding came from two different branches of government. Stephanie Brunner’s Microboard was the first for a person with very complex health care needs. Stephanie’s Microboard successfully assisted Stephanie in developing a customized communication system and in moving from Vancouver to a rural community in south eastern British Columbia, 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

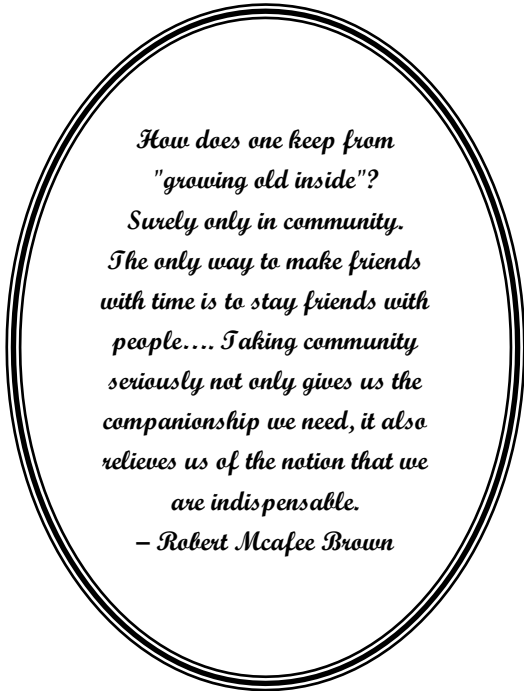
and natural relationships. In those early years as Project Coordinator I was often heard to say “We make our path by walking.” This truly summarized the initial process. Often progress required breaking new ground, challenging policies or procedures. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the three original boards. Without their ground breaking work, our subsequent successes would not have been possible.

Years Two and Three. Through word of mouth, the success of the original three Microboards spread through the community. The Microboards developed 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. In our third year, our work went Provincial, spreading to the Northeastern part of B.C.

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 Vancouver 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 which led to the creation of Vela Microboards Northern Ireland, Vela’s first affiliate.

Today. As of early 2008, there are about 600 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.



*How does one keep from
"growing old inside"?
Surely only in community.
The only way to make friends
with time is to stay friends with
people.... Taking community
seriously not only gives us the
companionship we need, it also
relieves us of the notion that we
are indispensable.
— Robert McAfee Brown*

Why It Works. The tremendous growth and development of Vela Microboards would not have been possible without those involved with individual Microboards. Microboard members 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.

Community Opportunities



Spring Dinner
and Silent Auction

April 12, 2008

Hors d'oeuvres at 6:30

Dinner at 7:15

*An evening of fine wine, dining
and conversation*

Owens Hall at Virginia Tech

*4 oz. Manhattan Filet with Garlic Seared Scallops or
Grilled Eggplant "Steak" with Balsamic Reduction*

Tickets \$65 ~ Call 961-7346
or MicroboardsNRV@verizon.net

Save the Date!

3rd Annual

**MOUNTAIN MUSIC
BENEFIT CONCERT**

Featuring:

**CAROLINA
CHOCOLATE
DROPS**

Sunday September 28, 2008

7:00PM

**LYRIC THEATRE
BLACKSBURG**

*Learn more about Community Opportunities through our website ~ www.communityopportunities.org
or contact us at MicroboardsNRV@verizon.net or (540) 961-7346*



Community Opportunities, Inc.
P.O. Box 11204
Blacksburg, VA 24062-1204