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Engage!

A New Beginning

Canada is the first country to address the concerns of families whose sons and daughters with disabilities will outlive them.

An expert panel on Financial Security for People with Severe Disabilities, set up by Federal Finance Minister Flaherty, has recommended the creation of a Registered Disability Savings Plan, a matching Disability Savings Grant and a Canada Disability Bond for low income families.

The panel's report signals awareness of a pressing concern for many families, "What will happen to our relative with a disability when we die?"

The recommendations, if implemented, will be the most significant federal initiative for families of people with disabilities in 25 years. Up to three quarters of a million Canadian families would benefit.

Across the country, there are thousands of people working to create a society that values, nurtures, and includes Canadians with a disability and their families. This issue of Engage highlights some innovative work and practice within the movement.



[Learn about the Disability Savings Plan at PLAN Canada](#)

Related Links:

- [Read the panel's report](#)
- [From hand-out to hand up](#)

By: Louise Kearney

The Belonging Initiative

Several years ago, a group of individuals, most of whom had a connection to people with disabilities, were exploring solutions to the persistent social challenge of isolation and loneliness.

They began looking for ways to foster a culture of belonging and, thereby, effect massive change to end the isolation and loneliness experienced by people with disabilities.



This change took flight in the Belonging Initiative in January 2005, with L'Arche Canada as a founding partner.

Using blogging technology, the Belonging Initiative harnesses resources and expertise. It highlights solutions employed to end the isolation facing people with disabilities, trusting that those efforts will ripple outwards and improve the situation of other isolated people.

Communities in which people are better connected are healthier, realize the contributions of all citizens, and have lower health and social services costs.

In other words, when people move from isolation to community, everybody benefits.

 [About the Belonging Initiative](#)

Related Links:

- [The Belonging Initiative Blog](#)
- [Fostering Inclusion, Understand and Belonging](#)
- [L'Arche Canada](#)

By: Susan Taylor Simpson

Vibrant & Inclusive

Canadians living with disability can be particularly vulnerable to poverty. Disabled individuals often incur expenses resulting from their disability, and they may face barriers in accessing higher education and entering the workforce.

Studies show that the link between poverty and disability is not unidirectional – poverty also places individuals at risk of disability.

Across Canada, Vibrant Communities is working towards more equitable and inclusive environments for people with disabilities. Vibrant Communities Calgary has advocated for increases to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) benefit, as well as an increased earnings exemption for workers with disabilities.

The CHALLENGE in B.C.'s Capital Region has also been working to raise the issue of earnings exemptions as a strategy for poverty reduction. Opportunities Niagara organizes Wraparound, coordinating care and support for individuals with complex needs.

All of these initiatives seek to realize the vision of a truly vibrant community that ensures support, inclusion and learning for all.



[Updates from members of Vibrant Communities](#)

Related Links:

- [Calgary's AISH Initiative](#)
- [Wraparound in Niagara Region](#)
- [B.C.'s Capital Region's Quality of Life CHALLENGE](#)

By: Susan Eckerle Curwood

Vibrant Communities Update

Niagara Region, ON – On February 6, in a full day event hosted by Opportunities Niagara, John McKnight will be sharing strategies on community mobilization to support families with children and youth with complex needs. Learn more [here](#) or download the registration form [here](#).

Calgary, AB – The 2007 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey is currently underway. This biennial survey provides wage, salary and skill shortage information by occupation, industry and geographical area for full and part-time employees. View the most recent results [here](#).

Abbotsford, BC – “The Imagine Abbotsford Thought Leaders Consensus Statement” has been released. The first in a three-year series, the current themes for consideration are the economy and ecology. Read the full statement [here](#).

Future Search

One of Paul Born’s highlights as a facilitator is volunteering with a group of individuals in Kitchener-Waterloo, each with physical or cognitive disabilities, in their attempt to make their community one of the most accessible places.



When asked to help this local group develop a strategic plan, Paul suggested using Future Search – a dialogue technique that brings people from all walks of life into the same conversation.

They began with a specific question about the group’s future and spent time together developing a path towards a more accessible future.

Key to the success of this dialogue technique is asking the right question to the right group of people.

By using a task-focused approach, Future Search invites participants to tell stories about their past, present and desired future, which, in turn, allows them to make concrete action plans.



Read about Paul Born's Future Search experience

Related Links:

- [The Future Search Network](#)
- [What is Future Search?](#)
- [Future Search and Community](#)

By: Rachel Veira Gainer

What's Eating Gilbert Grape

What's Eating Gilbert Grape is a must see.

Set in the small town of Endora, Iowa, Gilbert Grape (Johnny Depp) knows all about the tension that exists between individual happiness and family obligation.

Gilbert Grape is weighed down by the burden of caring for his family, including his morbidly obese mother (Darlene Cates), his 17-year-old developmentally disabled brother Arnie (Leonardo DiCaprio), and his sisters.

In essence, Gilbert spends his days *existing* rather than *living*. But, when he meets an inspiring outsider, his perspective on his family begins to change, and he learns how to truly appreciate what it means to live and love life.



Gilbert's transformation reminds viewers that there is hope, even when we feel burdened by our surroundings – a change of pace or new inspiration can renew possibilities and give us a fresh outlook on life.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape offers laughter, tears and, most importantly, hope.



Read other movie reviews from Tamarack

By: Laura Antal

Featured Resources

Increased Access to Postsecondary Education and Training - CLASP and the Center for Social Development explore the potential for Individual Development Accounts to increase access to postsecondary education, job training and services for low-income individuals. Read this report [here](#).

The Disability Savings Plan - The proposed registered disability savings plan is an idea put forward by the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) to help families improve the quality of life of their relative with a disability. Learn more [here](#).