



Life Sharing Handbook

Burnaby Association
for Community Inclusion



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Welcome to Life Sharing



Congratulations on your decision to share your life and your home with a person with a developmental disability. The decision you have made today will lead you down a path of tomorrows filled with love, laughter, fulfillment... and no doubt a few tears and fears. The Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion (BACI) looks forward to supporting you on your journey - we hope you have the time of your life!

We hope this manual sparks a conversation with you that will last for years to come. Please take a moment to read through the materials. If you have any questions or comments, we would love to meet up and have a chat.

About BACI



In 1956, parents of children with disabilities formed a non-profit organization in Burnaby to help advocate for the rights of their sons and daughters. This was the birth of the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion and the beginning of an unwavering commitment to respond to the needs expressed by individuals and their families.

From its start as a grass roots organization, our Association has maintained a steadfast commitment to listening to the needs of individuals and families. Services must honour this group above all and be capable of accommodating its diverse needs, interests, and expectations. This obligation results from a number of considerations, not the least of which is the

fact that our services bear directly and profoundly upon the quality of life of those receiving them.

We are therefore committed to being a dynamic and vibrant organization with a strong membership, always driven by, and answerable to, the individuals and families we serve.

A central conviction that shapes all our practices is the belief that citizenship (and the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that accompany it) must extend to all Canadians, regardless of whether or not one has a disability.

Thus, our goal is not simply to integrate principles of citizenship into the services we provide – such as

the right to self-determination, contribution, and the freedom from discrimination – but to advocate to make sure these principles are also present for people with disabilities in the wider social and political systems.

Being - Becoming - Belonging

BACI aims to increase the being, becoming and belonging of the people we support through advocacy, community development and service delivery. Each person has the right to make decisions about what sort of life they will lead, and receive helpful supports that look after their “Being” – home, health and safety, communication, positive social atmosphere, access to services and resources, and support from contractors and others in their personal network.

Each person is supported in “Becoming” contributing, active citizens and visible and valuable members of society – through employment, community engagement, and personal growth.

Each person is supported to explore and develop relationships to advance their “Belonging” – relationships that provide meaning and connection to



others including family, friends and loved ones. People are also supported to find meaningful opportunities to express and receive love and affection – acknowledging our desire for reciprocal bonds that confirm we belong.

Consequently, we are committed to ensuring that:

- Self-advocates are given roles or leadership, involvement and influence in matters that are of concern to them (including our services) and that all individuals contribute to decisions affecting them to the extent that they are able;
- All individuals enjoy opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their communities;

- BACI collaborates with our local communities, municipalities, province and nation to create inclusion and genuine belonging for persons living in the margins of our society, most especially those with disabilities.

However, because our communities clearly are not yet places of full inclusion where citizenship and dignity is readily given to all members, we recognize advocacy and collaborative leadership as important and appropriate ways of bringing about change.

The Board of Directors has created and endorsed the Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles of our Association:

Vision:

A society that includes all people.

Mission:

BACI creates places where people of all ages:

- Connect with family and friends
- Achieve hopes and dreams
- Learn and grow
- Have choices respected
- Access quality supports and services
- Believe in and advocate for the

rights and responsibilities of everyone.

Guiding Principles:

- 1. We recognize the inherent value of every person.** We recognize the value of every person. All people with disabilities share the same basic human rights as well as the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens. We will treat all people in a fair and equal way.
- 2. We believe that each person should be treated as an individual.** We recognize that all people are unique. They all have both gifts and limitations. All people must be seen as people and must be treated with respect.
- 3. We believe that friends and family are of utmost importance in the lives of the people whom we support.** We are committed to making sure that all of the people that we support have family and friends in their lives. Friends and family are an extremely important of our lives. People with friends usually are more valued by people in the larger community. Friends add joy to people's lives, make their lives more satisfying, and make them less vulnerable.



4. We believe that all people have a right to take part in and belong in their community. We are committed to working toward a community in which people are neither labeled nor excluded. We believe that all people have the right to belong in their community and that they should be valued for the gifts that they bring to their community.

5. We believe that people with disabilities should be supported and encouraged to make decisions that affect their lives. We will encourage people to say or show what they want, make sure that they have choices, and respect those choices. Our goals are to involve people with disabilities in making decisions and to make sure that they have enough information to make choices themselves. Making choices and decisions may lead to taking risks, to being responsible for those decisions

and to learning from those experiences. We will ensure that people who are vulnerable have family and friends involved in making decisions that affect their lives.

6. BACI is a Disability Confident organization; every aspect of the organization is accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. This commitment is proactively supported in policy and practice.

These principles serve as both the foundation for, and the inspiration behind our services. We are committed to their fulfillment in every aspect of our undertakings, and we are determined that they shall be neither compromised nor weakened as a result of the demands, pressures, and/or stresses that are involved in the provision of services.

We welcome and encourage all stakeholders (individuals, their families, members, social workers, external professionals/contractors, financial donors, and so on) to challenge us when they feel we may be losing this focus, or when they feel we have not implemented these principles to the fullest extent possible.

About Life Sharing

Life Sharing is a Relationship

Life Sharing means living with and sharing all of life's experiences together and forming a supportive and caring relationship. Life Sharing is a three way relationship between you, the person with disabilities/their family and BACI. Each of the members has a role to play in the relationship, and each member comes to the relationship with a set of hopes, dreams, and expectations.

While every life sharing relationship is unique, there are some hopes and expectations that are common such as the hope of a good life, lived with purpose and the expectation to be treated and supported with respect.

Exploring the Relationship

The support that BACI's Life Sharing Network (LSN) Team provides to the Life Sharing relationship begins even before the relationship starts – in fact BACI's LSN Team is the relationship 'matchmaker'. Compatibility between the members is an important ingredient for success. The LSN Team will spend time getting to know you

as well as the person with a disability/their family.

We think that making the right match is the first important key to a successful life sharing relationship. Here's how we make the match...

Getting to know you

The Home Study/ Assessment is a process used by the LSN Team to determine the suitability of prospective individuals, couples or families who are considering becoming part of our Life Sharing Network. The home study includes the following:

- 1. Pre-Screening (usually conducted over the phone):** A LSN Team member will ask you a series of questions to evaluate your interests, motives and understanding of Life Sharing.
- 2. Information Gathering:** You will receive a LSN Information Package by mail or email. You will be asked to complete and application form and return it to BACI. We will review the application for suitability and contact you. If you are successful to this stage, the next step is...



- 3. Home Study/Interview(s):** A LSN Team member will arrange a visit to your home to meet with you and your family and conduct an accessibility/suitability assessment. You will be asked to complete a reference check form and provide a copy of BC Identification.
- 4. Analysis/Evaluation:** All of the information gathered above will be reviewed.
- 5. Follow-up:** The LSN Team member may contact you to gather any outstanding information required.
- 6. Recommendation:** The LSN Team member will contact you and let you know if you are considered to be a suitable candidate.
- 7. You will be asked to provide criminal record clearance.**
- 8. Matching:** Your application will be presented to individuals and their families for review. If selected, an interview meeting between you and the person with disabilities/their family will be arranged and facilitated by a LSN Team member. When a successful match is made a Life Sharing Network Agreement will be executed and transition planning will begin.



Getting to know the Person with a disability and their family

Because BACI has been providing services to people with disabilities and their families for many years, we may already have a relationship with the person/their family who have made a choice to explore a Life Sharing relationship, but in most cases the person and their family are new to us, being referred through either Community Living British Columbia (for Adults) and the Ministry (for Children).

The referral process includes developing a profile with the person and their families that focuses upon exploring the hopes, dreams, services expectations and needs for support the person has.

Part of this process also determines how much funding will come from government to BACI to support the Life Sharing relationship.

Creating the Relationship

When all three members (you, the person with the disability/ their family and BACI) agree that the relationship is a good match, BACI's LSN Team will draw up a Life Sharing Network Agreement.

This agreement is a legal document between you and BACI. It describes all the terms, conditions and key deliverables of the relationship, including financial terms. It is very important that you are comfortable with the agreement and understand every bit of it before signing. BACI

recommends that you review the contract carefully and seek advice from a lawyer or tax specialist prior to signing.

A very important key deliverable contained in the Life Sharing Agreement is for you and the person with a disability/ their family to create a 'Shared Commitment'. This commitment to each other will be in writing and will contain very specific things about day to day life such as how the rent will be paid, how, when and where groceries will be bought, preferred meals and activities, favourite TV shows, expectations around privacy, resolving conflict, having friends over etc.

The LSN team member will support you, the person with disabilities and their family to create this commitment and it will be reviewed at least annually during personal planning sessions.

A sample of the Life Sharing Network Agreement and tips on how to make your Shared Commitment can be found at www.gobaci.com



Supporting the Relationship

Resources

When you enter into a Life Sharing relationship you will be matched with a member of the Life Sharing Network Team. The LSN Team member will connect you to resources – human and web based that we hope will help you enjoy your life sharing relationship and meet the terms and conditions of your Life Sharing Network Agreement.

We have found that the support drawn from common experience is very powerful. In fact many of our LSN Team members are in Life Sharing relationships themselves.



Web Based Resources

1. Resources to Strengthen your Life Sharing Relationship. This resource section contains links to interesting community information, examples of personal planning tools, Guidelines for creating your 'Shared Commitment', 'Circles of Natural Safeguards', best practice examples, generic health and safety information, Community Living BC Resources. This resource section will grow and change as BACI finds and posts new materials to help strengthen your life sharing relationship and meet the terms and conditions of your Life Sharing Network Agreement.

Semi-annual meetings provide an excellent opportunity for members of the BACI Life Sharing Network (there are over 100 members!) to come together share stories of success and struggle and learn from each other and the LSN Team. We really encourage you to attend these meeting and other gatherings organized by the LSN Team.

The dates, times, locations and themes for the meetings are posted at www.gobaci.com. If you have a suggestion for a meeting theme, please let us know!

2. Resources Required within Life Sharing Agreement. This section of resources connects directly to your Life Sharing Agreement and contains procedures and forms that must be followed and used in the fulfillment of your agreement. In this section you will find, for example, BACI Policy that relates to contractors, Critical Incident Reporting procedures and forms, reporting guidelines and forms, the BACI Life Sharing Monitoring Tool and Health and Safety Tool.



Tools and resources are available to all members of the Life Sharing relationship by accessing the BACI web site at www.gobaci.com. If you have questions about any of the materials on the web site, or are having difficulty accessing them, please contact your LSN Team member.

Monitoring

Your LSN Team Member plays an important role in monitoring how things are going with your Life Sharing relationship and your fulfillment of the Life Sharing Network Agreement. On a regular basis a member of the LSN team will visit with you and the person you live with. At least annually the LSN team member will conduct the BACI Life Sharing Monitoring tool and Health and Safety Tool. Monitoring is a collaborative process that includes seeking input

from all members of the life sharing relationship and others within the person with disabilities' circle such as family, friends and service providers.

While formal monitoring will occur annually, BACI relies upon and supports the informal and very powerful roles that families, friends, neighbours and co-workers can play in helping people with disabilities lead safe and dynamic lives, therefore the LSN team members will work with you to create Circles of Natural Safeguards to help promote the safety and security of the person with disabilities.

A guide to create the Circle of Natural Safeguards is available in the Resource "Strengthen your Life Sharing Relationship" on the BACI website.



Finances

Money can be a tricky part of any relationship and a Life Sharing relationship is no different. Combining resources to pay for food and rent requires complete transparency – everyone in the relationship needs to know what they are paying for and where the money is going.

BACI requires that the nature of the financial agreement within the life sharing relationship is included in the written ‘Shared Commitment’ and this commitment will be monitored by the LSN Team member.

You can be sure that BACI will honour the financial commitments made as part of the Life Sharing Network Agreement. Typically contract payments are made electronically into your bank account on the 15th of every month.

Respite

BACI believes that you should take time to take care of yourself! Keeping strong, healthy and well rested will help you keep your life sharing relationship moving in the right direction.

Self care is unique to each individual which is why your Life Sharing Agreement puts you in control of arranging and paying for your own respite. Of course, because the Life Sharing relationship isn’t just about you, BACI requires that the respite providers are a good match with the person with disabilities and are able to fulfill all the terms conditions and key deliverables of the Life Sharing Agreement in your absence.



Now What?

Before you begin your new Life Sharing relationship you will have a million questions, and probably a million more once you start to get your feet wet. We hope that this handbook and the web based resources, along with your Life Sharing Network Agreement will answer most of your questions.

We know this is a lot of information to take in all at once and while it is important for you to check out the web site and completely familiarize yourself with all the material we also want you to feel free to contact an LSN team member to arrange a time to chat.

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