

Our Stories, Our Voice

A Collection of Stories
from Leaders with Diversabilities



BY: SELF ADVOCATES OF NANAIMO



This collection of stories was written by members of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo — individuals with diversabilities who are leading by example, breaking down barriers, and helping to build a more inclusive community. Through personal stories of advocacy, independence, work, education, and community engagement, these Nanaimo residents show what is possible when people live fully and share their voices. Their stories reflect strength, creativity, and determination — and we are proud to share them with you.

My Story

By CAM DORE | Published: DECEMBER 7, 2018

By Barbara Anderson (Nanaimo, B.C.)



Barbara Anderson (right) and my friend Kara Anderson (left).

Hi, I'm Barbara and I'm living with a disability (diversability). I have been living on my own for 10 years and I really enjoy it. Since I moved out on my own I got to meet a lot of people. When I was a baby of six months, my birth mother had to put me up for adoption. I lived in a foster home until I was nearly a year old.

The family that adopted me is really great! My parents treated me the same as my brother and sister and never made me feel different. In my teenage years I helped my father look after my grandmother. Later on, I helped my mom take care of my father

when he was sick. I then looked after my mom before she passed away. Throughout those years I had to advocate for my grandma and my parents.

Currently, I volunteer for seniors at Foodshare Nanaimo and the Good Food Box. Through volunteering, I have learned new skills and met a lot of people.

In 2014, I helped start a self-advocacy group with my peers and support worker in Nanaimo. The group is called the Self Advocates of Nanaimo. The self-advocates create presentations for the community. We were also involved in a video about living with a disability and being connected to the community.

The video is titled “Food, Fun and Advocacy”. It is on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BpKWRn5HgU>.

This year, the Self Advocates of Nanaimo hosted two open houses during Inclusion Month. We also completed two Ride the Bus Challenges – one was to International Day for People with Disabilities and the other was to Parksville for a presentation to the CLBC regional conference.

My life experiences and the people around me help me live independently. Being involved in the community helps me feel connected and included.

Limitations Don't Define My Life

by Kara Anderson

Posted on [July 31, 2019](#)



Kara at Inclusion BC Conference

My name is Kara. I have lived my entire life with a diverse ability. I have found my path to independence by becoming a mom of a son who also has a diverse ability. He is 19 and gets lots of support from his grandparents and CLBC.

My son and I lived with my parents until eight years ago. With the help of Supporting Apartment Living, now Supporting Advocates in Leadership (SAL), I learned to live in my own home, cook healthy meals, pay bills and shop. I also learned to find my voice and stand up for myself, my son and others.

This led to the beginning of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo (SAN) with the support of some of my peers and SAL. I now have a group of friends who are like having second family.

Kara is actively involved with her local Community Council and the Self Advocates of Nanaimo.

I work for CLBC as a self advocate presenter for the Welcome Workshops which introduce CLBC services to adults with diverse abilities. I also present workshops for Empowering Self Advocates to Take Action (ESATTA), a planning process called People Planning Together, which is self advocates teaching other self advocates. That is how I met my boyfriend who is my co-presenter.

I have found through my independence a way to help others by sitting on the Community Council for Central and Upper Vancouver Island. The council is made up of self advocates, family members and community members who are connected to and support adults with diverse abilities.

I enjoy my independence by living life to the fullest. I have a wacky sense of humour which can be helpful at times when advocating for my self or others. One of the things that helps me define my independence is that I don't let limitations define my life.

<https://www.communitylivingbc.ca/celebrate-diverse-abilities/limitations-dont-define-my-life/>

Removing barriers in all areas of life

by Patrick Porter



Patrick and fellow members of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo help to raise awareness around important issues including accessibility.

An accessible future to me means that there are no more barriers. Services, buildings, housing, employment and health care would be accessible for everyone.

As a person with a diversability it is difficult to walk around and get to places I need to go. Reading and learning bus schedules and routes are hard; some buildings are difficult to get to by bus, or have stairs could cause me to trip; financial limitations to affordable housing, health and dental care are barriers I face.

To help make the future more accessible, I belong to the Self Advocates of Nanaimo. We meet every month to talk about issues that are important to us. We made [a film called “Food, Fun and Advocacy” that you can watch on YouTube here](#).

We present our film and share our stories with organizations in the community. Last May, we presented a workshop at the Inclusion BC Conference in Victoria.

I have written letters to the university and conference centre with concerns for people with mobility issues. Both times I received an answer promising better accessibility.

I also filled out the B.C. government's survey on accessibility. If we all do small things to make a difference, our future will be more accessible.

Volunteering Changed My Life:

My Story about Volunteering at Shaw TV

By Rob Janzen



I've been volunteering on "The Show" at Shaw TV, Nanaimo for 8 years.

The people are friendly and are nice to me.

I'm the first one to arrive so I set up the studio.

I bring a treat for the crew to share. People enjoy the treats and appreciate me for bringing them and this makes me happy.

Some of the jobs I do are set-up the studio, put together the headsets and make sure the batteries are charged. Once the studio is all set-up I unlock the door and greet the people. I show the guests where to go.

Before the show, the crew gets together and shares pizza and treats. Then they go to their stations.

During the show I operate the video camera. I enjoy operating the camera because I get to learn a new skill and help people tell their stories on TV.

After the show is over the crew cleans up the studio and puts things away. I usually get a ride home afterwards because it is too late to take the bus.

I love volunteering at Shaw TV because all of the staff and crew are very nice and love me very much. I recommend volunteering at Shaw TV because the people are nice, it's fun and I get to learn TV production skills.

Volunteering at Shaw TV changed my life because of supporting other people, working with everybody and the people are friendly and nice.

It's Ok To Be Afraid

By Patrick Porter

By BRYCE SCHAUFELBURGER | *Published:* NOVEMBER 20, 2019



Patrick Porter Filming at the Good Food Box for “Food, Fun & Advocacy”

It's Ok To Be Afraid

Patrick Porter

My name is Patrick. I am a self-advocate in Nanaimo. I grew up in a big family with 7 siblings. My parents loved and supported me. Even though they treated me the same as my brothers and sisters I felt different.

After my parents passed away, I didn't know what was going to happen to me and I was afraid. My mom and dad had a financial plan for me. My family still love and support me.

My siblings live in their own homes and I wanted to live in my own place too – even though I thought I couldn't. I didn't know how to cook, pay my utility bills or live independently. Another self-advocate, Crystal, said to "take the "t" out of can't".

In 2013 CLBC referred me to Eve at Supportive Apartment Living (SAL) now called Supporting Advocates in Leadership. SAL helped me move into my own apartment. Since then I have learned how to cook, plan healthy meals and do my own pay reports.

I enjoy living a busy life. I've worked for 35 years at the same company and received a "Loyal Employee Award". I love socializing, bowling with Special Olympics, travelling and am in a relationship. I took computer classes where I learned how to send e-mails, search the web and write documents.

I am a mentor and volunteer. Places I volunteer at are the Good Food Box and Everyone at the Table (EAT).

The Self Advocate of Nanaimo are profiled in a video, "Food, Fun and Advocacy" on YouTube. We present our film and share our stories with people and organizations in the community. In May 2019 we presented our film to over 100 people at the Inclusion BC Conference in Victoria.

As a mentor I remind people who have a diversability to believe in themselves. It's OK to be afraid.

<https://selfadvocate.ca/its-ok-to-be-afraid/>

Inclusive Education

By Miranda Orth



I had a personal goal to become an assistant bookkeeper. This is my story about my experiences taking a bookkeeping course at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

At a self-advocacy meeting, I heard about STEPS Forward, an organization that provides support for people with intellectual disabilities to attend post-secondary education. I contacted them and STEPS Forward connected me with a VIU facilitator and helped me apply for a bursary.

I was in school from September 2022 to June 2023. I liked that I could do my course online, as it's the best way I can learn. Having email contact with the instructor and having the resources needed relating to my work, kept me on track with my assignments. Besides the course, I really liked participating in weekly VIU fitness sessions.

The course itself was challenging and rewarding. A few of the challenges I had were that I was doing it online to accommodate my learning needs. I also had to ask my instructor for an extension for more time and support to understand and complete an assignment. Another challenge I faced was a household emergency that required my attention while trying to keep up with my coursework. The rewarding part was that I completed my course with an 80 % grade. I now have a framed certificate on the wall in my office.

I am currently working as an Assistant Bookkeeper and working at the reception at a local agency. My task for the next few weeks will be auditing. The agency provides an inclusive and supportive work environment, which I appreciate.

I encourage other people to follow their passions and go to university.

My Dream Job

By Crystal Carson

July 14, 2025



Pictured Above: Crystal with Lily Planted in her Mom's Honour

My dream job has been to work as a page at the library. I was told that I couldn't do the job by other people. Job coaches, friends, and other workers didn't believe in me. They didn't think that I could do it, and they also told me the library wouldn't hire me.

My mom and dad both told me that I was the one who could do it! They told me to take the "t" off of "can't" and it then becomes "can." I told myself that I wasn't going to listen to negative people's comments.

First, I applied for the job online on my own. I asked some of my friends to help me do some research for the page job at the Wellington Library. They helped me email some resumes, cover letters, and references. I emailed it all to the library, and I waited a couple of weeks to hear from them about applying for the job.

Two weeks later, I got a phone call asking me to come in for an interview. I went to the interview and felt nervous and scared, but I answered the questions to the best of my ability. They called me the next day to say I was hired. I was so happy and excited, yet nervous, with happy tears in my eyes.

I have been on the job as a page at Wellington Library, Vancouver Island, for two years this year (2025). My job tasks are taking the book bin in and out, locking both sides of the bin, and doing the totes, newspapers, shelving books and magazines, shredding paper, sharpening pencils, and crayons. I also cut paper, dust shelves, and sort out CDs, DVDs, and books.

I'm not afraid to take a risk to follow my own dreams even when others tell me that I can't do it. I just tell them to take the "t" off of "can't."

Published in Self Advocate NET <https://selfadvocatenet.com/my-dream-job/>)

Moving Out on My Own

by Nick Mezzabarba

Written: August 23, 2022



I wanted:

- To be more independent
- To meet new people
- To learn new strategies to deal with challenges

I talked with my parents about moving out and they were on board with the idea. My parents helped me search for a suitable place. The advocates at SAL helped me register for Affordable Housing.

I was accepted for an apartment right away. I declined because there was a strong odour of cigarette smoke in the apartment. A couple of months later, I found a place that was awesome!

The reasons I appreciate my new apartment are: it's soundproof even though I live downtown and it's also centrally located. It's close to Dollarama, the Credit Union, the library and the waterfront. The bus system is also excellent, as compared to Kingston Ontario where I lived previously.

I recently bought an air conditioner and it keeps my apartment cool during the summer. There's also a nice warm shower.

The rent is affordable. Hydro and hot water are included.

Some of the challenges of living on my own during Covid were being shut in and not being able to meet new people.

The things I love about living on my own are:

- Keeping my apartment clean and tidy
- Being grateful that I have a place to live and that I'm not homeless
- Making my own decisions
- Getting to know my neighbours and neighbourhood

What I would like others to know about living on their own:

- Try it and see how it goes.
- Have a positive attitude.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it.
- You can do anything if you set your mind to it.

There are responsibilities that come with being an adult, but it's also fun. Balance is the key.

Thanks for reading my story about moving out.

<https://selfadvocatenet.com/2022/08/23/moving-out-on-my-own-during-covid-19/>

Getting Medication Costs Covered

By Miranda Orth

By BRYCE SCHAUFELBURGER | *Published:* NOVEMBER 16, 2021



Medications can be expensive. Sometimes people need to advocate for coverage when it isn't covered by their medical plan.

There are ways to advocate. The first option would be to find out if there is a generic medication that is covered by your plan.

A second option is to find out what financial program can eliminate the cost or lower it.

The way you can find out about these programs is by talking to your family doctor and specialists.

Recently, my coverage expired. I was told my medication would cost \$940.00 every three months and that it would have to come out of my own pocket. The reason I'm

telling this story is to help people understand there are programs that can help cover the cost of prescriptions. I don't want anyone to give up!

Back in June, I called my local pharmacy to get a refill of the medication I need. They said my coverage had expired and it would cost \$320.00 a month. I knew I didn't have that type of money and I knew I wouldn't have it every three months.

I kept in touch with my family doctor and specialist about having them help me solve this problem. I wrote letters to different people including the health minister and asked for help. I did some research about the medication and as of September 2021, it was partly covered by Pharma Care. However, I finally found a program that covers this medication for free.

This was a medical problem and I had to fix it fast because my condition wouldn't be controlled without this medication. This is the power of self-advocating.



Charmaine (c) Waves at SAN Get Together During COVID

My Story About Keeping Busy and Staying Safe During Covid 19

By Charmaine Johnson (CJ)

My name is Charmaine. Some of my friends call me CJ. I am a Self Advocate of Nanaimo. We have meetings by telephone because of covid. We are doing a workshop to teach others about being a self advocate.

Every month we have a learning circle. We learn things about living a good life. At our last circle we wore silly hats and had mini-self-care pies. We shared our stories about friendship, played friendship balloon tennis and made a friendship circle out of blue paper ribbon.

During covid I try to keep busy. I like to get out, do stuff and meet people.

I volunteer at the Bike Shop. People are friendly and helpful there. They give me a chance to learn new skills. I get to fix bikes, patch tubes and recycle tires.

Every two weeks I go to the farmer's market with my friend, Barbara. We buy fresh vegetables, fruits and meats through a coupon program at Foodshare Nanaimo.

I met a new friend in my neighbourhood when I was walking my dog, Sassy.

Last month I wrote a letter to the editor asking people to stay safe and follow Dr. Bonnie's health rules. We can all stay safe if we follow the rules:

- keep six feet apart
- keep your social bubble small
- wear a mask
- be kind to others

From Can't to Can

By Crystal Carson (Nanaimo, B.C.)

By CAM DORE | *Published:* DECEMBER 30, 2018



Hi, my name is Crystal. I am a self-advocate in Nanaimo. I like to help people and give back to my community by volunteering for organizations like Foodshare, the library and Hospice. Recently I raised \$1,800 for Hospice through a 6km walk. I have a job at with the Vancouver Island Vocational Rehab Services which I love.

My mentors were my Mom and Dad. I was devastated when my Mom who was my best friend and mentor was killed in a tragic car accident when I was in my early 30's. She always gave me good advice, to not give up on my goals and dreams and to believe in myself. Then my Dad died a few years later. Cuddles my kitty is my best

friend. She gives me great comfort and joy. She helped me through my grief when my parents died.

I was told by others that I couldn't live on my own or finish high school. Yet I moved into my own apartment in 2001 and am taking adult education classes. I completed my grade 12 math exam and am waiting for the results. By taking classes I am learning new skills and boosting my self-esteem.

As a member of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo (SAN), I am learning to speak up and take action about things that are important to me and others. We got to make a film called, "Food, Fun, and Advocacy," which we presented to over 300 people in Nanaimo.

The film is about the Self Advocates of Nanaimo and their involvement in advocacy and community food programs.

The video is on YouTube, here is the link: <https://youtu.be/8BpKWRn5HgU>

We have been invited to present the film to organizations like CLBC Nanaimo and Nanaimo Association of Community Living. Some of the members of SAN are fundraising to present our video at the 2019 Inclusion BC Conference in Victoria.

By living on my own, taking classes, working at my job and volunteering in the community my self-confidence is increasing. I have learned there is no "t" in can" just like my Mom taught me.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for checking out our book!

Thanks to the Self Advocates of Nanaimo & Team SAL whose hard work and dedicated support made this book possible.

Self Advocates of Nanaimo - Barbara, Charmaine (CJ), Crystal, Gavin, Miranda, Nick, Pat, Ryan, Vicky, Bryce, & Rob.

Supporting Advocates in Leadership - Richard Chisholm, Gwen Harmen, Cheyanne McPherson & Christle Lowe.



Photo: Some of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo and supports at a summer gathering: From left to right: Pat, Ryan, Charmaine, Gavin, Gwen, Bryce, Cheyanne, Rob, Crystal, Jenny, Richard, & Christle.

The Self Advocates of Nanaimo have been meeting since 2014 and engage with the community by way of monthly gatherings, learning circles, short films, television appearances and conferences as well as local presentations on self leadership. The monthly SAN meetings, where they discuss a wide range of topics relevant to persons with diversabilities both locally and globally, welcome guests and presenters alike. If you would like to connect with the SAN group or just learn a little bit more about learning circles in general, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us through the contact information below:

Phone: 250-753-1907

Email: info@salnanaimo.ca

& Most importantly “*take the T off can't!*”