

Hello friends of the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario

It has been a long time since you have heard from the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO). With funding very limited and some of our volunteer leaders facing some health issues and personal pushes and pulls, IFCO has needed to take a step back as we attempted to secure some funds. We look forward to being in contact more often again going forward!

We are opening up this 'news brief' wanting to remember and honour a dear friend of the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario and a mentor to many of us, Andrew Bloomfield.

REMEMBERING ANDREW BLOOMFIELD

Andrew passed away unexpectedly in January. His passing saddened many. Andrew's life's work, his stories, and his life inspired and touched huge numbers of people and families in Ontario and far beyond.

"Andrew, we truly thank you for all you have given us. And we thank your parents for their steadfastness and willingness to share all that they learned along the way – always taking their lead from you. You are being missed."



Andrew's life was an amazing example of what can happen when: life is individually tailored to a person's passions and interests, supporters are individually chosen and paid through individualized funding, and when dreams and action plans are always at the forefront. With incredible support from his parents, his Circle of Support, and his Aroha, called Friends of Andrew Bloomfield (FAB), Andrew lived an incredible life overcoming obstacles most could never dream of.

His story and messages about life have been shared through the books he has written, his poetry, his paintings, and his blogs. For those who would like to learn more, here is the link to his blog site:
<https://andrewsbridges.blogspot.com/>

Andrew's resilience, commitments, and care were profound. I always felt so much support when reaching out to Andrew, who was most willing to help with the requests that I made, always with the assistance of his parents. Thank you for your mentorship and sharing.... Andrew. *Sincerely, Michelle.*

Note: The Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario will be putting up more on our website later. For now, here is the Obituary that appeared on line with the Wall-Custance Funeral Home & Chapel in Guelph.

“BLOOMFIELD, Andrew John – Andrew was born in Auckland, New Zealand on 6 May 1968 and lived in Guelph from January 1969. At the age of four, he was diagnosed with what was then called “classic autism”. He was a founding member of the first class for autistic children in Wellington County.

In his teens, the lack of local services meant that he had to live away from home, often at considerable distances from Guelph. In his memoir (2011) he told us how important his twin sister Vickie was in his learning to cope with what sometimes seemed an alien world. He was devastated by her death in a winter traffic accident in February 1996.

Since that time his parents Elizabeth and Gerald and his friends have supported the whole good life that was designed by and around Andrew and based in his own home. Unable to speak with his voice, he taught himself to read and, with the aid of Supported Typing, composed some 200 poems, was author of several books and, with assistance, envisioned and created many paintings. His most recent book was for children: *Friendmakers* is a series of stories about his companion dogs.

During his lifetime, he contributed to the development of many forms of support that have helped other people with complex needs. These included: creating a home of his own managed by a housing trust; imagining the self-directed support corporations we call Aroha entities (also known as microboards); and testing nutritional and sensory strategies to overcome severe health problems. Above all, he pioneered the communication support group *Bridges-Over-Bridges* which first met in January 2004.

Andrew made several videos about his life and inspired the short dramatic film *Holding in the Storm* (2013). His community influence was recognized by a Guelph Mayor’s award in 2013 for being a “difference maker”.

He will be missed by his parents, friends and running partners in the Riverside Park district, and by many others around the world.

Cremation has taken place. Arrangements entrusted to WALL-CUSTANCE FUNERAL HOME & CHAPEL (519-822-0051 / www.wallcustance.com).

In lieu of flowers, please send a message and/or give a donation to a community organization dedicated to helping people with complex needs.

A tree will be planted in memory of Andrew J. Bloomfield in the Wall-Custance Memorial Forest.”

Note from IFCO: Messages about how Andrew touched your life are being received by the Bloomfields to be collected as part of a book.

UPDATES FROM THE INDIVIDUALIZED FUNDING COALITION

Proposal Development: After receiving clear direction from people and families during a vibrant conversation following our virtual gathering in June, IFCO put together 2 proposals for small amounts of funding over the summer.

It was our goal for IFCO to be able to develop stories with people and families who have had experience with larger amounts of individualized funding and independent facilitation so that others could learn about their successes and participation as citizens, AND for IFCO to continue the momentum by holding community engagement events. One proposal was turned down. A portion of the second IFCO request was funded for some story development. The *This is My Life Stories* project got underway in November thanks to the Family Engagement funding from Community Living Ontario. Look for more on this later.

Summer/Fall 2024: Despite IFCO having to put a pause on our community engagement gatherings like Coffee & Conversations, Have Our Say, and Now is the Time, due to our limited resources there has been other action behind the scenes – a result of the commitment, time and talent of volunteers.

- Volunteers/leaders with IFCO have prepared PowerPoint Presentation based on the Now is the Time paper and what people and families had been telling us at events, and shared them at 2 different Provincial conferences. Interest has been increasing by other stakeholders and good questions were being asked.
- Volunteers/leaders with IFCO have been meeting for more than a year on the Resources and Capabilities Committee of the Inspired by our Grassroots Group to assist in the development of a business plan as part of a collaboration with other partners. A draft of the business plan is available while the committee members continue to fine tune the document into its final form over the next month. A presentation on the plan will be made at the upcoming OASIS conference. Kory Earl, IFCO co-chair along with others from the IFCO leadership team will be presenting.

This is My Life Stories Project: With the funding received for the development of stories, IFCO was able to secure a project coordinator, Judith McGill, has been able to lay the foundational work for launching a first podcast containing 2 stories at an IFCO event on April 16, 2024 in the evening. Two families/ individuals have been interviewed for the podcast. Their stories will demonstrate to others what life can be like with the support of individualized funding and independent facilitation. There will be opportunity for dialogue and sharing at this event. Stay tuned for more information. Judith has also been meeting with 3 other independent facilitators who will be interviewing people and families for additional podcasts. This series of stories through podcasts will be launched at the event in April. Additional funding is being sought and secured through partners/agencies who believe in this work and the power of stories. This will ensure the This is My Life Stories project can be completed over the next few months. It means 2 – 3 more podcasts, each containing 2 stories, and opportunities for engagement events and conversations with local Family Networks and People First Chapters who are interested. Stay tuned for more details later.

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