

Circles of support

Cherish your human connections - your relationships with friends and family.

Barbara Bush

(Read more: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_family.html#ixzz1NNjh2hxs)

Family means no one gets left behind or forgotten.

David Ogden Stiers

Read more: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_family.html#ixzz1NNjuawmZ

United we stand, divided we fall.

Aesop

Read more: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/aesop_3.html

Community Living
MISSISSAUGA

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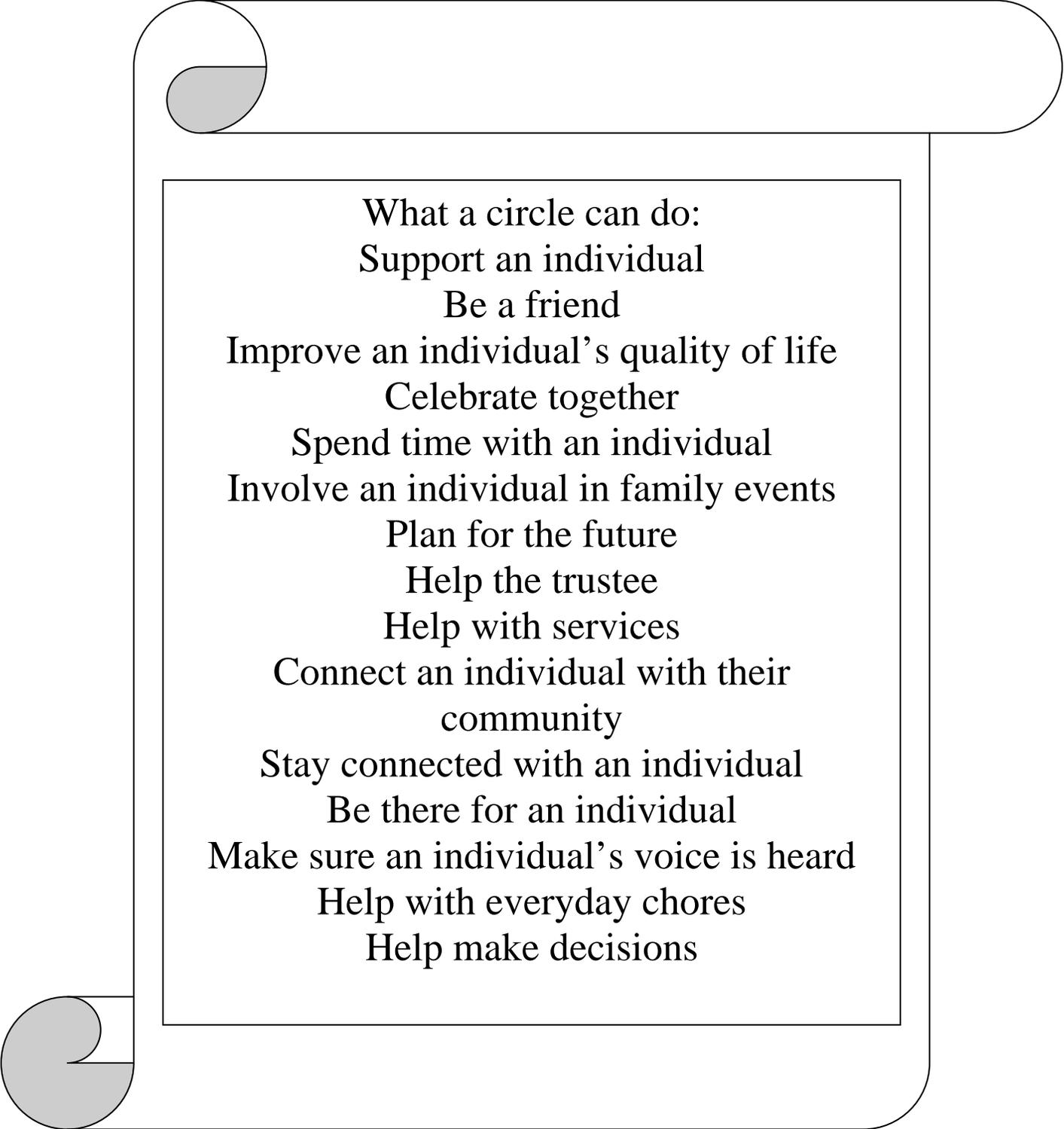
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What a circle can do:
Support an individual
Be a friend
Improve an individual's quality of life
Celebrate together
Spend time with an individual
Involve an individual in family events
Plan for the future
Help the trustee
Help with services
Connect an individual with their
community
Stay connected with an individual
Be there for an individual
Make sure an individual's voice is heard
Help with everyday chores
Help make decisions

Introduction:

Most people have a circle of support which evolves over time - the friend we go out for lunch with, go fishing with, or call when we need a shoulder to cry on. We don't necessarily choose these people...it just seems to happen. It happens because we have connected in some way, have a common interest or bond and because we are interested in each other's welfare. Our circle of friends may all know each other, or they may come from the different pieces of our lives - one from work, one from yoga class, or one from school. We may have family members we are close to as well - perhaps a sister or cousin, and we include them in our circle of friends. Our circle provides us with a sense of security and a sense of value.

Another term to describe the value that these types of relationships bring to our life is Social Capital. Social Capital refers to the "Connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them..." It is widely recognized that the more social capital you have, the healthier you are, the happier you are, the longer you live and the better the outcomes are in your life.

People who have a disability may not have the same opportunity to develop a circle of friends. Unfortunately they may be isolated and may be surrounded primarily by those who are paid to support them.

Rather than defining a circle of support it was felt that stories describing a circle would be more helpful to you the reader. What follows are a combination of stories from which bits and pieces have been collected and composed to illustrate the value and importance of a circle of support for an individual who has a disability. Information about circles of support has been interspersed to help define a circle and clarify any questions the reader may have.

As well there is a brief introduction to Microboards included in this publication. Microboards are more complex, and how they are established will vary from one jurisdiction to another so only a brief description has been presented. A Microboard is a non profit corporation whose mission is to work on behalf of an individual who has a disability and around whom the Microboard is created. Microboards are essentially more defined than formal circles of support.

Acknowledgements:

There were many in depth and detailed resources consulted in the creation of this publication. Of particular note:

1. *Stronger Together - Ideas, reflections and suggestions about networks of support*; Bruce Kappel; Support & Trustee Advisory Services of Brampton Caledon, 1998
2. <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca> - Ontario Adult Autism Research and Support Network; there is a great deal of valuable information on this web site;
3. *One Candle Power - Seven Principles that Enhance the Lives of people with Disabilities and Their Communities*, Revised by Cathy Ludlum and the Communitas Team; Inclusion Press
4. *THE "ALL OUR OWN" PROJECT A Fieldbook for Developing Microboards™* www.allourown.org Second Edition, January 2006; Networks for Training and Development, Inc, 1220 Valley Forge Road, Unit 17, PO Box 206, Valley Forge, PA 19481-0206; www.networksfortraining.org
5. <http://www.microboard.org> - Vela Microboards ; "Vela Microboard Association dedicates itself to honouring the rights of, and eliminating the barriers for, people with disabilities. This includes the right to freedom, equality, control over their own lives, and to be fully included as valued citizens in the relationships and the opportunities of community life."
6. <http://www.communityworks.info> - Community Works; "Management, consultation, facilitation and training in PATH, person-centered planning, and Microboard development - *Working towards communities in which each individual is cherished*"

Jessica's circle:

Jessica is the youngest child of Mr. and Mrs. Jones. The Jones are a small family, however they are close knit and supportive. The Jones' emigrated from the British Isles and only have one young cousin in the vicinity, Martha, who has also immigrated to Toronto with her husband James and young son, John. The Jones' have a large and supportive family back home. Mr. and Mrs. Jones had one other child and his name is Brian. Brian is three years older than Jessica and is away at University. He has a serious girlfriend, Denise, who is becoming close to the family, and enjoys spending time with Jessica.

Jessica is an independent young woman who transits on her own, works part time at a pet store and is in her last year of high school. Mr. and Mrs. Jones hope to take a trip for their 25th wedding anniversary and are considering booking a 29 day cruise of the Mediterranean. However, they feel they cannot leave Jessica alone for that period of time. While Jessica has many skills, it would be premature to expect that they could leave her unsupervised for a month. They worry that something may go wrong, as well as, Jessica's well being are their primary concerns. They want to ensure that Jessica is safe and well cared for while they are away.

Jessica will need support to do her banking, support preparing meals and grocery shopping, support with laundry and cleaning. As well, Jessica will need someone to stay with her.

Mrs. Jones makes some preliminary enquiries to find out what arrangements she can make to ensure Jessica will be cared for while they are away. Jessica has a respite worker named Michelle with whom she spends a couple of hours every week. Michelle is married, so is not available on the weekends, but has watched Jessica grow up and is very close to her. Jessica thinks of Michelle as a big sister.

Michelle has agreed to stay with Jessica from Monday to Friday afternoon while her parents are away. She has asked for weekends off, though, so that she can see her husband and spend some time with him. It is agreed that it would be best to keep Jessica in her family home while Mr. and Mrs. Jones are away, as it will be a familiar place for Jessica, not interfere with her school bus, or any of her other activities.

Mrs. Jones is happy with her arrangements thus far, however she then begins to think about how Jessica will be supported on the weekends, who would coordinate the support and ensure that there are no problems or that the arrangements she has made actually happen. This prompts Mr. and Mrs. Jones to look to the future as well. While they have completed their wills and set up a Henson Trust for Jessica, they realize that while they have legally and financially arranged for Jessica, they have not provided any type of structure to support Jessica - to be like a family around Jessica, to help her when they pass away.

Mrs. Jones starts researching different alternatives that they might consider to support Jessica. While on the internet, Mrs. Jones reads about creating a circle of support to help which could be created to support Jessica to ensure that she is well cared for while they are away. Mrs. Jones reads:

What is a circle of support?

A circle of support involves a group of people from all areas of the individual's life, and those who may help to provide support for the individual in some way or another who are originally and intentionally invited to come together with the purpose of assisting the individual reach or attain what is important to him or her.

This group of people consciously comes together to support and care for the individual at the centre of the circle. They provide organized help to the individual so that he or she can achieve what he or she wants to achieve. More often than not the circle is started by the parents of the individual, and ideally the circle will remain to support and advocate on behalf of the individual long after the parents have died.

People with connections in the community are generally less vulnerable. This also applies to those with a Developmental disability.

The purpose of a circle may change over time. It may start off as an informal opportunity for people to get together; it may require more structure and formality in times of crisis. It may start when the individual is young and evolve and grow as the individual ages, and his or her needs change as well.

Mrs. Jones feels that a circle of support may be just the solution she and her husband are looking for to ensure Jessica is well cared for not only while they are away, but in the future as well.

Who becomes a circle member?

A circle of support is comprised of a number of people who are involved with the individual who will be at the centre of the circle in a variety of ways. Perhaps family, friends, paid staff, or trusted community members may be approached. Each circle is personal and unique to the person it has been created for; some may feel they want certain people involved in a circle and some may not. For example, if an individual has many paid staff and few non paid people participating in their circle, one might query whether the paid staff would try to influence the circle to meet their own needs versus the needs of the individual.

Also important to consider are the ages of people being invited into the circle. It is generally felt to be a good idea to have a continuum of ages of the people involved so that there will be continuity in the circle over a period of years - which could easily be 40 or more years depending on the age of the individual at the centre of the circle.

Another question is whether all the members of the circle have to live in the same community as the individual at the centre of the circle. For example, if a sibling of the individual at the centre of the circle wants to be involved, but lives away from the individual, then he or she can be kept current by emailing them information from each meeting, by conference call, or even by using web cameras and video conferencing at meetings. Naturally the sibling may not be extensively involved with the individual's day to day life, but at least he or she will remain involved in with the individual's life and be in contact with the circle of support.

How should Mrs. Jones start to develop the circle of support around Jessica? Mrs. Jones begins to analyze their family situation and those people who they would trust to care for Jessica and who they would like to see involved in her life.

The Jones family is active in their church and Jessica sings in the choir, as well as attends the coffee club on a regular basis. The Jones's have close neighbours on either side of their home, and there are often Saturday BBQ's that all the neighbours participate in.

Mrs. Jones considers their neighbours, members of their church, Jessica's teacher, the cousin who has immigrated from Great Britain, and all of the other people who know Jessica and are involved in her life, as potential members for Jessica's circle.

Also, it is important for Mr. and Mrs. Jones that their son Brian is involved, even though he lives away from home. Mrs. Jones wonders about Denise, Brian's girlfriend and whether she might join Jessica's circle.

Mrs. Jones decided that the best way for her to organize her thoughts to determine who would be best suited for Jessica's circle was to create a chart, outlining how different people fit into Jessica's life:

Context	"Really Close" (i.e. family & friends)	"Sort of Close" (i.e. acquaintances)	"They are paid to help me"
FAMILY	Mom, Dad, Brian	Martha, James, John; remaining family in the British Isles	
FRIENDS	Denise		
SCHOOL			Jessica's teacher
JOB/VOLUNTEER		Pet store owner	
NEIGHBOURS		Neighbours on either side of parents' home	
RECREATION, LEISURE, GROUPS			
FAITH/WORSHIP		Choir leader, church Minister	
OTHER: Respite worker			Michelle

When Mrs. Jones completed her chart, she realizes that the two areas that were lacking in Jessica's life were friends and recreation, leisure and groups. Despite the fact that Jessica has a full, meaningful and happy life, she has few friends and has not to this point, participated in many recreational activities or groups. Perhaps the circle could work together to fill this void!

Mr. and Mrs. Jones decide they will invite Brian, Denise, Martha and her husband James and their son John, Jessica's teacher and Michelle to become members of Jessica's circle of support. They discuss the idea of a circle with Jessica, explaining the purpose, and what they hope will happen and to their surprise, Jessica is very excited to think that people she feels close to may continue to be closely involved in her life!

RELATIONSHIPS CHART:

Context	"Really Close" (i.e. family & friends)	"Sort of Close" (i.e. acquaintances)	"They are paid to help me"
FAMILY			
FRIENDS			
SCHOOL			
JOB/VOLUNTEER			
NEIGHBOURS			
RECREATION, LEISURE, GROUPS			
FAITH/WORSHIP			
OTHER:			

The Relationship Chart provides a method to determine how those around your son or daughter fit in to his or her life. Once this chart is completed, you may have a sense of who may be good candidates for the circle as well as how they fit into your child's life. It also may show areas of your child's life where a gap exists and provide you with the opportunity to fill the gap!

Mr. and Mrs. Jones now have an idea of who they will ask to join in Jessica's circle. They realize that they will find it difficult to ask people to join Jessica's circle, because they are afraid that people will see it as an imposition or an additional responsibility that the Jones' are asking - one that could continue for a number of years.

How does one invite someone to join their child's circle?

The first step in inviting people to join your son or daughter's circle is to determine who is involved in your child's life, and consider at the same time, how close they are to your child. The objective is to identify as many people as possible as well as their relationship ("closeness") to your son or daughter.

Once the participants are identified, then comes the "ask". Many parents will state that is the most difficult step in establishing a circle. Many parents feel that what they are asking will be viewed as an imposition, which they fear they may be rejected. It has been reported that frequently parents are surprised by the positive response they receive from someone they have invited into their child's circle. Parents report that they can't believe how receptive people are to their invitation, how they state they feel privileged to be part of a circle of support.

It is important to remember that parents are not asking for a lifetime commitment from someone when they ask them to join a circle of support; what they are asking is to take the opportunity to get to know the individual.

To the Jones' surprise, everyone they invited to join the circle stated they were very pleased and honoured to be invited! The first meeting, a potluck dinner, was held in November. Brian and Denise were not able to attend in person because they had mid term exams, however they participated in the conversation after dinner by web camera. Mr. and Mrs. Jones acted as the leaders or "facilitators" for the circle and during the formal portion of the first meeting, they talked to everyone there about why they had invited each person to be a member of Jessica's circle. They talked about thinking about goals for the circle, and what everyone - especially Jessica - hoped the circle would accomplish.

“What Happens During a Circle Meeting?”

A facilitator is essential to an effective circle meeting. The facilitator is someone who agrees to conduct the meeting by beginning the activities, keeping a record of the discussion, summarizing the ideas generated and helping people make commitments to actions. The facilitator may be the person with the dream, family, a friend or someone brought in from outside to get things started. It is important that the facilitator understand the person’s vision, preferences and social network.

The first time a circle meets, the objectives are to get everyone acquainted with one another and with the vision the group will pursue... It is important to describe the role of a circle of support and to explain the process so people do not feel lost. The best way is by telling stories of other circles and how they worked. The rest of the meeting is spent brainstorming strategies to bring a vision into reality. Identify which part of the vision to focus on first: looking for an apartment or planning supports, for example. Don’t try to do everything at once.

In the last ten minutes of the meeting, the facilitator goes over all the strategies that have been suggested. Five to ten action items with commitments are the result of a productive meeting. The focus person and/or family decides which of these are worth pursuing (all ideas are welcome, but some may seem more appropriate than others). Then circle members have the opportunity to make commitments to act on these strategies. It is important not to overlook people, but if each circle member takes one or two assignments, this is usually manageable. The group chooses a time and place to meet again, and then the meeting adjourns.

One Candle Power, Cathy Ludlum

Two years have passed since Jessica’s first circle meeting. The circle met regularly until Mr. and Mrs. Jones went away, to ensure that Jessica would be well supported and cared for. While her parents were away Michelle stayed with Jessica during the week and on the weekends, Jessica went to Martha and James’ house where she really enjoyed spending time with her young cousin. Brian and Denise came home to take Jessica out for dinner and to a movie one Saturday night and Jessica’s teacher worked with the circle to ensure there was active communication between school and home. Mr. and Mrs. Jones had a wonderful cruise and enjoyed their time away. The fact that Jessica was safe and secure and well looked after played a very important role in the success of their vacation. They realized that all their careful planning had paid off. They appreciated the value of the circle and realized it should become a permanent fixture of Jessica’s life!

Raymond's circle:

Raymond Smith is 45. His father suddenly passed away and the whole family is devastated - none more than Raymond. Dad was Raymond's primary caregiver and while Raymond is close with his Mother and 3 sisters, his Dad and he were very close. Raymond's Dad organized most of his activities and supported him with his personal care and social activities. Raymond's Mom feels overwhelmed as she realizes that she cannot support Raymond on her own. Mom is 80 now and her husband's passing has made her realize that there must be some planning done for Raymond if something were to happen to her. Joanne, one of Raymond's sisters lives in Mississauga; however the other two live away - one in Ottawa (Mary) and one in Halifax (Christine).

Raymond currently attends a day program which he thoroughly enjoys. He has been going to the same program for 20 years now and is well known by everyone there. Raymond goes to the program 4 days a week, and has a worker come and spend a half day on Fridays with him as well as a half day on Saturdays. His worker, George, has been supporting Raymond for about 7 years, and has become close to the family as well. With the death of his father, there will now be a health service coming in to support Raymond with his personal care twice a day 7 days per week. Raymond is a social gentleman who enjoys being with others in a lively environment. He enjoys music, being out in the community and various social settings. While he uses a wheelchair often, he occasionally walks with someone supporting him. He does not use words to communicate but has a PEC Board which augments the vocalizations he uses to make his wishes known.

In meeting with her Service Coordinator, Mom learns about circles of support and thinks that having a circle support Raymond may be the answer she has been looking for - someone to help her organize Raymond's supports, and to be there to support Raymond in the future, as well as advocate on his behalf. Mom realizes that she will now also have to think about planning ahead for Raymond.

The question is who to invite into Raymond's circle? Mom looks to Joanne and her husband and their 3 children (ages 14, 12 and 9) because they are in Mississauga and are all close to Raymond. However, she wants Raymond's other sisters involved as well and feels that they can time meetings to when the other sisters are in town, or by using email, telephone conference calls or even the internet. Mom also feels George, Raymond's worker, would be a good circle member as he knows Raymond so well.

The Circle of Support:

The network/circle is made up of a group of people who volunteer to have an ongoing role in the individual's life. The set up and functioning of such a group can be designed to suit each family's unique situation. They can be very effective, and provide the individual at the centre with a "family" per se. That "family" may continue the role as advocates, once parents are no longer involved. ..

Networks of support require some planning and organization as well. While they will support the individual, it may not be to the extent that "staff" provided by residential funding would. However, circles don't happen by magic. They also require facilitation and commitment from members of the circle. In many cases, the circle of support becomes or develops into a circle of friends who support the individual at the centre. Circles will be more successful if driven by the family or family member at the centre of the circle.

The governance of a circle depends on the circle. Some circles are informal, pot-luck get-togethers. Some circles may opt for a more formal board, with a newsletter to keep members informed. Having a skilled facilitator to work with the individual and circle members may be beneficial. The Facilitator will take time to get to know the individual at the centre of the circle and then strive to ensure that his/her needs, wishes and dreams are realized in the planning process.

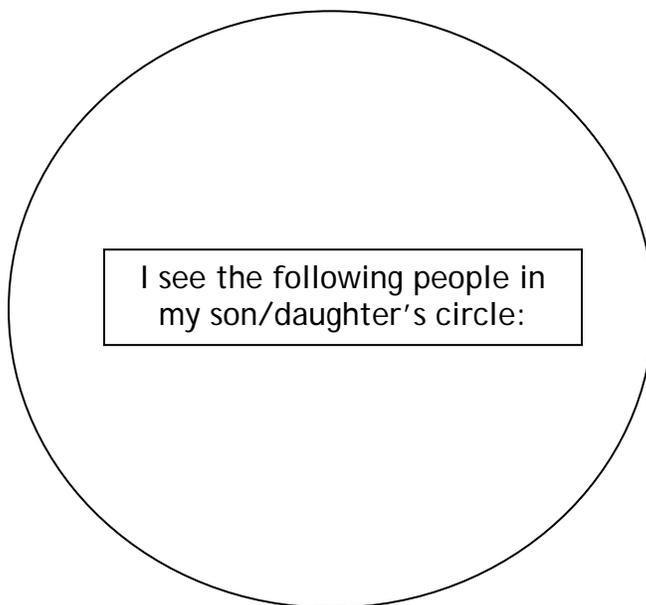
The size of a circle can vary as well, however parents should keep in mind that if the circle is too large it may become unwieldy. Parents may decide to start by participating in the circle and then gradually withdrawing their active participation. That way they can assess the effectiveness of the circle, and the individual at the centre of the circle can become accustomed to participating on their own.

Mom worries that Raymond's circle is so small, but then feels that more people could be invited as time passes. For the first meeting Mom invites Joanne, her husband and three children, and George over for dinner with Raymond and herself. It is an informal meeting, with lots of laughter and chatter! Mom mentions that with Dad's passing she will need some help with Raymond and that they need to start planning for his future. Joanne and her husband agree and feel that another meeting with the whole family is in order. Calls are made to both sisters and it is decided they will have a circle meeting with the whole family at Christmas time. Mom feels tremendous relief now that the family is on board and ready to help her. Raymond's worker George is pleased to be included in the circle as he feels close to the family and intends to stay with Raymond indefinitely.

At Christmas Mom slips and falls on the ice and has to be hospitalized for a couple of days. This brings home to the remainder of the family that Mom will not be able to care for Raymond indefinitely, and that it would be better for everyone involved to begin planning for Raymond's future before they are forced to do so in an emergency situation. The sisters, together with Raymond, their families and George begin to plan in order to assist Mom. To their surprise Raymond expresses some of his wishes which the family work to incorporate in their plan. Even when Mom returns home, the family continues to meet via telephone, in person or using a webcam, on a regular basis to develop their plan. Mom feels a tremendous sense of relief knowing that together with Raymond, her family will work towards a future where they are not depending on her. While Mom continues to attend the circle meetings, it is Joanne who runs them and Mom comments as necessary.

THE CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

1. Who belongs in your son/daughter's circle? Who would your son/daughter like to have involved in their circle?



Siblings?

Extended family members?

Cousins?

And parents of your son/daughter's friends that you can work with (they sit in your circle, you sit in theirs)?

Friends?

Church members?

Club members?

Any contacts from your son/daughter's activities?

Are you involved with any clubs or associations where you know of people who may want to be involved?

Are there any current support staff that you have a close relationship with?

I will need people to advocate in the future helping ensure that I enjoy the best quality of life. I may need someone to advocate on my behalf in the following areas:

My Advocacy list:

Person/contact information	Advocating for me in the following areas:
	Finances
	Legal
	Support
	Accommodation
	Changing needs

Who will advocate on my behalf in terms of my plan?

Have my family had the conversation with the people who are advocating for me about what my plan is, what my family wishes for me, and do they have that information?

What if in the future my needs change?

The microboard

A “microboard” is a circle of support that is established as a non profit agency, so there is a more formal arrangement than there may be with a circle of support. In this arrangement, a small Board of Directors is established and the individual works with the Board in making decisions. A microboard is incorporated as a not for profit organization and should have by-laws by which it is governed. To become a not for profit organization also has a process; for example, in Ontario one applies to the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Just what IS a microboard?

“A microboard is a formal fully incorporated organization (typically a non-profit) which is created with the specific intent of supporting one person’s dreams, needs, hopes and desires. It is formed around a person who may have disabilities of some kind, significant medical issues, or in some way needs assistance and/or personal services to help them live their life as independently as possible.

A microboard is often formed when this person along with friends, family, and others decide to go their own way and formally start a new corporation, their very own individual organization, specific to this person. The entire purpose or Mission of this organization is then to assist the person to plan for, obtain, and manage whatever they may need and desire to live the life of their choosing and reach towards their dreams and goals. While this is obviously a lot of work, for some this freedom and control is seen as needed to truly help this person live their own life and not be helped by organizations designed to serve many people.”

THE “ALL OUR OWN” PROJECT A Fieldbook for Developing Microboards; Second Edition; January 2006; © 2004 Networks for Training and Development, Inc.

Usually a microboard is a small organization and may have 3 Directors, although this number would be determined by the microboard itself. A microboard may operate within a circle of support as the mechanism driving the circle or may even operate alone working with the individual. A microboard may have more continuity than a circle of support because it has a formal structure. Choosing whether to have a circle of support or a microboard is a personal decision, and one that may depend on where the individual lives, the number of family and friends involved in the individual’s life, and the extent of support the individual may need.

KEVIN'S EMPOWERMENT GROUP

By Joan Gray www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/KEG-Feb04.PDF

Our son, Kevin, was diagnosed with autism at Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto when he was four. Thirty-six years later he lives semi -independently in his own apartment with the help of a microboard.

The diagnosis of autism was devastating, but it came at a fairly early age, and we were fortunate to have Kevin enrolled in an opportunity class shortly after. The teachers were intrigued and dedicated themselves to his education. He learned to express himself through his art, then he learned to print and to type, and eventually he learned to read. He skied with his younger brother, and he swam and canoed with the family in the summer. He was included in most family outings, which included eating in restaurants and a trip to Disney. But, living with a child with autism took its toll on the family, and at age 18 when Kevin expressed a desire for more independence, he left home to live at... a home for adults with autism. He gained more skills, but he actually had less independence, and he began to express a desire to return to his home community. In 1989, Kevin came back to our community.

We have had a rocky ride over the years as we balanced Kevin's desire for independence with his need for help. I will never forget the first time he slept overnight in his own home. That night, and for weeks after, I drove by his home at 11 p.m. If the lights were still on, I drove by again at midnight and again about 1 a.m. I wasn't satisfied until the lights went out. I was introduced to many all-night doughnut shops. And my husband learned to cope with my motherly ways as I tried to let go. We also had to learn to decipher Kevin's many varied ways of communicating. After he cut the telephone cord on three separate occasions, we finally learned that he didn't want staff chatting on the phone when they were with him, and we had the phone removed from his home. Kevin has been hospitalized on a number of occasions for a possible bi-polar disorder. The last time he had thrown a variety of foods and condiments around the apartment for several weeks, he had broken plates, etc., all behaviours connected to food and to staff. The very insightful doctor asked me just prior to Kevin's discharge how I would feel about withdrawing staff. I admit I had thought about doing this on a number of occasions, but now the doctor was giving his approval, and it worked! Now Kevin prepares his own breakfast and lunch each day, and he sometimes offers and makes tea for guests.

He currently lives in his own bachelor apartment with limited staffing. Kevin had a very wise grandmother. When he was diagnosed at four years old, she invested a small amount of money in GICs. Last year, the proceeds from the investments were used as a down-payment on a house that was purchased in trust for Kevin. The house is an older style which backs onto a hill and which has a deep front yard. There is a house to one side but empty space on the side next to the apartment, so it provides the privacy that is needed. The apartment is over the double garage that is attached

to the house, and there is a common room between the apartment and the main house.

I was introduced to the concept of a microboard in the fall of 2002. Two of my very dear friends supported my endeavours in this regard, and we visited Elizabeth Bloomfield in Guelph where she has a similar but different living arrangement for her son, Andrew. Elizabeth kindly provided us with the information we needed to incorporate. The objects and template by-laws for her Board are posted on her website <http://www.ontautism.uoguelph.ca/microboards.shtml>. She is very knowledgeable and very willing to share.

We completed and submitted the application form, which was provided by our lawyer, and with minimal changes, we received our letters patent in April 2003, two months after Kevin moved into his apartment and about a year after we began to investigate the possibility of a board. We currently have five members on our Board, which we call Kevin's Empowerment Group, or KEG. My brother is the secretary, one good friend is the treasurer, the second good friend and my sister are members, and I am the president. It is preferred that the individual be a member, but for various reasons this is not the case for Kevin at the moment. The key here is that the Board makes all decisions, which brings with it a great deal of responsibility, but also the best possible program for Kevin...

...She, or one of two part-time staff, drop in around lunch time to make certain morning meds have been taken, and one of them supplies a hot dinner on weekends. Another woman lives in the house rent free, heat and hydro included, in exchange for which she has contracted to be on the premises from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m. every day with alternating weekends off. She provides meds for Kevin at 9 a.m. and with dinner four days a week, and she leaves a vitamin with his popcorn at 9 p.m.

KEG's vision is that Kevin will live in the community as a valued/contributing member. Board members, staff and friends work as a team to make this happen. Kevin makes his own choices when possible and staff support him in this. We try not to be intrusive, but we all find ways to spend small periods of time with him. We encourage staff to be perceptive and to listen to what Kevin is saying. He often gives clues, and we need to let him know that his words have meaning and that we are willing to help him. We all work together to help Kevin to lead an active life in the community.

It is rather difficult to determine if Kevin is satisfied with his latest living situation, but he is becoming more and more involved in his own day-to-day living, and he is beginning to reach out to people from his past. It seems apparent that giving plenty of choice is paramount to Kevin's success, and the microboard is successfully allowing this to happen.

Conclusions:

No two circles of support will look exactly the same. Let's face it, no two families are the same and no two individuals at the centre of a circle of support are the same. While this booklet has attempted to offer assistance to families in terms of starting a circle of support, there are no set rules; there is no set format; and there is no "right" or "wrong". If a circle is working then the people involved are doing it "right". If a circle is NOT working, then the people involved need to revisit what they are doing and make changes.

The most important step in starting a circle of support is to make that first call to someone that the family or individual at the centre of the circle would like to see involved. Invite him or her over for coffee, or a meal. Then contact a second person until the group is complete.

Once the group has accepted the invitation for coffee or a meal then the first circle meeting has really been organized! At that meeting the family may decide to outline what they are hoping to accomplish with the circle, or they may just say that they hope the guests will continue gathering on a regular basis to keep in touch with the individual at the centre of the circle.

The circle will evolve from there! It is more a question of making the call, rather than planning out the whole role of the circle of support at once. A circle will likely always be a "work in progress".

Establishing a microboard requires a more formal process and will have more structure. However, a microboard may evolve from a circle or be at the centre of a circle. Again that is unique to each family. While there may be more work "up front" in establishing a microboard, once it is an official entity, then much of the work becomes the responsibility of the Directors.

Parents who start a circle on behalf of their son or daughter also get support from the circle - people to talk to, bounce ideas off, share their dreams and plan with. The close connection with the members of the circle can be reassuring for parents, as like their son or daughter at the centre of the circle, they realize *they* are not alone.

Yes there is work involved in establishing both a circle of support and/or a microboard. But the end result, knowing that the individual at the centre of the circle has people around him or her who care, and who are there if needed, brings parents and their sons or daughters a sense of security and peace of mind.

NAMES AND NUMBERS:

Emergency:	Hospital:
Parent/s:	
Emergency contact:	
Brother:	Sister:
Other close family:	Other close family:
Trustee:	Trustee:
Lawyer:	
Neighbour:	Neighbour:
Friend:	Friend:
Friend:	Friend:
Friend:	Friend:
Support Circle contact:	Support Circle contact:
Service Coordinator:	Agency support:
Doctor:	Doctor:

Dentist:	
Pharmacy:	Specialist:
Social Worker:	Clergy:
Landlord:	Bank:
Boss at work:	Employment support person:
Hairdresser:	Barber:
Volunteer contact:	Vet:

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