



# Family Newsletter

## Supporting Families to be Families First

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### A Parent's Perspective

Miriam's 28th birthday in 2012 was a time of hope. The last few years had not been her best. She lived with her retired mother. She had become increasingly isolated, not looking after herself well and staying at home stroking her cat and watching TV soaps. The year before she had been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome – an autism spectrum disorder that affects social interaction and learning. This had been upsetting, but it also gave hope of a way forward; it helped explain why she was where she was and pointed a way towards a happier, independent life. Her mother made contact with NBACL and she and Miriam began to make plans for a better future. But then her mother died. She had no family in Fredericton and she moved to live with me in England.

Here her prospects of independent living proved bleak. There was little understanding of autism and Asperger's within the community services and funding for all services was being cut back drastically. Miriam was just not a priority and no-one knew what she needed.

Miriam just wanted to go home. But that just seemed like Mission Impossible. Where would she live? How could she live alone, with no friends her own age? Step forward her brother Aaron, then living in Hungary. He renewed contact with NBACL and her psychologist to find out if the plans made earlier could be revived and made to work in much less promising circumstances. At the beginning of 2013 he put his own life on hold for four months to return to Fredericton with Miriam. With NBACL staff he worked out a support package for Miriam and set about creating a support network made up of Miriam's mother's friends. Everybody came together with Miriam to create a PATH, a plan for Miriam to achieve her goal of living her own life. Aaron found her a tiny apartment and NBACL helped arrange daily support through WeCare. Kerry and Carmen were not there to do things for Miriam; they set about teaching her the life and social skills she needed. Budgeting, shopping, cooking, cleaning, healthy living and exercise, use of leisure time – these were all part of the programme. Such was her progress that in April Aaron was confident enough to return to Hungary.

December 2013

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## A Parent's Perspective (cont.)

Since then I have been able to keep an eye on Miriam through daily Skype video calls. 'Not much' used to be her reply when I asked her what she had been doing.

Now I find it more and more difficult to fit my calls into her increasingly busy schedule. Of course she still grieves for her mother. Nevertheless, she is getting visibly happier with her life.

When I visited Fredericton in September I was able to see how well she has developed. She looks good, with a well-chosen set of attractive new clothes. She eats well, cooking for herself from an expanding list of recipes – no more TV dinners now. She goes to the Unitarian Fellowship on Sundays and has joined the University choir and the YMCA. She volunteers at the Food Bank and a cat breeder's. Just before I left she was asked to speak to the new NBACL board. I was so proud of how assured she was. I know she could not have achieved so much anywhere else. There is nothing to match NBACL in England. I hope the province continues to value this diamond in its crown.

Miriam still has things to work on – especially in meeting new people nearer her own age – but she has support from her network, her support workers, her psychologist and NBACL staff. With their continuing support Miriam has found that living an independent life in Fredericton is not Mission Impossible after all.

*Keith Taylor, Miriam's father*



*Miriam and her father Keith*

## National Inclusive Education Awards

As you may already know, February is National Inclusive Education month. The New Brunswick Association for Community Living would like to recognize achievements and present an award, on behalf of the Canadian Association for Community Living, to an individual or group who has made a significant contribution to inclusive education in New Brunswick or their community.

In order for us to recognize this dedication and to honour individuals or groups, we you're your nominations. If you would like to nominate a teacher, EA, principal, student, other school staff or volunteer for this award, please fill out a nomination form. The nomination form is available on our website homepage ([www.nbacl.nb.ca](http://www.nbacl.nb.ca)) or by calling the NBACL offices (1-866-622-2548 option 2). Please note the deadline for submissions is January 10, 2014.

## Achieving Inclusion: A Retreat-Style Workshop for Parents

First of all, to the members of the NBACL, you had me at “retreat”. When the email inviting parents of children with disabilities to attend a ‘retreat on the province’s inclusion practices’ came across my desk I was immediately intrigued. Their choice of vocabulary was obviously alluring but a chance to look at this policy surrounded by other parents for whom it is crucial was equally as enticing.

I suppose I should share a little background. I am a resource teacher and have spent much of my time on the ‘other side of the table’, so to speak. The new inclusion policy is integral to my personal life as well. I also have a three year old little girl with autism. I write about her on my blog, [www.goteamkate.com](http://www.goteamkate.com). So, you can see, I have a very unique perspective when it comes to the implementation of such a policy. I firmly believe the education of families about this policy is paramount. Clearly, the NBACL feels the same.

The ‘retreat’ as it were, was held just minutes from my home. I emailed the organizer to reluctantly admit that my husband and I did not need a hotel room for the evening. Her response was to kindly offer the room, anyway. Of course, with a child with autism, we rarely sleep through the night and getting up before dawn is common. This kind soul offered us a chance to get a good’s night’s sleep and some respite before sharing with other parents our ideas and concerns regarding the policy.

We dropped our children off with Grandma and headed to the hotel to enjoy the keynote speaker, Michael George. As this father spoke of his family’s experiences with the system and his twenty one year old son, Ben- who might not have lived beyond his first 24 hours, and now attends UNBSJ-we were riveted. His story was heartbreaking and hopeful and inspiring just like so many of yours. We were privileged to hear it.

My husband and I went back to our room to chat about the evening and prepare for the next day. We talked with other parents on the way out and we all had one thing in common: we were all looking forward to uninterrupted sleep. I’ll add that I was also looking forward to a ‘Disney Junior’ free evening and drinking nice wine from a proper glass.

The next morning, I kid you not: we slept until 8:15. We haven’t needed to use an alarm in years. We were shocked to wake so late and quickly got ready to head down to breakfast. The day would start at 9:00am which is a most civilized time if I ever saw one.

We listened to presentations and collaborated with parents in like situations and all the while we were making connections and friends that will forever be useful. We dug deep into policies written for the protection of our children and we had experts (and by ‘experts’ you know I mean the parents of children with disabilities) right there to help walk us through. It was a day of excellent presentations from staff of NBACL on various topics surrounding inclusion. Their easy-going style allowed for discussions that would involve the entire room.

I am grateful for the chance to have participated in this event and hope to be a part of many more in the future.

-Shanell Mouland, parent and workshop participant

More “Achieving Inclusion: Retreat-style workshops” will be held in 2014! Check out our *NBACL- Families United Network/L’ANBIC-Réseau des familles unies Facebook page* for updates and registration information!

## Government of New Brunswick Introduces New Policy on Inclusive Education

On September 17, 2013 the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development signed a new policy (Policy 322) on inclusive education. The purpose of this policy is to “ensure that New Brunswick public schools are inclusive”. It applies to all schools and school districts within the public education system (private schools are not affected by this policy).

Since 1986, New Brunswick law has required that students who are considered “exceptional” be educated in regular classrooms. While the Department of Education has previously issued guidelines on “inclusion”, there has never been a clear policy that establishes what is required within an inclusive education system. Until now.

Policy 322 covers a broad range of issues. It defines inclusive education as a philosophy that when combined with education practices “allows each student to feel respected, confident and safe so that he or she can participate in the common learning environment and learn and develop to his or her full potential”.

“Common learning environment” is new language that the policy defines as “an inclusive environment where instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed ability and of the same age in their neighbourhood school, while being responsive to their individual needs as a learner, and used for the majority of the students’ regular instruction hours”.

This definition recognizes that the traditional classroom may be one of several types of learning environments that exist in the schools of today and tomorrow.

What are some of the important things about Policy 322 that families should know? Here are a few highlights:

- Policy 322 is not a policy that deals only with students who have a disability. While the inclusion of students with a disability is important, inclusive education is about having an education system that includes all students regardless of their background and characteristics. Inclusive education respects diversity and seeks to ensure that all students are welcomed and learn to their potential.
- The policy expects that all students will be educated in the common learning environment. The common learning environment must be appropriate for the student’s age and grade.
- The policy does, however, provide that under specific conditions, a “variation” of the common learning environment may be necessary to meet the needs of a student. A “variation” is a situation where a student is removed from the common learning environment for more than one period daily or more than 25% of the regular instructional time, whichever is greater. This means that short term “pull outs” (that last no longer than one class period or 25% of instructional time) can happen without need to say that the common learning environment is being “varied”. Such pull-outs should still be justified and tied to a student’s education plan.
- Prior to removing a student from the common learning environment for more than one period (or 25% of instructional time), a school must demonstrate that its ability to meet the needs of a student (even when supported by the district and the Department) is not sufficient. In these situations, schools must keep a record of student progress and the results of any supports or accommodations provided. Schools must also have a plan for the student’s return to the common learning environment when he or she is removed for more than one period.



A student whose learning environment is “varied” shall be provided with a “personalized learning environment” where the student receives “individualized instruction in the neighbourhood school”.

- The policy obliges school principals to ensure that a student’s instruction is primarily provided by a classroom or subject teacher and that the grouping of students based on their ability is “flexible and temporary”.
- Principals must also ensure that all students have access to co-curricular and school-sponsored activities, including access to transportation in school vehicles.
- The policy prohibits the creation of “segregated, self contained programs or classes for students with learning or behavioural challenges”.
- Students in kindergarten to grade 8 must not be placed in “alternative education” programs (these are programs that are provided in a different location than the regular education system).
- Students must receive a Personalized Learning Plan (a new term for SEPs) when teaching strategies “beyond robust instruction are required”, behavioural supports are required, or the students common learning environment is varied (see above).
- Teachers must ensure that their lesson plans and teaching strategies are consistent with what is required in a student’s PLP. Teachers must also provide formal progress reports for students on a PLP “on the same document (report card) and at the same time as this is done for all other students”.
- When a student has a behavioural crisis, any removal from the common learning environment must only be temporary and never used as a punishment.
- A school must only use a single version of the High School Diploma and any graduation ceremony must be inclusive and distribute diplomas without dividing students based on their performance.



The policy contains many other provisions. We encourage families to become familiar with the policy. You can read the full policy on-line at <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/policies.asp> or contact NBACL for a copy.

NBACL has had a long standing relationship with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and works to help ensure that students have a positive inclusive education in their neighbourhood school. We work with both the Anglophone and Francophone sides of the Department to promote better policies and inclusive education practices across the province.

NBACL is also available to support families if their children are experiencing challenges with the education system. This support may involve attending meetings with families or helping to identify solutions that are positive for student and the school system. If you would like support for your child to be better included in his or her school, please call us at 1-866-622-2548 (#2).

## NBACL wins award for “Superior Services to Seniors”

New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL), was presented with an award from the Third Age Centre for its work in supporting senior parents. The Third Age Centre is a non-profit organization that works to provide public education and research on issues related to people fifty years of age and older. The group’s focus is to empower older adults to maintain healthy, independent and active lifestyles.

The Centre presented NBACL with the Logue Memorial Award for “Superior Services to Seniors.” NBACL was nominated by Ann Passmore, a member of the Third Age Centre, who recognized NBACL for their work in supporting senior families of adult sons and daughters with an intellectual disability and addressing issues such as estate planning, emergency planning, and navigating service systems. NBACL was also recognized for establishing a Seniors United Network (SUN NB) where families gather as a group and one-on-one for support, and to share their experiences with other families.



L-R: Ann Passmore, Joy Bacon, Elizabeth Kearns & Tiffany Bowering

If you are interested in learning more about how we support senior parents who have a son or daughter with an intellectual disability, or would like to join the Seniors United Network, please contact our Family Support Facilitators.

## Seniors United Network

The Seniors United Network (SUN) at NBACL is made up senior parents who have a son or daughter with an intellectual disability. We support each other and offer strength, stability, confidence and knowledge. We believe that all people should have the opportunity to lead a meaningful life. SUN members are connected to information and to other senior parents who may share similar experiences.

Through SUN NB, parents of adults with an intellectual disability often explore the following topics together:

- Supportive community living options for adults with disabilities who are currently living with their aging parents;
- Support and relief is available for parents while they are still providing a home for their family member with a disability;
- Support for the facilitation of community connections and enhancing natural supports for their family members with a disability;
- Support to develop and implement transition/future plans for their family members with a disability;
- Financial questions on Will and Estate Planning and Registered Disability Savings Plans; and
- Support for advocacy when issues arise.

If you are a senior parent and would like to join SUN, please contact the Family Support Facilitator in your area:

**Saint John Family Support Facilitator:** Amie Burke at [aburke@nbacl.nb.ca](mailto:aburke@nbacl.nb.ca) , or call 506-658-2204

Meetings in Saint John are held the last Wednesday of every month from 1-3 pm in the NBACL Boardroom at 50 Crown St, Saint John (The office building faces Crown Street-from Crown Street turn to Hanover Street and take the first right into the parking lot. Once in the parking lot, take the back door (glass doors). Go upstairs it is the first door on the right suite 206).

**Fredericton Family Support Facilitator:** Tiffany Bowering at [tbowering@nbacl.nb.ca](mailto:tbowering@nbacl.nb.ca) or call (506) 453-4416

Meetings in Fredericton are held on the last Wednesday of every month from 1-3pm in the NBACL boardroom on 800 Hanwell Road, Fredericton NB.

## Thoughts from Families

*"NBACL works as a team to help people in the community and you care about the community. You give people a shoulder to lean on. You helped us to know our rights and gave us the courage to keep fighting. NBACL never gives up on people and other people in the community need to know you exist. You connected us with resources in the community we didn't know were available to us. You are a valuable asset to the community and you are our angels."*

- Debbie and Andrew, parents

*"We reached out for family support at NBACL to ask for help with respite and support for our daughter. We moved back to NB and were unaware of possible services available to us. Tiffany helped us navigate the application process for the Children with Special Needs program. We also obtained some information on where to look for respite care providers. Tiffany often contacts us when a volunteer is looking to work with a family like ours. The staff at NBACL are always available to answer questions and help navigate through systems that might be able to offer us assistance. While no organization can alleviate the full stress of having a child with an intellectual disability, NBACL tries to help manage that stress. They offer opportunities to connect with other families who understand a lot about our journey. They also provide us with workshop opportunities and information on available programs. Our daughter is 4yrs old. We know we have a lot more obstacles ahead of us and we know NBACL will help us in any way they can."*

- Dawn Marie and Marty, parents



## Featured Family Support Facilitator

Tiffany Bowering joined the staff at NBACL in May 2012. She is the Family Support Facilitator in the Fredericton area and works full time thanks to a partnership with the Fredericton Association for Community Living.

*Favorite Movie* – Despicable Me

*Favorite Vacation* – Family cruise in the Caribbean

*Pets* – a large cat named Babies that looks like a bobcat

*Favorite Food* – Chicken Curry

*What I do for fun* – Cooking, watching movies, enjoying nature, doing body combat classes and spending time with friends and family.

*Why I love working at NBACL* – NBACL has given me the opportunity to meet so many wonderful families and individuals in the Fredericton area. I learn something new from each family I come in contact with. Seeing inclusion become a reality in my community is a passion that will be with me wherever I go. I have been inspired by the commitment, passion and knowledge from families and enjoy seeing them share their resources and knowledge with others in the community. The individuals I support have many gifts to contribute and I love being a part of something that is vitally important to achieving inclusive communities.

Tiffany can connect you to community resources; help you navigate government or service systems; assist your family in planning and reaching goals; facilitate networking opportunities; and support you to ensure that your voice is heard. She can be reached by email: [tbowering@nbacl.nb.ca](mailto:tbowering@nbacl.nb.ca), or by phone (506) 453-4416.

## Kids are worth it! Parenting with wit & wisdom

Back by popular demand, Barbara Coloroso, international bestselling author and internationally recognized consultant on parenting, presented to over 150 parents on “Parenting with Wit and Wisdom”. Through stories and humour, Barbara shared solid practical advice on parenting, including treating children with respect, instilling a sense of responsibility through providing opportunities to make decisions, and how to learn from successes and mistakes.

*Here are what some parents had to say:*

“What a gift! Barbara was amazing, and this workshop was priceless!”

“The evening was wonderful, I just wish we had more time. She was very helpful-bring her back again!”

“Wow, what an inspiration! As the parent of a teenager, this session provided great encouragement. I learned some tips tonight that I can use tomorrow!”

More information on Barbara’s philosophy and teachings can be found on her website, [www.kidsareworthit.com](http://www.kidsareworthit.com).

## Changing Lives, Changing Communities

Have you attended one of our information tours? Each month, NBACL hosts information tours to help raise awareness of our organization. These 1 hour “mission tours” provide information on NBACL’s programs and initiatives through stories from people who have been supported by NBACL, including families, self-advocates, employers and others. You will also get an opportunity to meet some of the great staff working for NBACL and ask any questions you may have. We would love to have you as our guest, and we promise to finish by 1pm sharp, and you will not be asked for anything but your time. Think you already know us? We’ll surprise you! Have you already attended one of our information tours? Why don’t you extend the invitation to a family member, friend, co-worker or neighbour? Please RSVP to NBACL’s Community Giving Coordinator, Sheri Shannon: [sshannon@nbacl.nb.ca](mailto:sshannon@nbacl.nb.ca). And stay tuned for upcoming tour dates around the province in the New Year!

All tours are from 12pm-1pm.

Tours available in Fredericton (at our office, 800 Hanwell Road): January 15, February 12, March 12, April 16, May 8.

Tours available in Saint John (McInnes Cooper Law Firm, Brunswick Square): January 22, February 26, March 27, April 10, May 14



*L-R: Elizabeth Kearns, Tiffany Bowering and Amie Burke*

NBACL’s Family Support team would like to wish you and your family a very happy holiday season and a happy and healthy New Year! Please note that our offices will be closing at the end of day Monday, December 23 and reopening the morning of Monday, January 6.

This Family Newsletter is produced by NBACL’s Family Support Program. Please let us know what you would like to see featured in the Family Newsletter. We would love to share your story!