



Living In Friendship Everyday Inc.®

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## Connections Newsletter

January, 2013

### IN THIS ISSUE

- News from the Executive Director
- The LIFE Team
- An Evening with John Lord



### Calendar of Events

An Evening with  
John Lord  
March 19, 2013

LIFE AGM  
Winnipeg  
June 8th, 2013

Mark your  
calendars.

We look forward to  
seeing you there!

### News from the Executive Director

**H**appy New Year to everyone! Happy 2013! I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season with your friends and family with some time to relax and renew.

You've consistently heard us talk about the *LIFE team*. The ten individuals employed by LIFE truly are a team as we work together, share values, goals and more or less think along the same lines. We get together often, share our successes and frustrations and when one of us is struggling with something, we typically bring it to the collective table to problem solve or at least think about some possible solutions.

ICOF networks are also teams of people working towards a common purpose. I thought it might be helpful to offer some information on ways in which we strive to keep our team focused, clear and strong:

**Communication** – It is critical that we feel safe and comfortable talking with each other about the good stuff and the tougher stuff. Fine tuning communication means spending time with each other, listening, sharing feelings and experiences and having the ability to talk through some of the troubles that undoubtedly arises every so often.

**Commitment** – To the larger cause and to each other. Within LIFE, our focus of commitment is to each ICOF employer and his/her network of allies and supporters who come together intentionally to ensure that he/she is living the life of choice. But we also have a commitment to each other.

We work to ensure that each feel we 'have each other's backs' if there are problems or things that surface. If one person is feeling low or unable at any point, other team members take the initiative to step up and help out in the moment. We've seen that happen over and over again through the years as team members have experienced sickness or deaths in their families.

**Sense of humour** – We have fun together, laugh, be silly and celebrate.

**Appreciation** – It's sometimes difficult to remember that taking care of the team is as important as doing the work we're here to do. Because the truth is we can't do our work well if we are falling apart or going in different directions.

We know it's the same process that each of you are involved in as the supporters and allies of ICOF employers. We've seen time and again the troubles that you have run into when there is discourse, personality clashes, or differing values and agendas getting in the way of the true reason that you continue to come together.

As we begin another year, it is a good time to do a temperature check and see how that part of our work is doing. We suggest, you might want to do the same. In the meantime this newsletter is intended to help you get to know us better. You open your homes and hearts to us everyday and we wanted to take this moment and do the same. So.....in no particular order, here is our LIFE team.

*Maisha*

## The LIFE Team



*Tara Martin*

When I tell people that I am a Resource Coordinator, I don't think those 2 words conjure up excitement, unpredictability or wonder, but in my Resource Coordinator life....it does! I ask you....how many individual's work see them heading off on a road trip one week to help someone piece together their past or the next week be off on a celebration horse cart ride through the Carberry desert, or next week find themselves helping someone find a staff member that ends up changing their life? Mine does. This is some of the work that I have done this last year and it makes me feel enlivened. It also helps that I have some experience working in this field, but let me say that I didn't have the greatest memories until I discovered the ICOF model. I saw a lot of hopeless, lonely people that were in undesirable placements. ICOF is no where near being a placement, it is a life choice and a very progressive, exhilarating one at that. I see people building and leading authentic lives and it is why I love telling people what I do. I love spreading the word and I have not felt that way about many jobs that I had before. I feel very blessed and for that I thank LIFE and ICOF.



When I was in high school, I had a guidance counselor that supported me through some pretty difficult situations in my life; she listened, offered advice and sometimes just told me when I was being crazy. She passed away before I was really able to thank her for what she had brought into my life, and it was at that point that I realized I wanted my life to make a difference for someone else. It was many years later before I was able to say that yes, I believe I am making a difference. Coming to work for LIFE has been one of the best things that has happened to me. I feel that what I do, no matter how small, makes a difference, but I've also come to realize that no matter how much I have to offer, I also still have plenty of room to learn and grow. I continue to look forward to the many opportunities to do so and wanted to thank each and everyone that crosses my path for your continued contribution to my life.

*Shannon*

### Mission Statement for LIFE

It is the mission of LIFE to provide each participant of In the Company of Friends and his/her support network with high quality resources, information and guidance that will assist each participant in creating the life that he/she desires within the framework of valued and meaningful relationships.

In February, I will be celebrating 10 years with LIFE. I first applied for the position for selfish reasons, to learn about the world of Supported Living for my son Shane. It wasn't long before I realized that I hadn't found the job, but rather the job had found me! Every day ICOF parents, family and employers became my 'teachers' as they shared their stories about being part of a team, a 'network'. Their vision and passion for challenging the status quo of typical support systems drew out my own passion. When Shane passed away, I wondered if there was sense in my continuing with LIFE. I soon realized Shane had been the catalyst that empowered me to take a position where each day I have the chance to make a positive difference. As his Mother, I've been given a unique insight into the reality that families face and in return, families have given me the honour of entrusting me with their stories. Many of my 'teachers' have now become my friends. Together we continue work towards a world where everyone has the chance to grow and flourish. How could LIFE be better than that?



*Lynda*

For the past 3 years, it's been my privilege to be the Office Manager at LIFE. I was also a Resource Coordinator from 1998 to 2004 and have been a network member to an ICOF employer for almost 15

years. My work is not glorious but I enjoy my work! Behind the scenes, I work hard to ensure the office remains organized, create newsletters and see that there is plenty of food and fun at the AGM. It is my hope that I make life easier for the LIFE team so that they can focus their energy on the people who matter the most—ICOF employers, their family and friends.

*Samantha*

I have worked for LIFE for 12 years. I continue to love my job because of the people I meet and watching people live the lives of their choosing. I believe my best accomplishment has been advocating for ICOF



employers—it is where my true passion lies. I believe my strongest skill in my role is being open minded and being open to new ideas. To keep myself motivated and passionate, I enjoy reading, hiking, fishing and spending time with family and friends.

*Laurie*



*My greatest learning over the past year is around journey, pace, and vision. Where a person comes from and how they've journeyed to their present space impacts where they are going and the time it will take them to get there. I feel it is crucial to understand and respect this in order for me to support the people I work with- ICOF employers, their staff, and their support network members. Each of these people are on a differently paced journey, and will therefore come to the table with a different vision of what the future could look like to/for the ICOF employer. I came to the realization that I too have a vision for everyone I work with which got me thinking... with all these visions colliding no wonder we get stuck sometimes! I now remind myself that my vision for the person, staff team, or support network is only that- my vision of what could be... and it ends there. My learning has been that to walk alongside people in their journeys, you need to know their story, follow their pace, and help them identify a vision for their future; because that is how we move out of stagnancy and into evolution.*

*Michelle*

*I just celebrated my 10<sup>th</sup> year as a Resource Coordinator with LIFE, but before that I had the wonderful opportunity of supporting an ICOF Employer. Growing up in an inclusive family, this model naturally fit with my beliefs and values. I have two cousins with developmental disabilities who were part of every aspect of our family circle. We played, celebrated and fought as any other cousins would! I am grateful for having them in life and for teaching me such important values which guide me professionally and personally. To work in a place that is rooted in relationships, self determination and community is a great feeling. I believe that by connecting people to community we are helping build a web of possibilities and opportunities. It is an honor to be a part of someone's life journey!*

*Chloe*

*My name is Valeria, but everybody calls me Vale (say Val). I'm LIFE's Financial Coordinator. I started working at LIFE as the Office Manager in 2008 and moved to my current position in January of 2011. I love numbers, so I enjoy my work a lot. On the other hand, LIFE gives me the chance to see how people can live a productive and meaningful life, even when faced with big challenges. It is very inspiring to see the love that support network members and staff surround ICOF employers with. Happy 2013!!*



*VALE*



*Traci*

*I had time over the quiet Christmas holidays to reflect on my life, my priorities and my work. I am not surprised*

*at how intertwined they are with each other.*

*My life circumstances brings me into the work I do. It is my desire that my son who lives with a disability, lives life as if he didn't. His medical needs and limitations are real for us. We focus on his dream to live a meaningful life, his desire to have friends, to be able to call a buddy to just say " Hi". His dreams are simple things that most of us already have and many of us often take for granted. Just ONE FRIEND does not sound like a big request but for him, and many of the people I work with, it can be. This task is filled with risk taking at many levels, for instance; parents risking letting go enough to allow other people into the life of that vulnerable person so dearly loved; the risk of asking people to come into your life and share the joys and challenges that is experienced by those who live daily with a disability; the risk of losing friends; the risk of falling in love; the risk of rejection. What other job can one work with people to experience such deep joy when people take those risks and reap the rewards of that labor? In my job I can provide guidance, resources, listen, encourage, learn and most importantly, get to know and appreciate the goodness in people as they devote their time to help those simple dreams come true. Through our collective efforts we celebrate as people learn to care about each other and flourish.*

*"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much."*

*Helen Keller*

*Providing leadership to the LIFE staffing team is like a gift that I have been given after a long and sometimes frustrating career. We are truly a team of 10 passionate, intense and energetic women. Having worked in a variety of settings and models I can tell you that the challenges of supporting people with disabilities is not the difficult part of our work. The most depleting aspect of working in this field is the differing values and intentions of the systems that we have created to provide supports. There is a profound strength in the shared vision of the LIFE team. We know what an honor it is to work in a model that focuses almost entirely on enabling people to live their very best lives outside of the bounds of traditional rules, policies and structures. I hope this newsletter gives you, the reader a snapshot of who the staff of LIFE are and the depth of both individual and collective spirits. Being Executive Director of LIFE is quite simply a pleasure.*



*Marsha*

## Upcoming Events

### LIFE is pleased to be hosting “An Evening with John Lord” for ICOF employers and their supporters

Tuesday, March 19, 2013  
120 Maryland Street  
7:00 to 9:00 pm

#### *Join us for Conversation, Reflection and Sharing!*

This evening conversation with John Lord will include some compelling research about relationships and social networks. As we explore ways to create community for individuals, this timely session will engage us in thinking about how we nurture relationships, and how we can be intentional about creating social networks that last. Using stories and conversation, John will inspire us to recognize the gifts and possibilities that individuals bring to community, as well as the gifts inherent in community.



***Social networks impact our lives more than we think. Come spend an evening with John and learn how we can shape our networks in ways that enrich our relationships.***

**John Lord** is an author, researcher, and facilitator of community change. For more than thirty years, he has worked on a range of issues, all designed to build inclusive communities, including supports that enable people to participate and contribute to community life. John calls this a ***New Story***. John is actively involved in supporting communities and organizations to embrace the values, principles and strategies to help facilitate a new story for people with developmental disabilities. As a parent and circle member for his daughter, John relates with the experiences of fellow parents and circle members.



If you would like more information or want to confirm your attendance, please email Charlene Farrell—[charlene@icof-life.ca](mailto:charlene@icof-life.ca) or phone the LIFE office 204-772-3557.

There is no cost to attend, but confirmation of attendance is required.

### The LIFE Team

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