

**Subj: Setting My Direction**  
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**From: 73742.3523@compuserve.com**  
**To: MBB1217@AOL.COM**

**Where Do I Go From Here?**

**Dear John:**

**As you asked I am writing down perspectives in order to develop for myself, with your help and others, a clear action path over the next few years. What follows is a compendium of notes, mostly written by myself, showing the range of philosophies, goals and planned activities that have been discussed between Nov. '98 and May '99. This does not take the shape of a proposal and I don't think it needs to since the money is in place.**

**What I do need to develop for myself is a clear voice, simple, inspiring and different. By different I mean activity that:**

- DOES NOT play into the hands of the service system;**
- DOES NOT become a charitable enterprise; and,**
- DOES NOT become merely an intellectual exercise.**

**I am challenged by the absence of a clear idea of what a truly unique direction could be.**

**Other characteristics of a different direction would be:**

- People from the "disability" world connect with people from other sectors**

**and, at the same time, maintain a strong voice and presence.**

- Projects and activities do not take on a "helping" or "fixing" focus.**
- The results of my work increased inclusion and also were effective in other ways such as improving employment for youth, and increasing membership in associations as examples.**
- There is a clear philosophical engagement, i.e. people discuss the values**

and the culture that strengthens community.

- It is about community!

- We reintroduce or re-emphasize the aspect of changing social policy and have clear results in this area.

What follows is the notes taken from our face-to-face, e-mail and forum discussions.

From a summary of our history, written by me, April 1999

The question that we gathered to consider, (in the beginning), was, "What changes in social policy are required to ensure that people who are labeled disabled will always be able to participate fully in Canadian communities everywhere?"

Quoted from Vickie Cammack, written April 1999

"We describe ourselves as a non-movement movement that creates catalytic

actions in which people are responsible for their own actions. We discussed

a key finding of our work to date: this project is about language. The struggle is to communicate what we and others already know about communities and people who have been labeled as disabled. We often lack the

words for our experiences and knowledge. .... Enabling Communities will continue to search for the words and processes which easily and readily bring our understanding of community and citizenship to others."

Written by me, Jan. 1999:

"For myself, my dream is still that the world will appreciate the value of diversity and vulnerability - to the point where people will voluntarily welcome people they now typically marginalize. I want to work at the dreaming, thinking, writing and language creation. At the same time I don't

want to be completely sheltered from the real struggles of real people. I am a warrior by inclination and by life and I need to stay close to the fight in order to grow and learn."

Forum, May 1999, written by me:

We have different emphases and core directions to follow:

There are a few factors to consider:

- the philosophical core is different from different points of view. Three prime threads are:

- reinventing citizenship along ancient roots but with a capacity to transform and beat back modern social/bio engineering, mechanistic forces;

- valuing diversity, vulnerability and suffering along with ending the growing impotence that arises from adopting the victim stance; - relationship and community instead of individualization and being cared for; building from capacity, dream and interest rather than planning/management.

In addition:

- different language groups AND different regions see different emphases, because, in part, of different histories and different perceptual emphases; and,

- practical outcomes are expected and will concrete activities will shape the philosophy.

Also by me at about the same time:

The similarity about all these efforts was and is that when all is underway

people say, "This is good for our community!", not just, "How good this is for disabled people."

Jan. 1999 - Proposed Activities - written by Jacques Dufresne and Helene Laberge, in response to McConnell's offer to fund:

- 1) Writing, publishing, filming, disseminating stories (through Internet, TV, Radio, Newspapers, books)

- 2) Writing an publishing a theoretical manifesto. (Stories would be the illustrations of this piece) (This includes the finding and disseminating of any pertinent information, about books, existing web sites, existing activities similar to ours in the rest of the world)

- 3) Organising houses of dialogue in each of the five regions.

4) Establishing groups in two other regions and; enlarging them, structuring them in the three first provinces.

5) Organising symposiums, (one per year) seminars (2 per year) and small encounters in the houses of dialogue.

Jan. 1999 - Proposed Activities - written by me, in response to McConnell's offer to fund:

#### Story Collection

I will look at mature networks, (support circles), and collect stories of what has and has not actually happened over the last 20 years. I imagine that Jacques is going to give us a framework for developing our web site. I will write up stories, and commentaries on stories, for the web site. Likely someone should answer e-mail generated by the web site and I would

do some of this work, though probably not all of it depending on what sort of queries and contributions we get.

I see Dawn, Al, Vickie, Jacques and Helene contributing to this area - Al and Vickie writing up PLAN experiences, (or getting others to), and Dawn directly interviewing people.

#### Extending the Steering Committees

I see myself:

- rebuilding the Southern Ontario Steering Committee
- developing one other Regional Steering Committee

I see us "counting" 300 community leaders from 6 regions by setting up sections of our web site for each region and having stories and statements

from leaders recorded and posted both by region and by topic areas, such as: community contribution, home as a haven, community renewal, most unusual relationship-building strategy, testimonials, etc.

#### Youth Organizations

I have about five connections to active youth groups, mostly social action/political types. I see working with other youth and youth groups

that Jacques or McConnell recommend. I can work with the Regional Steering Committees to plan youth forum(s) and then consult to the project leaders that emerge.

#### "Disabled Community" Organizations

I see inviting key representatives from the parent movement, the

Independent Living movement, People First, and others to dialogue with us,

both face to face and on the Internet. We want to clarify differences in our philosophies and to encourage other labelled folks to take an "Enabling Communities" approach and to take up leadership in these initiatives.

First

steps can be generated through our web site and through personal contact.

#### Deepening the Dialogue (In General)

I see taking a good chunk of time, after we get started up, to read, reflect, speak and write about the "gift" of "vulnerability". It would be good to do this in the context of a conversation with one or more people so that we can deepen the questions and include a broad range of experience.

#### Goals in the Memorandum of Understanding - May 1999

##### Canadian Public Awareness

To raise Canadian consciousness about the urgency and feasibility of mobilizing communities, individuals and resources to ensure the contributions of all citizens are made. To promote understanding of the unique and invaluable contributions of people who have been labeled disabled.

##### Community Mobilization

To help communities develop and implement coordinated long-term efforts to mobilize the capacities and contributions all citizens.

##### Organizational Transformation

To motivate and equip organizations to develop and implement asset-building strategies.

### Citizen Engagement

To create wide spread "disability literacy" amongst citizens and cultivate mutual hospitality.

### Youth Action

To actively engage children and adolescents in mobilizing assets in their own lives and the lives of their peers. To activate youth contribution to local and national Philia initiatives.  
(Philia is our informal name, as of May.)

### Partnership

To create strategic alliances with existing groups, organizations, federations and individuals for dialogue and joint action.

### Indicators of Success

- \*The idea is no longer ours.
- \*Unexpected outcomes have emerged.
- \*Community members will have an improved "disability literacy". They will look upon someone who has been labeled as disabled with openness and curiosity regarding their potential contribution.
- \*People will understand that problems can generate communities. They will ask what is in this problem that can benefit us?
- \*There will be a deepening of our understanding of the values that inform how we live together.
- \*Our reflections will be linked to historical and current intellectual thinkers, traditions and philosophies.
- \*There will be a body of stories and literature that speaks of the concepts of Enabling Communities. It will include a compilation of relevant stories

from literature and the writing of new ones. This body will have a breadth so it is of interest to many people.

\*Community vitality indicators will be developed. They will focus on the links between social life and natural life. They will be used to help people understand the necessity of time and space for inclusive, social actions to occur.

\*There will be fluidity of language around the concepts of Enabling

Communities that reflects an organic, living message, not social engineering.

\*The word "disabled" will disappear.

Our new name as of May 7: Discovering Community - the Philia Project

In the last while we have been connecting our thinking with the growing movement of "resilient community". We recognize that including vulnerable

people in community improves community capacity to deal with crisis, cope

with economic and social stress and make a come back after a shock. We are

paying attention to the <http://resilientcommunities.org/html> web site, run

by Robert Theobald and friends.

Written by me recently:

Our start, (Philia), is slow but the potential good. One of the reasons for a slow start is that I think it is essential not to do the same old thing - but how to get away from that pattern? What is actually different? For example, the folks who have been the advocates in the "disability" world turn immediately to other folks in that world, "service providers" want to help, etc. I'm pretty certain that we have to make at least one strong breakthrough in this pattern in order to achieve something worth looking at.

We are celebrating that social resilience in Canadian society comes from including vulnerability in community. We are stimulating projects in every aspect of life from family, government, social and service associations, small business, religion, parks and recreations, banking and commerce,

and

more. We are on a journey to discover community by being open to the gift of diversity and supportive to people we usually exclude.

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Subject: Setting My Direction

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