transition

BC COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

NOV./DECEMBER 1996

BCCPD Mission Statement

The BC Coalition of People with Disabilities was founded upon the belief that:

- people with disabilities want and are entitled to equal opportunities in all the activities and privileges that other Canadians take for granted,
- full inclusion of people with disabilities within our communities is a fundamental necessity for a diverse, productive and economically vibrant social environment, and
- people with disabilities have the right to expect equality, fair treatment and respect.

Because of these beliefs, the purposes of the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities are:

- to use education, advocacy and special projects to work toward the dissolution of the physical, attitudinal and systemic barriers in our society that deny us equal opportunities,
- to provide a strong coherent voice for the cross-disability communities in B.C.,
- to share information with and support other self-help disability organizations with common goals, and
- to carry out our mission and projects within a self-help model.

transition

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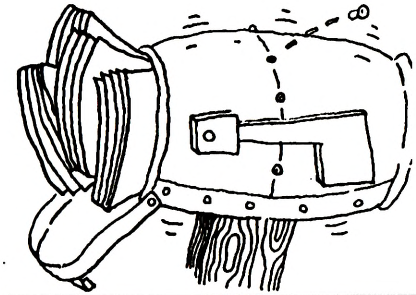
in this issue

Features

November/December 1996



letters

DEAR EDITOR:

I ran into a trap which your readers may not be aware of. I am on Handicapped Benefits. I receive $771 per month and I am allowed to take in $200 per month without it affecting my GAIN. So far, so good.

A close friend receives a day care grant for her younger son who is Autistic. I am his caregiver, so I am paid by that grant. A good deal all around. She received the grant on March 22, 1994. At that time, I put in a claim of $100 for work done in March (from the 22nd to the 31st).

Non-licensed day care workers (yours truly) are supposed to file on the 15th of the month to be sure of payment in that month. Obviously, I could not, so my March cheque for $100 came in April. Meanwhile, my April claim for $200 had gone in on time and I received that cheque also in April. MSS then decided I had received $300 in April and docked $75 from my June GAIN cheque. Furthermore, the computer thought I was now making $300 per month, so docked my July cheque as well.

When I asked what was going on, my worker conceded that I shouldn't have been docked for July and I got that back. The computer was reprogrammed, but June's $75 was gone because I'd clearly earned $300 in April.

I promptly wrote to both the Minister and the Premier, sending them copies of the authorization form and my claims. It took a year-and-a-half for anyone to get back to me, and then I was informed that department policy is to count money when it's received, not when it's earned.

I wrote back saying that that was insane, that I had no way of controlling when I was paid by the government.

Due to a grand mix-up in November, 1995, I didn't receive November's cheque until December. I received December's cheque on time, yet I wasn't docked.

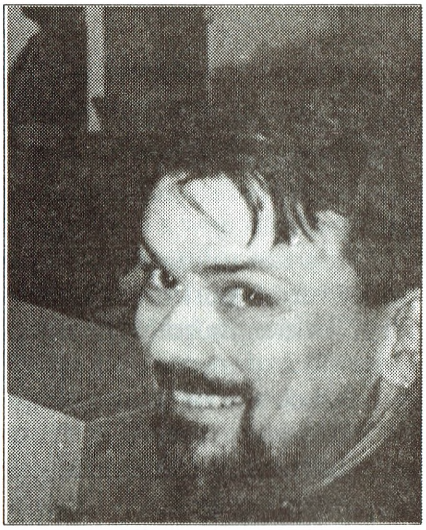
I moved at the end of July, 1996. I had hoped July's cheque would help. When it still hadn't arrived by July 29th, however, I called to find out what had happened to it. I was told the claim had been received and approved and I should be getting my cheque any day. However, department policy is that unlicensed day care workers' cheques can take up to the 5th of the following month to arrive before they are considered to be late.

My cheque arrived the following day, thank Heaven, but if it hadn't arrived until August 5th and my August cheque had arrived on time, would I have been docked? No one has answered that, and no one has explained why the computer not only docked me for June, 1994, but was under the impression that I was making $300 a month from then on.

Anyway, I thought I'd share this just in case someone else gets caught in this unpleasant Catch 22.

SINCERELY,
(MISS) JANET SUSAN CHAPPELL
NANAIMO, BC ≈

editorial



by Geoff McMurchy

Not only is this our calendar year-end Transition, but a celebration of our twentieth anniversary! Well, sort of. In 1976, this publication was simply called the "BCCD Newsletter". It wasn't until 1977 that it was dubbed "Transition". So you could say we're on the cusp of our unofficial and our official 20-years-in-print. Either way, we've been around a long time and that's something we're proud of.

In this edition, we're looking back over the years. We've combed through the archives, picked out bits and pieces of our history and organized them into four "eras". Since our space is limited, we've opted to give you a taste of a wide range of material, rather than just a few complete articles.

We tried to create a "slice of life" look at each era with a cross-section of issues, writers, styles, and perspectives–and some landmarks, like the Solidarity movement.

However, one contributor emerges most prominently, namely, Rick Watson, who sadly passed away in 1994. For many years, Transition was Rick's baby and, apart from soliciting others' work and overseeing production, he contributed everything from poetry to hard-hitting editorials.

Actually, going over our files, it was pretty impressive to see all the ground we've covered. In terms of progress on issues, a kind of "two steps forward, one step back" pattern emerges (or *vice versa*). You can see how persistent some issues are and how we've always endeavoured to represent the facts as we see them.

Content aside, just glancing at this cover, you can see the progress we've made in style. We've come from a photocopied and stapled newsletter to a much more design-conscious magazine format. We've got our sights set on further improvements as well, some of which are dependent on funding.

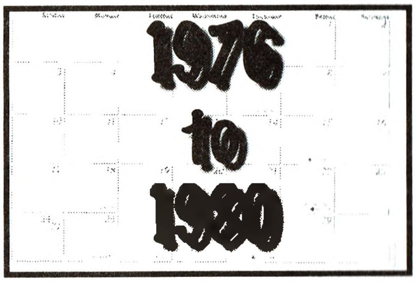
There's that word again. Well, I'd be remiss if I didn't at least mention it on this auspicious occasion. Once again, I need to remind all our readers how important your support is, even if it's just to renew your subscription regularly.

Another way you can support us is to come out to a fundraising evening of fun that we're planning for next March. Watch for details in future Transitions.

And finally, all of us at Transition would like to wish you a very happy Holiday Season and the best in the New Year . ≈

Some of the themes that Transition has covered over the years

Sexuality
Animal Experimentation
The Arts
Misunderstood Disabilities
Psychiatric Disabilities
Alternative Health Care
Recreation
Aboriginal People and Disability
HIV/AIDS
Deaf/Hard of Hearing
Right to Die
Health Care
Transportation
Invisible Disabilities
Poverty
Environmental Disabilities
Violence and Women with Disabilities
New Reproductive Technologies
Technical Aids
Employment



Vander Zalm Ignores Reps

People in need should get the Human Resources Department's $100 million "surplus."

That's what nearly 100 representatives of over half a million people told Bill Vander Zalm at a City Hall meeting June 21.

The meeting was organized by DERA, chaired by Alderman Harry Rankin and attended by representatives of labour, church, poverty, handicapped mental patients and social worker groups.

For 2 1/2 hours, DERA Vice-President Bruce Eriksen, members of City Council's Community Services Committee and representatives of all the other groups told Vander Zalm that B.C.'s welfare rates under the Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act are "wretchedly insufficient."

"How can you ignore the fact that you're not giving single people enough to live on?" Alderman George Puil asked Vander Zalm. But Vander Zalm seemed to miss the point, made over and over that people dependent on GAIN are "literally going hungry."

"It's not a simple black and white," said the millionaire Vander Zalm (who was wearing expensive soft grey suede boots and looked like he had eaten recently), "You also have to consider the minimum wage."

. . . . Vander Zalm went through a long list of programs he claims were begun in his ministry. But, replied Irene Cavaliero, a mother on welfare, "We don't need programs. We need money."

1977

Disabled Establish Housing Co-op

At their June board meeting, the BC Coalition of the Disabled decided to sponsor a housing co-operative.

Access Housing Co-operative will be the first in BC to be organized and managed primarily by and for disabled persons. It will provide low rent ground-oriented housing for families with one or more disabled members, for single disabled people, and for non-disabled people alike. Initial funding from CMHC has already been approved.

1980

Awkward Paternalism

The original impetus of handicapped consumer movements was of course the fact that, for many years, voluntary agencies, charity based organizations, etc. were the official spokesmen for the handicapped. These traditional organizations not only shared the legitimized sympathies of the general public, but also the keys to the doors of government.

The role that these agencies played in the past were both beneficial to the handicapped community, as well as destructive.

Many services were provided by these groups which the state was initially unable to provide. Today, however, the state in one way or another has assumed most of these responsibilities to the extent that the importance of these groups has diminished.

It can be argued that the continuing monopolies which these agencies still share in serve to slow the mechanism whereby the state takes responsibility for those areas, as it rightly should.

Within this situation, we find such organizations as the BCCD which feels that the handicapped are sufficiently capable of speaking for themselves and capable of impressing upon governments the true concerns of the handicapped community. The irony is that, for organizations such as ours, funding is practically non-existent, whereas for the traditional service organizations staffed by the able-bodied, funding is readily available. A sort of awkward paternalism exists in this situation. . . .we must fight for our own self-determination with all our energy. Surely this is not asking too much.

1978

First TTY

Many people have a difficult time communicating by telephone. The teletype (TTY) machine which is produced by MOR Systems Ltd. in BC may solve this problem. MOR have produced a portable teletype machine which they are offering to anyone with a communications problem at cost price. The machine consists of a 31-key standard keyboard and a screen where messages typed over the phone appear in large green letters. . . .

1978

Telethons More Harm Than Good

by Richard A. Watson

Will the 1981 Variety Club Telethon, coming up next February, be like those telethons we have been subjected to in the past? We, the members of the adult handicapped community who are active in the movement to advance the status of handicapped citizens, say "yes"....

Take, for instance, the last Timmy's Christmas Telethon held last December. Congratulations are in order to the tax-supported CBC and the BC Lions Society for Crippled Children for their combined efforts in the last Timmy's Telethon. And you, the public, must feel great. We feel ill. We feel ill when we see children, handicapped or not, used in any prostitution operation. Society calls it charity, but it is charity at the expense of dignity, public knowledge and accountability.

It is the dignity of the children, who do coincidentally become adults, which is sacrificed to the power of the dollar. The children are flashed onto a TV screen and portrayed as pathetically as possible without really knowing why or having any real choice. Telethons

(continued on next page)

(Telethons, cont'd from previous page)

in British Columbia have all along been presenting an image of the physically handicapped as deprived and helpless, in desperate need of your charity dollars to make us whole....

In reality, it is the public who is deprived, deprived of the essential knowledge that handicapped individuals have abilities and talents and an equal, yet unique, ability to be social beings, participating in their own growth and that of the community.

And do you, the public, know where your pledged money goes, how it is spent and who controls it? Does not the power and authority to spend this money and to decide the priorities for its spending lie not with the handicapped ourselves, but with the white-collar businessmen, executive administrators and other such professionals who are concerned and occupied primarily with their own credibility and professional image?

. . . We ask you, the public, to consider these points as you watch next year's Variety Club Telethon. Instead of reaching into your pockets, try to evaluate the means by which a telethon brings in the money....

1980

Newsflash

One handicapped person and one attendant can travel by Easter Seal Bus for $2.00 return (4-mile limit) plus mileage over four miles, between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. 7 days a week. Reservations should be made one week in advance. Identification card required....

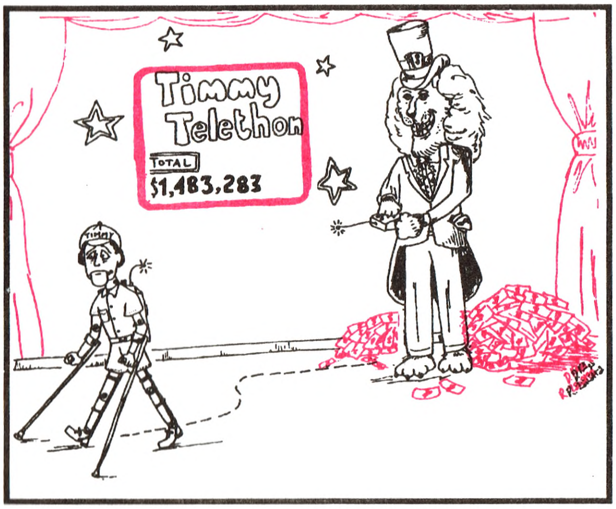
1977

Demonstration Sparks Action

Close to 50 people participated in a demonstration held outside the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). The demonstrators, drawn largely from the ranks of the BC Coalition of the Disabled, came to protest the unacceptable state of affairs that characterizes custom transit services in the city of Vancouver.

During the interviews that followed, a confrontation developed between Tim Louis, chairman of the BC Coalition of the Disabled, and Jack Loucks, who is chairman of the GVRD sub-committee on special transit. Feeling responsible for the lack of progress in the GVRD - UTA - Lions talks, Mr. Loucks defended the position of the negotiators by stating that the situation was much more complex than the demonstrators realized. Tim Louis pointed out the inadequacy of this line of argument by noting that the public transit operating agreement was signed, sealed and delivered as of April 1980 while custom transit negotiations remained in dispute as late as July, with no firm resolution in sight. Chairman Loucks was unable to explain this discrepancy.

The demonstration was prompted by a number of specific concerns. . . . The situation regarding custom transit in Vancouver as it presently exists requires two weeks advanced



booking to secure service as opposed to the one week advanced booking period two years ago. Booking this far in advance is therefore not only an inconvenience, but also a regression in the level of service. In other cities, such as Edmonton, people book only 1 1/2 days in advance. . . . The demonstration was an attempt to bring closer the signing of the Annual Operating Agreement, as well as making the public more aware of the importance of this issue to the disabled citizens of Vancouver. It now appears that the demonstration was a success on both counts. . . .Even though news coverage of the demonstration was inaccurate and in some cases opposed to the demands of the demonstration, it did serve the function of highlighting the fact that custom transit in the city of Vancouver is an issue yet to be resolved. . . .

1980

Victoria Branch Admits to Stick-Ups

by Matthew Allen

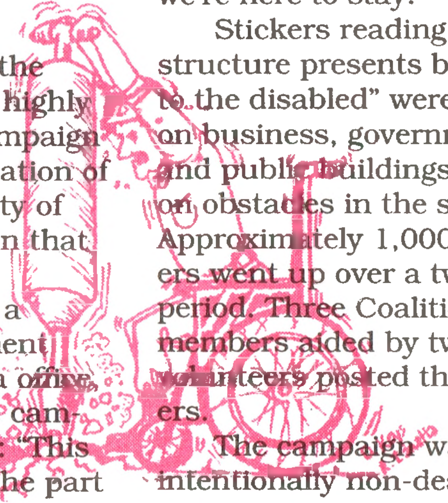
The Victoria office of the BCCD recently ran a highly successful sticker campaign aimed at the identification of barriers to the mobility of handicapped people in that city.

Doug Ottenbreit, a community development worker in the Victoria office, who spearheaded the campaign had this to say: "This is not a vendetta on the part of handicapped people against the community. We have no malice, but we do want the public to be informed. We want them to know that we live in their community too, and that we're here to stay."

Stickers reading "This structure presents barriers to the disabled" were posted on business, government and public buildings, and on obstacles in the streets. Approximately 1,000 stickers went up over a two-week period. Three Coalition staff members aided by twelve volunteers posted the stickers.

The campaign was intentionally non-destructive, since the stickers could be peeled off without damage or inconvenience.

1980



The First Hand

Reaching out
thru empty hours
to find a hand

to hold
the first hand
I touch
that answers
with love

It was your hand
I touched
somewhere outside my
vision
almost undetected
soft, warm
like life moving
thru deep dark
seas

Fingers
curled around fingers
love moving
like blood thru veins
pulses beating
to the music
of tides
eroding shores
and centuries
to sand

Richard A. Watson
1977

1981 to 1985

The Disabled Community Unites

by Richard A. Watson

Perhaps it could be said that Bennett's Budget of July 7th is the best thing that ever happened to the disabled community in BC. It has awakened us from our lethargy; it has triggered a sense of urgency that all disabled people can share. . . . It has served as a catalyst for the political mobilization of the disabled community. Bennett's brutal attack on social programs and benefits holds fierce consequences for all disabled people.

Never before have strategy planning meetings and protest rallies been so well attended, and by those who never understood the politics of being disabled and were never seen at meetings! Bennett's Budget has forced all disability groups to stop and look at one another and understand, and truly recognize, their common suffering and the need to support one another in a united effort.

A sense of identity is also to be found growing, not just within the disabled community itself, but among all minority groups whose livelihoods are being so profoundly threatened by Bennett's so-called "restraint" legislation. Recent events in BC are pulling together such minority groups as natives, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, people in poverty, the disabled, etc., in a fight against a common enemy which is endangering the social fabric of this province.

Yet, throughout this ordeal and forever after it, minority groups must recognize each other's differences and respect each other's uniqueness, for it is that difference and uniqueness which makes for diversity in society and contributes to the whole. Even with this risis situation we find ourselves in now, the disabled community is having to struggle to be heard, to deliver its message, to contribute its unique perspective to the overall effort. Two out of three Budget-protest rallies organized so far have included on the speakers' list representatives of the disabled community, but only after painstaking persuasion by the BCCD and a good deal of hedging and backtracking on the part of officials. It is not enough to have the disabled mentioned here and there in other people's speeches: our own voices must be heard if our story is to have any kind of impact....

1983

Charter Victory!

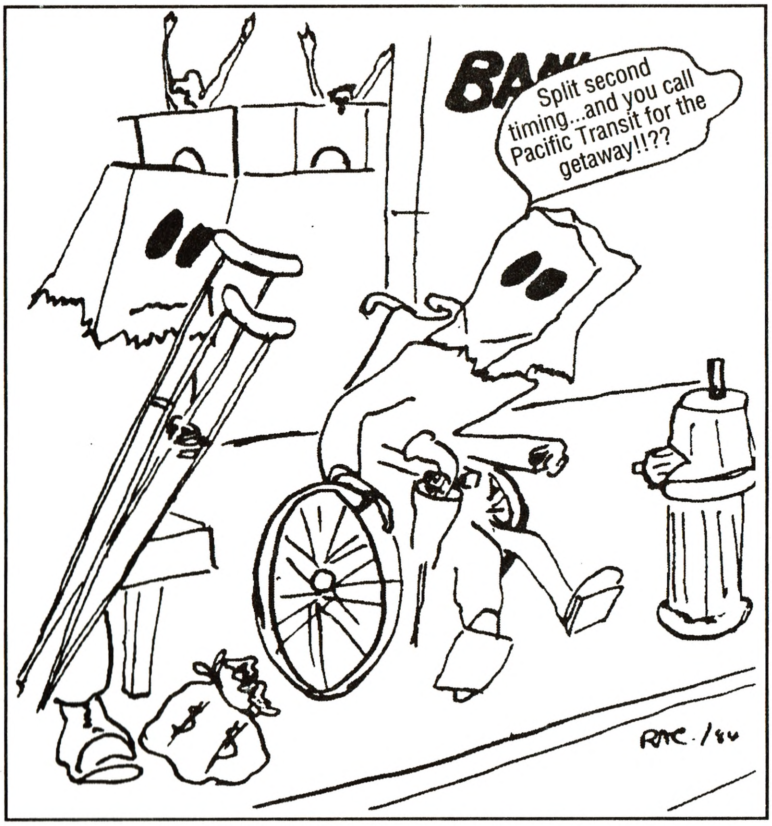
by Tim Louis

Jean Chretien, Minister responsible for patriation of the Canadian Constitution, has given in to the demands of COPOH (Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped) and agreed to name the disabled within the proposed Charter of Rights. This represents the culmination of an intensive, six-month lobbying campaign which involved all of COPOH's nine provincial member organizations including the BC Coalition of the Disabled....

While the initial reception from the Joint Committee was positive, the Federal Government held firm and refused to amend the Charter of Rights to include the handicapped. Continued pressure by COPOH, and the support of many other non-governmental organizations, eventually convinced the Government to give in and Chretien announced his change of heart early in February.

The Federal Government agreed to include the term "physical and mental handicap" in Section 15(1) of the proposed Charter of Rights. Section 15(1) deals with the protection of minority groups from discrimination which had not been previously extended to the disabled.

1981



The Dawson Case: A Question of Human Rights

by Jill Weiss

Early this month, the Ministry of Human Resources filed suit in provincial court to gain custody of a six-year-old multiply handicapped child named Stephen Dawson so that surgery could be performed to repair a blocked shunt and to thus remove building intra-cranial pressure on his brain. Stephen's parents had refused to authorize this surgery, saying that their child was in constant pain, was not capable of a reasonable "quality of life", and should be allowed to "die with dignity".

The family court judge, Patricia Byrne, agreed with the parents, saying the surgery was an extraordinary surgical intervention which constituted cruel and unusual punishment, and remanded the child to the custody of his parents, who she felt were best able to make the right decision. One week later, acting on the basis of an appeal by MHR, a child advocate lawyer, and the BC Association for the Mentally Retarded, Supreme Court Justice McKenzie overruled Judge Byrne's decision and specifically ordered the necessary surgery.

This case has received substantial publicity and has important implications for the disabled community. At stake are some basic questions:

- Can anyone determine the possibilities and/or quality of life of a disabled child and/or adult?
- Can parents (or anyone else) deny a disabled child necessary medical treatment because of their presumption of that child's quality of life?

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(The Dawson case, cont'd from previous page)

Justice McKenzie answered a resounding "no". In a thoughtful and carefully worded statement, he said that no one can determine the future or current quality of life of a disabled child....

A teacher, a physiotherapist, a pediatrician, and the head of Sunny Hill Hospital, where Stephen Dawson had lived for the last two years, unanimously agreed that he was a consistently happy child who showed absolutely no signs of pain until the shunt in his brain was recently blocked. They stated that he was a responsive child, who giggled with delight when his babbling was repeated by staff, clapped his hands, and was capable of free movement on his bed. All confirmed that Stephen was by no means the most severely retarded child at the hospital and that he had more physical ability than most....

As disabled people, we must be keenly aware of how easy it is to underestimate our potential. We must also be careful not to stigmatize or abandon children who have multiple handicaps and/or who are mentally handicapped. If we believe that a disabled child will have a limited quality of life, we should fight for improved support services, not for the termination of such a child's life. This is the measure of ourselves, our movement and our society.

1983

Don't talk to me about rheumatism.

Deinstitutionalization: A Process

by Richard A. Watson

Deinstitutionalization is more than just a physical move from the care institution into the community, and the eventual abolishment of the institution. Deinstitutionalization involves a whole process of preparation on behalf of the people moving into the community, and only with this process firmly understood and carefully executed will the concept of deinstitutionalization work.

Originally, the institution was a monster of the government, a result of social technology, created under three basic, but false assumptions. First, the government believed that there was economy in numbers: that it's cheaper to administer care and medicine when patients are lined up in rows all in one building. Second, this was a way of hiding away the sick and lame so society did not have to deal with them. And third, handicapped people are happier when they are all together "with their own kind".

Institutions are perpetuated for the convenience and prestige of the medical and social work professions. Institutions employ thousands of people whose positions within the care field are visible and useful in climbing the ladder of professional success. The institution continues to exist despite people in economics and the rehabilitation fields proving it is more expensive to maintain people in institutions than in the community with appropriate support mechanisms.

What about the effects of institutional settings on the client? The expectations of a patient within the institutional care model do not promote active involvement in one's own growth or that of the community. The handicapped are excused from any obligation or responsibility to themselves or to society. The result is a passiveness which eliminates any real motivation on the part of the patient for self-improvement. This naturally means the patient has absolutely no control over the creation of his/her own environment and lifestyle. The patient does not have to make any decisions because the institution makes them for him/her, and such decisions are usually based on medical and professional considerations.

Deinstitutionalization, therefore, must be regarded as a multi-faceted and long-term process involving the preparation of institutionalized persons for living a trauma-free life in the community. This does not refer only to the learning of a wide range of self-maintenance skills, from grocery shopping to the assertion of legal rights, but also to the gaining of an emotional maturity and strength enabling people to be content, confident and productive within a self-created social environment. . . .

1984

Justice Institute Supports Access

The Justice Institute of B.C. has received funds from the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training to increase access to its programs for students with disabilities. Students interested in attending courses at the Justice Institute, who have the necessary prerequisites but require support, should contact Shelley Rivkin at 528-5628 or TTY 528-5655.

Letters

Dear Editor:

I think the BC Coalition of the Disabled and the disabled community in general are making a fatal mistake in aligning themselves so intimately with Operation Solidarity. The disabled community has over the past two decades been developing its skills and learning to use them effectively in presenting the uniqueness of its position in society and the distinctiveness of its character. The disabled are a recognizable group and, when they turn out at demonstrations or appear on television shows, people notice. Now the disabled community, by joining hands with Operation Solidarity, is giving up its right to be disabled in the community; it is giving up its own vested interests. Operation Solidarity is a conglomeration of labour unions, laid-off government employees' unions, churches, community agencies and minority groups, among others.

. . . All the agencies who might be suffering from government cutbacks and who have used the disabled to achieve financial security are now using the disabled to regain their status when in reality their job should be to make disabled individuals and the disabled community more independent and self-reliant.

I doubt whether the disabled will gain anything from their association with Solidarity. On the other hand, Solidarity will gain cred-

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(Letters, cont'd from previous page)

ibility on the "sympathy" that the disabled evoke. . . .
Yoshinori Tanabe
1983

Dear Friends:

The headline in the Vancouver Sun read—"Educated Man Tired of Retarded Label". And so am I. So is every mentally handicapped person. So is every parent, every friend and every advocate of mentally handicapped people. We're damn tired of it too. We're sick and tired of it.

Within the disability community, there appears to be a hierarchy of handicaps. Those who are mentally handicapped inevitably appear at the bottom. Those who live with any other type of disability inevitably shy away from association with mentally handicapped people.

What is it about the disability of mental retardation that frightens us? What is it about the disability of mental retardation which makes people, who are sensitive to the impact of prejudice, stereotype and discrimination on most handicapped people, become insensitive to a mentally handicapped person?

What is mental retardation? It is simply an intellectual disability. It means people sometimes have trouble thinking straight. It means you get confused, particularly in pressure situations. It means your capacity for scholarly pursuits is different. It sometimes means you can't remember everything you've just said. It means you are capable of doing things yet you sometimes forget what to do. For some, it means you can't speak very well, if at all. It means you are a little slower.

So far this sounds like me. I am often mentally handicapped.

It doesn't mean you don't feel joy, sadness, love, satisfaction, and frustration as keenly as anyone else. It doesn't mean you can't learn. It doesn't mean you don't grow and develop. It means you respond to love, affection and warmth. And it means you are hurt by discrimination, by taunts, by rudeness.

And what of the place of mentally handicapped people in the world today? I know of no mentally handicapped person who has the ability to hate. Mentally handicapped persons are not bomb makers. They aren't testing cruise missiles. They haven't sent people to war. They don't damage the environment. They don't make pornography. And we aren't hurtling toward the destruction of our planet because of them. So what's so great about intelligence anyway?

I write this letter because I think we can do something about it together. All of us—mentally and physically handicapped people of today and of the future. Can we not help in the liberation of mentally handicapped people? Can we not lend our intellectual abilities to those whose disability is an intellectual one? Can we not help bury the stigma associated with mental retardation? Do we not have common cause—the rights of all disabled people? Can we not help each other?

With respect,
Al Etmanski
1985

Independent Living Centre in B.C.?

The Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH) is interested in facilitating the establishment of an Independent Living Centre in B.C. The BCCD is looking for groups in B.C. who are interested in becoming involved in working on such a task.

Independent Living Centres have already been proven very successful in some cities in the United States. They are a part of and one result of the overall consumer movement which strongly promotes handicapped consumer control of their own goods and services. A major foundation on which the concept of Independent Living Centres is built is self-help and peer counselling. The objective of such centres is to provide the support services necessary to enable handicapped adults to live independently in the community.

1982

Disabled People's International Peace Statement

Disabled people all over the world know, from their deepest personal experience, the capacity of war to cast its mantle of death and destruction over life and limb. The ability of modern weapons of war to devastate people, to sear human memory with the permanent scars of personal tragedy, to shatter the dreams and hopes of children, to maim and injure, is nowhere more eloquently proclaimed than here, the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima.

Everyday the absolute sanctity of human life is asserted by the aspirations of this planet's 500 million disabled people. The creation of disability and the ending of life by the waging of war is an abomination. Yet the accumulation of the engines of war gains peace.

The talents of humankind are turned from the satisfaction of people's needs to the invention of more and more horrific devices of destruction.

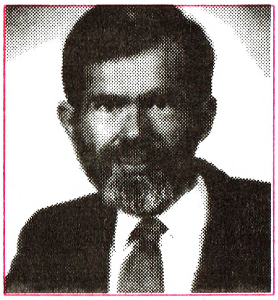
The products of human labours, wrested from the earth with all the ingenuity of generations of men and women, are dissipated in gigantic stockpiles of armaments which are of benefit to no one.

The power of co-operation amongst individuals and the organizing capability of the human race is squandered in the creation of gigantic war complexes whose sole intent is the destruction of people.

How long can this obscenity continue?

We, the representatives of all the world's disabled people, have come to Hiroshima to make known our resolute condemnation of the arms race.

1985



fun
food
music
drinks
laughs
gossip
planning
reunions
reflection
networking
conversation

...all this and more–FOR FREE!– at the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities' Year End multi-purpose PARTY and GATHERING. Please come by and ponder past, present and future with us.

Thursday, December 19th

3 - 6 p.m.
BCCPD Office
204 - 456 West Broadway

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Submissions for *An Anthology for and by Canadians with Disabilities* are being requested from any interested creative writers. Contributors must be at least 18 years old, but not necessarily established authors. All entries, if accompanied by a self-addressed-stamped envelope, will be responded to.

Submission requirements:

- Creative pieces including: short stories, poetry and short scripts
- Fiction or non fiction
- Submissions should be typed (taped versions will also be accepted)
- Include a self-addressed-stamped envelope (SASE) with submission
- Include a short statement about yourself (50-100 words) in a covering letter
- Possible themes could include: Family Relationships, Friendships, Self-Identification (Who Am I?), Pride or Touched with the Challenge
- Entries must be written by a person with a disability (or in collaboration with a person who has a disability)
- Submissions will be accepted between October 1, 1996 and January 31, 1997.

Mail your submission to:
An Anthology for and by Canadians with Disabilities, c/o Selection Committee Chairperson, 253 College Street, Suite 377, Toronto, ON M5T 1R5.

New SPARC Placards

SPARC has received many complaints concerning our parking permits and have come up with a new design which we expect will correct these problems.

The new permit, which is 3 1/2" x 6", is slightly smaller than the previous permit, can be put in a pocket or purse for easier accessibility. It is also made of a much lighter and stronger material which will eliminate breakage. The background is white with blue lettering, and the international handicapped access symbol is white on a blue background.

The major difference in the permit is the new way of indicating the expiry date. Previously we applied expiration date stickers. Now with the months down the sides and five future years at the bottom, on both sides we will holepunch the expiration date. This should prevent tampering with the stickers which has been a problem in the past. It will now be easier to read both the permit number and the expiration date from a distance to improve enforcement. Also, it will be easier for the public to report and advise us of abuse. The authorized owner's name and signature and instructions for displaying the permit remain on the back side of the permit.

The old design will continue to be issued as temporary permits, so the permanent permits will be distinctive.

We have also changed the "hanger" to make it easier for putting on the rear view mirror and the extra strong new material should help eliminate the problem of breaking at this weak point. ≈

Cross Country Skiing: Good for the Mind, Body and Spirit

Enjoy the many benefits of cross country skiing through the Disabled Skiers Association of BC (DSABC). Come meet our friendly volunteers who will provide qualified instruction and will adapt lessons to meet the goals of each individual. Experience the benefits of increased fitness level (including balance, coordination and stamina), make some new friends, and enjoy the great scenery and fresh air. Whether you wish to try the sport for a day, take a series of lessons or simply wish to ski on your own or with a friend or family member, DSABC offers a variety of discounted rates and packages. This year our programs will be available at Hollyburn Ridge, accessible from Vancouver within a one hour drive or with the shuttle service.

For further information, please call the cross-country ski coordinator at 322-0229 or the DSABC office at 737-3042. Have a great Christmas! ≈

YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS VALUABLE

The B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities is a province-wide, non-profit organization run by and for people with disabilities. We are an umbrella group representing all people with disabilities and our strength comes from membership support.

Will you join the Coalition today and help build the voice for people with disabilities?

As soon as you begin your membership, you'll enjoy a number of benefits:

- an organization that can lobby the government on behalf of people with disabilities–too many helping agencies depend on government funding and fear funding cuts. They need an independent advocate like the Coalition to lobby for their interests.
- policy research and development on areas of concern to you.
- membership voting rights, if you are a person with a disability.

If you would like more information on BCCPD, please feel free to contact the office at the address below, or call (604) 875-0188.

Membership Acceptance Form

I accept your invitation to join the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities.

Membership Fee (groups and individuals)
$10

☐ **New Membership *or***

☐ **Renewal?**

All memberships are renewable annually from the date of application.

☐ **Voting Member *or***
(self-help groups where at least 51% of members have disabilities or a person with a disability)

☐ **Non-Voting Member**
(all other groups and able-bodied members)

Voting and Non-Voting Members: All individuals and groups are welcome to become members of BCCPD. However, voting rights are limited to people who have a disability and groups composed of a majority of people with disabilities (i.e. Self-help groups).

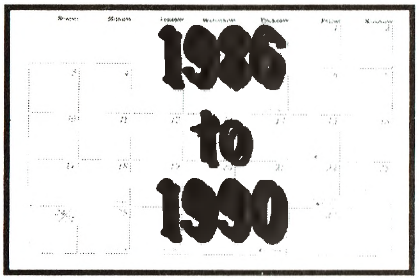
Name______________________________________

Address ____________________________________

____

City ____________________ Postal Code___________ Phone ________________

Please return your cheque or money order, with this form, to
BCCPD, 204-456 W. Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3.
We thank you for your support.



A Victory for Pro-Choice?

by Rawnie Dunn

On the morning of January 29th, I was sitting in my hotel room at a COPOH Council meeting in Ottawa...I grabbed the Globe and Mail off the tray and said, "What a loud headline! It looks like a supermarket tabloid!"

That headline, of course, like much of the entire paper that day, was about the Supreme Court's decision which effectively legalized abortion in Canada. It was hailed as a victory for Pro-Choice. As I glanced over the photographs of laughing, clapping women, I felt a little sad that I couldn't participate in their joy. Not that I don't agree with the right of a woman to choose to reproduce or not. I most definitely do. It was just that experience had shown me that the Law can sometimes mean one thing for able-bodied men and women and another thing for disabled men and women.

Many battles have been fought under the banner of Pro-Choice, but the focus has not always been the same for the groups involved. For able-bodied women, it has largely come down to a struggle for the right for a woman to choose whether or not to have an abortion, whereas with disabled women the essence of the struggle has been for the right to choose whether or not to have a baby.

There is more than a difference in semantics here. From the struggle of disabled women against compulsory sterilization, to their struggle to resist apprehension of the fetus or the child by the "authorities", to their struggle to even receive unbiased medical information and counselling, the message is the same: we disabled women do not want to be universally assessed as unfit to mother simply because we are disabled. We do not want decisions about our bodies and our futures made without consulting us, without our being able to consider all the options. Quite simply, what we want is the right to choose.

My newspaper was basically right, of course. The Supreme Court decision did herald a victory for Pro-Choice, but until all women—whether able-bodied or disabled—control their reproductive powers, the fight will not be won.

1988

Letters

Dear Editor:

I too would like to add my voice to those objecting to the views expressed by one of your readers in Transition who thinks the government should not pay for medications for people with AIDS.

I very much appreciated the earlier article you carried on AIDS as a disability and I think that people within the disabled community can learn a lot from people with AIDS and their friends. Think of the extraordinary organization and networking that's occurred! In addition, all chronic illness is by definition incurable and disabling and, unfortunately, sometimes support services and treatments that might help are denied to sufferers by people who have the same beliefs as the man who wrote the letter.

If we are going to be effective in bringing about social change that will benefit the disabled community, we have to embrace the goals of disabled people's coalitions that work for us all, regardless of the particular nature of our disabilities.

Maureen Moore
1987

(continued on next page)

(Letters, cont'd from previous page)

Dear Editor:

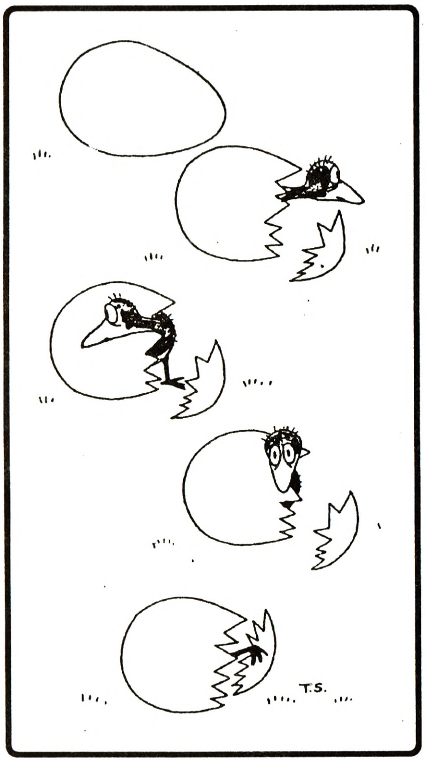
I want to applaud Mr. Bob Elliott, for speaking out on his strong feelings about my article in Transition. This article concerned the women-only initial general meeting of a network formed in March of 1986.

Since I wrote the article, I can assure one and all that there was no anger, either implied or overt, in it. It was a simple announcement. The women of the DisAbled Women's Network are not fighting against anything, let alone his supposed "unsympathetic, unsupportive, angry men". DAWN BC is a network of women supporting each other. We help. We do not fight. At least, we haven't yet. DAWN BC is a society, with bylaws and a constitution. But DAWN is also a family, a family of BC women.

To his charge of sexual discrimination, I can only reply that we are a network of women, but we are appreciative of help from men. DAWN is concerned with women's issues only. There are some things that are specifically not male interests. However, a number of men have already been helpful in helping us get started, and I have no doubt that men will continue to assist. I invite Mr. Elliott on any occasion to give us the benefit of his opinions and experience in the disabled culture. We all have respect for his thirty-four years of experience with discrimination.

I think that the suggestion that women take a close look at why we are uncomfortable discussing our concerns with males present, as Mr. Elliott pointed out, is a good one. We are uncomfortable; it would be good to discuss why.

Eunice Brooks
DAWN BC
1986



The Measure of Worth

by Bill Richardson

We are a people who tend to understand worthiness by measurement. How much is he worth? Is it worth it to do that, to go there, to spend the money, to spend the time? We turn to quantity even to validate those human pursuits where quality is supposed to be of paramount concern. A Van Gogh painting is of itself less interesting, it seems, than the huge sum paid for it by a Japanese insurance company.

It need scarcely be said that the 10 million dollar measure of Rick Hansen's heroism is important. The interest generated by that trust fund will do a lot of good. But money in large amounts inevitably generates controversy, too. There is bound to be rancour, as various agencies vie for their share. Some people are angered that individuals like Rick, or Terry Fox, or Steve Fonyo felt compelled to undertake life-threatening projects in order to raise money and public awareness. Why, they ask, is money not available for medical research, when it is so freely spent on the military and interior decoration on Sussex Drive? Money-raising invites invidious comparison. I, for one, certainly felt that all was not right with the world when Rick Hansen and Oral Roberts reached the 8 million dollar point at about the same time.

Important and impressive as the 10 million dollar mark is, money—by its very nature and its sharp effect on human sensibility—cannot be the real measure of Rick Hansen's heroism. Real heroism is an achievement of the spirit, and as such it is felt most tellingly by the spirit, in that safety zone where quantitative measurement cannot enter. The hero shows us that courage begins at that place where we simply say "yes" to a challenge; yes to the responsibility of being—in Rick Hansen's words—the "best we can be."

What does being the best involve? For most of us, it has nothing to do with capturing the imagination of the world, nothing to do with raising 10 million dollars. For some of us, being the best has to do with raising a child alone, with not much money. It has to do with getting through a demanding day and still having the energy and commitment to be an effective citizen. It has to do with being undaunted by the problems of the day to day. Being the best you can be may have to do with something as seemingly commonplace as getting out of bed in the morning. We are not, after all, without our so-called disabilities. . . . His journey leaves a legacy of 10 million dollars; but most importantly, he has given us the notion that our own life journeys, small or large, can be heroic, and that a warm welcome waits for us when we get to wherever we call home.

1987

The Catcher in the Wry: Is This Some Kind of Joke?

by Geoff McMurchy

When someone suggested to the Port Corporation that they install, as one of the "minor modifications" to the infamous Main Street overpass, a "catcher" to prevent out-of-control wheelchairs from careening into the traffic on Alexander Street, they took it seriously! . . . They had a contractor sketch plans for a backwards goalie's-net-looking-thing, made of chain-link fence (painted a tasteful yellow, mind you) that would sit at the foot of the steep sidewalk which just happens to be the sole pedestrian access to the new CRAB Beach Park.

Perfect! Those disabled folks are always going on about choice, so we'll give them a couple of options. They can go ahead and

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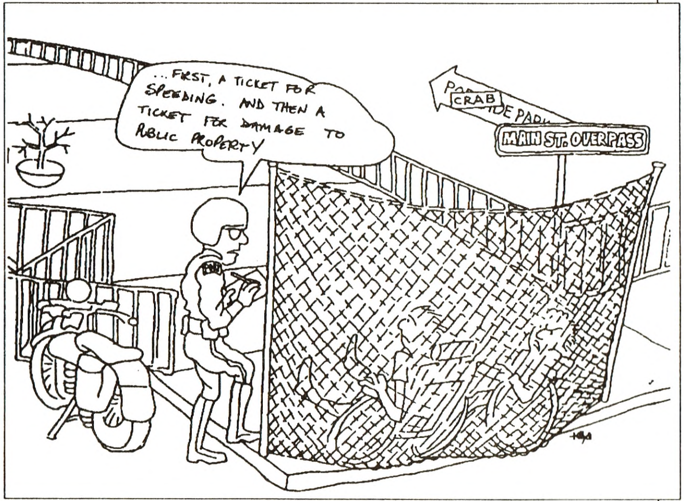


(Catcher, cont'd from previous page)

careen into Alexander Street and maybe get hit by a truck or they can smash into a chain-link fence! What a deal!

. . . Excuse me, am I being a bit hyper-sensitive, or is the Port being a bit insensitive? Does the catcher idea (not to mention the overpass itself) demonstrate a certain, shall we say, lack of concern for equal access?

For its part, the City, which agreed to cost-share the minor modifications, would seem to be trying to do the right thing in this case. They have decided, after consulting with community groups including the BCCD, not to proceed with the catcher.

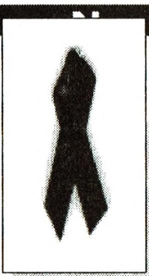
1988

He approached my universe
from the back door
and sat in its folds for a while
before
I noticed him there

If I had wisdom to give him,
my heart, shy like an eyelash
in his hand,
or my sensitized touch
I could understand

But he said
he just wanted
to sit for a while
in my kind of air

Rawnie Dunn
1987



Creative AIDS Education

by Richard A. Watson

AIDS events have been the most powerful and moving I have ever attended in my career as a protester. I attended the Names Project rally held July 12 which opened the quilt exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

As if it wasn't enough to view the massive assembly of panels personally created by those who have lost loved ones through AIDS, there was the endless recital of names coming through speakers placed around the exhibit. It was like being trapped, almost against my will. I could not turn it off or run outside.

On Monday September 4th, the People with AIDS Society hosted a Fantasy AIDS Rally on the empty corner lot outside the Vander Zalm-owned Fantasy Gardens in Richmond. . . . The rally was in response to statements which had been made recently by senior cabinet ministers. It called for the immediate resignation of Forests Minister Dave Parker and Health Minister Peter Dueck. In a radio interview Parker said, "AIDS is a self-inflicted wound, and you're bloody well responsible for your own acts." Health Minister Dueck subsequently defended Parker's statement saying, "Some people, in fact, by their lifestyles have invited the disease."

People with AIDS and their supporters are appalled and angered at such bigoted, homophobic judgements passed on a health issue, judgements which serve to put the health of all British Columbians at risk. Such attitudes on behalf of "honourable" politicians, combined with their refusal to fund medical drug therapies and education programs, actually serves to spread AIDS.

Mary Williams spoke on behalf of the BCCD, saying that people with AIDS have the support of their fellow disabled citizens. Williams said that "instead of spreading superstition reminiscent of the dark ages, the Ministers better bloody well start being responsible for their actions." . . . .

1989

No Sex Please...

by Geoff McMurchy

Is "No Sex Please. We're Disabled" a joke or not? It gave me pause for thought when, after agreeing to write something for this issue on sexuality, I received an almost total non-response from thirty-odd questionnaires I sent out to BCCPD members. The questionnaires were anonymous, and even came with return postage-paid envelopes, so why the reluctance from recipients to share their experiences and views on sexuality?

It's safe to say that the community of disabled persons is much more sexually disabled than non-disabled people. Parents and care-givers who "protect" their charges, media exclusion, physical barriers to socialization and poor access to information have all contributed to hinder people with disabilities from dealing with their sexual identity.

Basically, a high percentage of the disabled population have either been taught that having sexual relationship(s) is not an option for them, or if they wanted to explore sexuality, they've found both physical and attitudinal barriers in their way. Just one of life's realities; it's always been that way.

Today, prehistoric myths about what it means to be a female or a male in society still plague us, disabled and non-disabled alike. Under the critical gaze of society, disabled people may be self-conscious about their disability, being seen as less of a man or woman, having less personal power, and not having the skills to overcome self-doubt.

It's a double-edged sword: society conditions us so that our self-esteem relies heavily on the roles we play and it restricts these roles, yet denies the means to expand or adapt them. The more marginalized you are, the harder you have to fight to maintain your self-esteem.

In many areas, the collective self-esteem of people with disabilities is improving. It has changed as we become more visible and more involved in our communities. We are expanding our roles, and we must seize every opportunity to address our sexual health and thereby contribute to our individual and collective self-determination.

1990

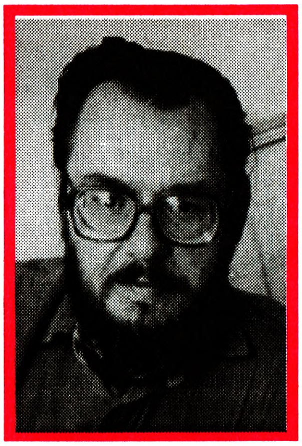
At Last, A Premier's Advisory Committee!

by Richard A. Watson

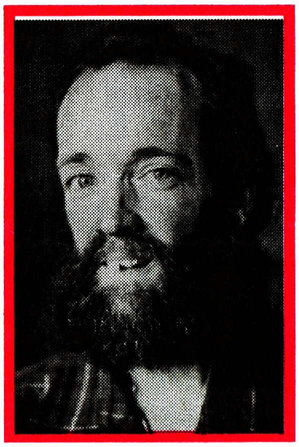
Premier William Vander Zalm and Provincial Secretary Bill Reid hosted a gala reception on January 12th at the Vancouver Hotel. About three hundred people representing the Social Credit party, the society service industry and a smattering of disability groups gathered to drink wine and wait in anticipation for the announcement of who was appointed to serve on the long-awaited Premier's Advisory Council on People with Disabilities....

Many of us are now wondering about the risk that the Council could become a convenient dumping ground for every issue that arises—an excuse for politicians to avoid issues by referring them to the Council. Council Chair Paul Thiele says he wishes to make clear from the beginning that the Council will not consider problems that can be solved directly by politicians or groups, unless the problem is part of a global issue...

1989



Garry Colley



Richard Watson

Watson/Colley Fund Seeks Donations

In the Spring of 1994, two pioneers of the BC disability movement passed away. They were Richard A. Watson and Garry E. Colley. Richard Watson worked as a columnist for The Province, and was long-time editor and inspirationfor Transition magazine, and Garry Colley was a Disability Rights Advocate for the BCCPD's Advocacy Access Project.

In memory of Rick and Garry, the BCCPD and the VanCity Community Foundation established a bursary fund. Students with a disability studying in any post-secondary institution in the province of BC are eligible to apply for this bursary.

Please consider making a donation to this fund, in memory of Rick and Garry and to help a student with a disability. You can send your tax-deductible contribution to:

Watson/Colley Memorial Bursary Fund,
BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
204-456 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3.

A Public Forum
and Book Launch

The Confinement and Extortion of Elderly Canadians

with Scott Adams and Invited Speakers

Sponsored by the Alice & John Human Rights Campaign and Habitat Canada– Canada's New Federal Political Association of Canadians

Saturday, December 14th
8 p.m.

Location: Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC)
2150 Maple Street
(btwn. 5th & 6th)

Tickets: $10, $15 at door
Phone 732-6019 for information.

Thanksgiving

...for the hardworking production crew at Transition Inc.:

Carol Dixon • Teresa Kubaseck-Berry • George Lawson • Bob McElroy • Geoff McMurchy • Eleanor Pasholko • Pushpa Patel • Robert Ponto • Mark Rogen • Valerie Stapleton • Steve Wong

And sincere thanks to the many people who write, draw, send letters, suggest ideas....

And, last but not least, we also are grateful to our advertisers and sponsors who provide necessary, and often unheralded, financial support.

Tyranny of Abuse

by Don Beddows

. . . Our care institutions are places dedicated to the care and protection of their charges, but their intent and thus success as caring places is only as good as their staff. And success lasts only as long as that staff vigorously strives to uphold individual dignity, individual choice, individual freedom and to meet individual needs in spite of the compelling temptation to bypass these in order to make the institution easier to manage and the population easier to control. The conflict question is, "Whose comfort levels are of primary concern?"

. . . Most people who provide care are well-intentioned. But there is a tyranny of ignorance where care-providers do not understand, a tyranny of arrogance where they know what is best, and a tyranny of devaluation where they come to believe that the feelings, needs and aspirations of people with disabilities are in some way less valid and less important than those of "normal" people. We can all add our own tyrannies to this list.

So what to do? Where is the weak point?

Until we, and all who interact with persons with disabilities, can begin to see them as "ordinary feeling folk like us with an additional difficulty which makes life tougher for them than for us," we will fall into the trap of becoming tyrannical. It's not enough to pay lip-service to this issue. This is a gut-level issue which must be believed with heart, mind and soul if we are to protect people with disabilities and be worthy of providing care. . . . We all do what we do best because we are grounded in an unshakable belief in its value and rightness.

Such believers are the real caring among us and people with disabilities need them as family, friends and advocates. Then, perhaps, they will be safe.

1995

A Self-Advocate's Story

Over the past year, Marcella Baldwin has been talking to consumers and self-advocates about what the guardianship changes will mean in their lives. She is a volunteer with the BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) Self-Advocacy Caucus.

Marcella prefers the word "self-advocate" to describe herself. This is probably because it most closely describes her approach to her work and to her life: she wants to speak for herself and to help other people with disabilities to do the same. But Marcella remembers that when she first started talking with other self-advocates about the new guardianship laws, people expressed some resistance and fear.

"Some of them were afraid that, all of a sudden, they'd have to make all their own decisions," she said.

Marcella explained to her peers that guardianship is all about having choices, including choosing if you want someone to help you make decisions or not.

One part of the guardianship picture that annoys Marcella is the question of capacity: how a person is judged to be capable of making their own decisions. Under the old law, the measurement is clearly an intellectual one–a person's perceived ability to know and understand the consequences of their decisions.

Marcella doesn't have much time for that "dumb IQ thing". She knows that an IQ rating is a "stupid" way to measure a person or to find out what matters to them and how they make decision.

This is one of the things that Marcella talks about in her speaking engagements with students and employees in various workplaces, and it has an effect. "Self-advocacy opens people's eyes," she says. "Then they realize that if they give us a chance, we can do things as well as them, maybe better."

Marcella has also seen how changing a person's label–from "mentally handicapped" to "self-advocate"–changes their view of themselves and of their place in the world. "All of a sudden, people feel like they belong. That's what I like to tell people like me."

For Marcella, it feels good to give back some of what she's received. She remembers that when she first got involved in the self-advocacy movement she felt like she'd entered another world. "I felt listened to and I knew I wanted to help other people to feel that."

1994

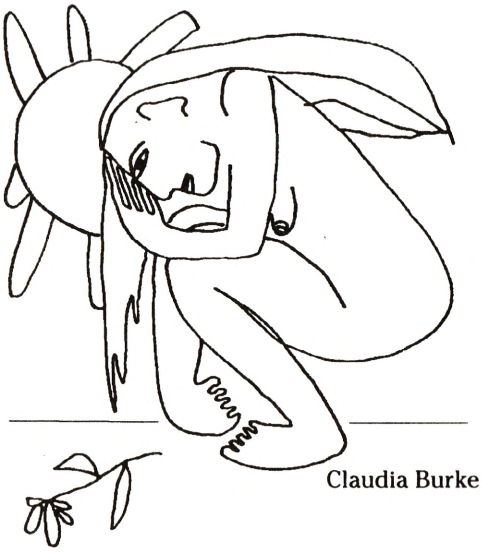
Letters

Dear Editor:

. . . I do not believe that people with disabilities should participate in receiving handouts, free services, reduced rates, special privileges, etc. as it only perpetuates the concept that we are in some way less-than-capable and need to be taken care of and felt sorry for.

Instead, we need to be coming up with ideas that will facilitate paying our way. It is only through paying our own way, contributing, participating and generally taking care of our affairs that we will gain and maintain our self-respect, dignity and sense of self-worth.

Pat Johnston
February, 1991



Claudia Burke

Dear Editor:

I was very upset after reading Pat Johnston's letter in the February 1991 Transition. Getting rid of reduced rates and free services, etc., for the disabled community is not a very good idea. If a disabled person does not want these services, that is his/her choice, but please don't take these services away from those who want them. Living in Northern B.C. costs are higher than in the Lower Mainland and the Island. What about people who will never have employment? Why should I pay full fees for taking one part-time course at a college or university? What about seniors' discount days in stores, business, recreation, etc.? The seniors have a choice, and we, the disabled, have a choice too. As long as the choice is available, life is a little easier.

Y. Nielsen
May, 1991

INDEPENDENCE 92

Empowerment: Will the Message Travel?

by Richard A. Watson

My greatest hope for people with disabilities is that we all have a sense of humour, that we can laugh at ourselves. If we do not, we are destined to fail at what we seriously believe in. This is the conclusion I took away after the gruelling five-day Independence '92 International Congress.

Never in my 15 years of chronic conference attendance have I seen so many people of all sizes, shapes, colours, nationalities, and disabilities, ranging from minor to severe, converge at the same time in one location for five days, and all (or most) looking happy about it. . . . Can you imagine the shock of other people staying at the Pan Pacific Hotel who did not know about the Congress, emerging from their rooms last Wednesday morning to find a congestion of 2,800 "gimps", with every kind of mobility device imaginable, lining up to register for the event?

It did not take the attendance of many workshops for me to realize that the underlying theme of this Congress was the concept of "empowerment". I remember the beginnings of the disability movement, when we held thinly attended and naive protests in front of transit, human resources and health department offices. We have matured and Independence '92 made me and others see the bigger picture that includes supporting each other in taking control in making decisions about our own lifestyles, taking the power away from government agencies and "care-givers".

In summing up the value of this $4 million Congress, Henry Ens, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, told me, “A best case scenario on the results of this Congress is that people with disabilities in underdeveloped countries will organize and achieve legislative change and develop ILCs.

“People will take back to their countries a sense of solidarity and motivation. Without this event, the $4 million would have gone to something other than people with disabilities”. . . .

1992

Priorities Not Ours

by Henry Vlug

I think Independence '92 was a colossal waste of money and was very frustrating. Rather than doing something constructive, the government had a party.

Deaf participants were very frustrated by the lack of adequate interpretation. The excuse given by the organizers—that this was due to an unexpected last minute increase in the number of deaf delegates—is an outright lie. Only “50%” access for the smaller expected number had been contracted for!

The lack of interpreters was very frustrating for me personally as it prevented me from doing any networking with people with other disabilities. I saw many people I knew, but all I could do was wave “Hi” and “Bye”—and not even that with the blind delegates!

The government should stop imposing their and Rick Hansen's priorities on us and let us decide where and how we want to spend time, effort and money (“us” means legitimate disabled consumer groups).

1992

When a Win is not a Victory

by Ann Vrlak

It is now two days since the national referendum where Canadians said "no" to the constitutional agreement penned by the First Ministers. Many of us at BCCPD gave our time to the campaign and on Monday, October 26th, we "won." Then why doesn't it feel like it?

Like many other "no" campaigners, I was troubled by questions like: Why do I feel manipulated? Why on earth were we asked to say "yes" or "no" to such a complex, and often contradictory, set of issues? Will the progressive "no" forces be heard among the rejoicing of more right-leaning voices?

Watching the referendum results in the mainstream media, it is clear that the media persist in focusing the debate, and now the results, on the anti-French, anti-aboriginal angle. In reality, there was much that was good about this deal and, if the ministers had been willing to make some changes, we could have lived with it. But our concerns about equality rights and social programs were ignored or completely trivialized ("There, there, we'll take care of those little details later"). So we had no choice but to work toward the end of this fundamentally flawed agreement.

We wonder if it's true, as we dearly hope, that the "no" came out of a grassroots discontent at the elitist process, and the threat to human rights and social programs. Or, was it a reactionary vote against Quebec and our First Nations? One thing is certain, we should never have been in the position of choosing between aboriginal rights and other human rights, Quebec and the rest of Canada.

1992

Dear Mary (Williams) and Margo (Massie):

The flowers I recently sent to the BCCPD are inadequate to express my true feelings about the phenomenal support provided by your organization. I don't know if this letter can convey what I feel more effectively, but I will try.

When I first learned that the BCCPD would be intervening, I was simply delighted! Knowing that my cause would be supported by such an influential group gave me an enormous boost of hope. At the initial hearing at the B.C. Supreme Court, I felt rather overwhelmed by the opposition. But at the B.C. Court of Appeal hearing, I felt that I had many supporters with me—because of the BCCPD's involvement—and I feel very honoured to have had this tremendous backing.

By the time you receive this letter, the decision of the judges will be known. If their decision is negative, I want you to know that I will continue to fight for the right to self-determination as long as I am able. Reading your personal story, Mary, touched me deeply and reinforces my commitment to fight for the right to choose.

Margo and Mary, please accept my heartfelt gratitude for your personal efforts. I truly admire the BCCPD for its courage in speaking out so effectively on behalf of its members.

Sincerely,
Sue Rodriguez
1993

The Coalition Against Disincentives to Work Challenges Your "Will to Act"

by Geoff McMurchy and Paul Tubbe

We've heard it before: the best form of income support is a job. Apart from money to spend, a job can provide us with a sense of purpose and of belonging. If every person of working age was equally integrated into, or at least had access to, the labour market, you would call that fair. But when some people with disabilities are quite well supported by legal settlements, while others have nothing but what can be provided by welfare services, the system is unfair.

A recent report by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business concluded that one of the main reasons that 35.2% of businesses are having problems finding qualified labour is that they are "competing with government social assistance". While one might question this, there's obviously something wrong.

Part of what's wrong is that there are very real systemic reasons why it is more economically feasible to stay on social assistance than to work, if you have to bear the cost of a disability. It's one of the main reasons that so many people with disabilities are on welfare or at best are very marginal to the work force.

When a person gets a job, they face the prospect of paying for attendant care, transportation, housing, and medical equipment and supplies on their own. The latter, most people know, are very expensive. Taxicabs are often necessary to supplement handiDART rides. Many people find accessible housing in facilities where rent is based on 30% of income, with no upper limit! With these and other employment-related expenses, it's not hard to imagine a person doubting whether they can afford to work!

The BC Paraplegic Association once did a comparison of the cost to government of supporting a man unemployed, to the man being employed. The unemployed cost was over $32,000 and the employed man cost government $63.

That was based on 1991 figures, but guess what? Not a lot has changed.

"It's time for governments to wake up to the huge costs of forcing people into unemployment. We spend billions on supporting people as long as they are idle", says Sam Sullivan, a City of Vancouver Councillor and a quadriplegic. "I have to wonder why a businessman can write off 50% of a lunch and I only get a 17% tax credit for the equipment I need to even hold down a job!"

The Canadian Paraplegic Association also targets the tax system. They've been advocating a 100% tax write-off, among other measures, for years. No changes have been implemented because the government has apparently been concerned about the potential costs.

As well as the tax system, there are areas of our income security and social service framework which demand attention. Existing income support programs can actually raise obstacles to entering the work force. David Metcalf, a vocational counsellor at BC Rehabilitation Centre says: "There's a lot more funding available for support like personal care attendants when one is in training or educational programs, but not when one becomes fully employed. Is it any wonder that so many choose not to work?"

If it's time for the government to wake up, then the wake-up call has come. It came as the report of the Federal Task Force on Disability Issues, titled "Equal Citizenship for People with Disabilities - The Will to Act". Released October 28th, it was hailed as "a significant step forward in improving the status of persons with disabilities" by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD). However, they preceded that statement with an "if endorsed", and it's a crucial qualifier. Eric Norman, chairperson of the CCD, said "Now we will see whether the government has the 'will to act' or not."

The report makes over 50 good recommendations dealing with federal-provincial responsibilities, legislative reform, disability income, labour market integration and the tax system. It's unclear how long government will give itself to respond to the report, so it's incumbent on all of us who care to act now! Ministers Martin, Pettigrew, Rock and Stewart and all MPs must hear from us that we want these recommendations supported, that we want commitment to action and that we want to be consulted in future planning. The fate of this report and the outcomes for people with disabilities may very well depend on our own "will to act".

So write a letter or make a phone call to your MP! Also, if you have a story about your own financial difficulties with working, the Coalition Against Disincentives to Work, an ad hoc group of concerned individuals, is collecting them. Contact Geoff McMurchy at the BCCPD office. ≈

Classified Ads

Charting New Waters
Violence Against Women with Disabilities

Video and Facilitator's Guide

The Justice Institute of BC has produced this new 35-minute video and facilitator's guide to raise awareness of the barriers women with disabilities face when they try to end the violence in their lives. Through the voices of disability advocates, this video offers ways for police, Crown counsel, victim services, and other front line workers to support women with disabilities and overcome the barriers.

The package consists of:

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- a facilitator's guide to a six-hour interdisciplinary workshop, which includes a sample lesson plan, content notes, participant handouts, and suggested readings

The project was funded through the Family Violence Prevention Division of Health Canada.

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WARNING
This video contains language that may be offensive to some viewers.