

In the Company of Friends



“Our family found ourselves at a crossroads in spring 2019, when the traditional support of 45 years for Brenda was suddenly removed. At this time we were referred to In the Company of Friends. While the initial set up takes some time...the benefits and flexibility have added without doubt to the quality of Brenda’s life! Through ICOF, we have been able to implement support and programs based on what Brenda wants and needs, not what others want. To Brenda this is significant in that she feels she is part of something rather than being “told what to do!” We are still learning and we are still growing within the program, but with the support of ICOF, Brenda is enjoying a fuller life...and she deserves this! Thank you ICOF!”

Dawn, Sister and Support Network Member

“Being on a network, I have great relief in knowing that there is always someone there to help navigate through ANY problems that come up. From assisting with staff recruitment, sourcing supplies and education, to just being a shoulder to lean on.”

*Aim for progress, not perfection.
Roseanne, Support Network Member*

“What’s great about ICOF; A life of choices, choosing your own place to live (within budget of course), choosing how you want your space to look, choosing what to buy, eat, wear, and do with your time. Mark would say, making your own coffee and going to McDonalds for ice coffee or chicken nuggets.”

Marlene, Support Network Member

In the Company of Friends

In the Company of Friends (ICOF) is a **unique model of support** which gives individuals with an intellectual disability the opportunity to manage their lives with support from family and friends.

In the Company of Friends provides:

Direct Funding

Choices

Self -Direction

Flexibility

Person-Centered
Approach

As illustrated throughout this booklet, ICOF provides for a very individualized way of creating a good life and as such, ICOF employers are not bound by residential licensing requirements. Therefore, individuals can live in a house, an apartment or a condo of their choosing.

Who is eligible?

An individual may be eligible for In the Company of Friends if he/she meets the eligibility criteria of the Community Living disABILITY Services of the Department of Families.

RELATIONSHIP

CHOICE

RESPECT

Philosophy

The In the Company of Friends philosophy is based upon a foundation of respect as well as relationships and supports a person-centered approach.

In Manitoba, legislation called the Vulnerable Persons Act (VPA) recognizes that individuals with an intellectual disability have a right to make decisions about their lives.

Using plain language, the Vulnerable Persons Act (VPA) states:

- Vulnerable people are presumed able to make their own decisions
- Vulnerable people are encouraged to make their own choices
- If a vulnerable person needs help to make their his/her choice, the legislation encourages family, friends and service providers to help him/her to understand the choices to make an informed decision
- Any help provided must be respectful of the vulnerable person's privacy and dignity as an adult
- There may be a decision that the vulnerable person is unable to make, even with help. As a last resort, a substitute decision maker can be identified.

What does the VPA mean for ICOF employers?

ICOF employers will be encouraged to be involved in making decisions about their lives. Each individual will choose a support network of people whom he/she values and trusts to assist with the decision making process.

What does this mean? ICOF employers will be encouraged to make choices and will be supported to participate in meaningful decisions about their lives.

ICOF employers, with their network members take an active role in deciding how to spend money, who to hire as staff members, where they want to live and where they want to work, learn and/or volunteer. If making decisions or having their voices heard is a new skill that the employers are learning, they will be supported to participate in the process and to learn from the choices they make.

Support Networks

Support networks are integral for each ICOF employer

A support network is a group of people the ICOF employer chooses to assist in his/her life. Support network members may be family members, friends or acquaintances with whom the person is developing a relationship. Support networks can develop organically, intentionally or both ways. Each ICOF employer has his/her own support network.

Support networks are unique and diverse

Many ICOF employers have life-long friendships as a result of the commitment of network members. Support networks have shown to create positive outcomes for people such as expanded opportunities and increased self-esteem and self-worth.



Support networks are the structure that helps the individual manage ICOF responsibilities.

In doing so, **supported decision making** becomes an integral part of how support networks operate. The assistance support networks offer comes with many decisions whether helping with hiring a staff person or throwing a party.

Supported decision making is ensuring the individual is informed and involved with making decisions about his or her life. It is woven through conversations, planning and action. It does not take a back seat to convenience. It looks different for each person except that the structure is always made up of people who care.

Supported decision making is fundamentally the reason why support networks exist.

Support networks offer assistance with:

Relationship and
Community
Connections

Managing
Finances

Managing Staff

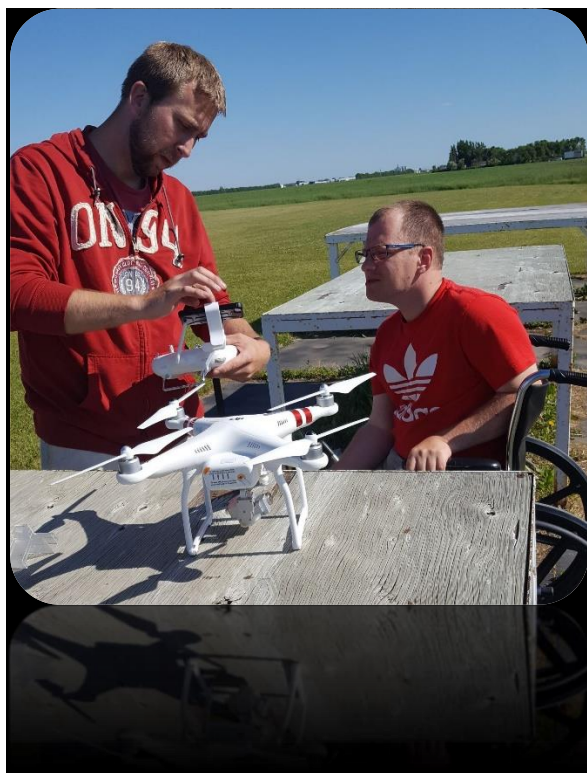
Support Network
Nurturing and
Celebration

“The ICOF program has allowed me to be more trusting and patient with people. Also more importantly, ICOF has given my son a chance to experience independent living in the closest normal way possible within a safe environment”

Rene, Parent, Support Network Member

Relationship and Community Connections

Some of the noted outcomes of support networks are that ICOF employers have expanded opportunities, connectedness and belonging, enhanced quality of life and increased safety and security. Support networks offer assistance in these areas naturally – by providing options, information and planning opportunities for the individual to be involved in activities with them in his/her community and in the communities of support network members. Support networks can also model and mentor for staff members the importance of connections and how to nurture relationships.



Managing Finances

ICOF employers receive funding each month to manage their daily living and staffing expenses. Support networks play an important role overseeing and maintaining awareness of finances to facilitate decision making about spending. This might include overseeing banking, approving payroll or reviewing financial reports with the individual. As well, there might be correspondence with an accountant or some paperwork to fill out. These are all great opportunities to assist the individual to better understand his/her finances and to make sound financial decisions through discussions and planning.

Managing Staff

Support networks can offer assistance with many aspects of overseeing employees. Positions may need to be advertised and candidates may need to be interviewed, hired and oriented. Employees benefit from guidance and reviews resulting in a higher quality of support. Processes and documentation help everyone to be on the same page. Employer responsibilities are important to review and discuss to ensure obligations are being met. When support networks facilitate decision making about employees, individuals gain opportunities for learning, understanding, and expanding knowledge.

Support Network Nurturing and Celebration

In order to work and play together, support networks – like any other teams – need mutual support, communication, fun, vision, belonging, check-ins, fondness and acceptance. One of the most critical ways that support networks can offer assistance is by nurturing the support network itself. Intentionally creating opportunities for gathering, making memories and reminiscing. Checking-in with other members and assisting the individual to facilitate dialogue about how things are going. Developing an understanding of the past and how each member has become the person he/she is today. Helping each other out on tough days and celebrating the good ones. Being a champion for each other and acknowledging contributions. Developing deeper connections with one another creating strength and sustainability.

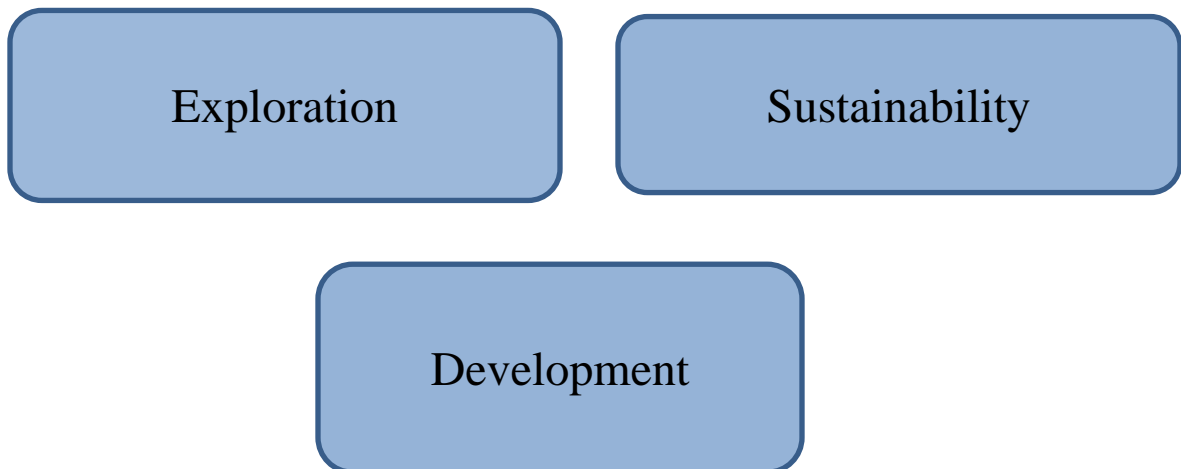


Building and Strengthening Networks

Support networks need to be developed and strengthened initially and continually. Every support network is different and will be developed and strengthened in different ways. Because of this, there is no handbook or checklist. Rather, there is an understanding that support network development goes beyond simply bringing people to the table – it is an intentional process of nurturing relationships between people.

Tend to the development of caring between people and overtime, the support network will evolve more organically.

A commonality is that support network development typically has 3 stages:



Exploration

When a support network first starts to come together, it is important to look at who is already a part of the ICOF employer's life and notice what existing relationships could benefit from support and nurturing.

In order to do this, it is vital to develop a deeper understanding of who the person is. Ask thought-provoking questions, talk to people from different parts of the individual's life, listen and learn about the individual's past, take time to find out about his/her aspirations and learn what supports would best help him/her connect with others. Then identify sports, clubs, groups, activities, volunteer and work opportunities. Look at where friendships can be made beyond those that are already a part of someone's life.

We tend to make friendships at school, at work, when volunteering, when advocating and when attending places of worship because relationships need common ground, frequency and time to develop.



**Coming together is important to maintain relationships
and for positive mental health.**

Development

Support network development at its core is nurturing the depth of relationships between people. In other words, it is the process of getting people to recognize why they care about one another. As with any relationship, this process and outcome will look different every time. Experiences shape how a person engages with others so this may mean paying attention to history, reactions, timing and what support is needed to be successful.

Trying to create multiple connections at once can be complex and may not leave room for the depth of those relationships to grow. Focusing on one connection at a time creates room for intimacy. Common interests are a great way to get people together and talking, but they do not result in immediate relationship success.

One of the key elements of developing support networks is to nurture the relationships – not to be the relationships. Over time, encourage ways for the connecting to happen without your involvement. As you lessen your involvement, their bonds should be strengthened. Do not be discouraged if a connection does not seem to flourish. Instead, try putting your energy into nurturing another relationship. Most importantly, don't feel discouraged as developing support networks rarely goes as planned and always takes time. Keep at it!



Sustainability

There are a number of ways to increase the sustainability of support networks. Support by staff members is key in the on-going nurturing of relationships. Proper daily support and encouragement is critical. Staff members and support networks can assist with reciprocity. It is of utmost importance that we show we care and that relationships are meaningful to us. Depth develops when we make our fondness known through our actions.

“Creating lasting and sustainable relationships takes intention.”

When we listen not only with our ears but also with our eyes and hearts, intimacy and trust develop between friends. Listening and sharing are important in developing lasting connections. Share about your own experiences when the timing is right. Deeper connections emerge when we let people in to what has shaped us.

Create memories by doing things together, taking pictures, laughing, crying or sharing moments that are fun or tough. Experiencing and reminiscing about these times will create lasting connections. Once caring has been nurtured, bring people together and gather. Space and opportunity for people to spend time together nurture new relationships.



Becoming an ICOF Employer

With the help of their support networks, individuals who receive ICOF funding take on a new role as employers. This means that the support staff will work directly for the individual and support network who develop position expectations and requirements together.

With the help of his/her support network, each ICOF employer will:

- Learn and follow the legal requirements of becoming an employer
- Learn about hiring new staff
- Develop a training plan for new and current staff
- Develop skills to manage his/her staff team
- Create protocols and policies for staff to follow
- Develop a process for providing feedback to staff
- Create a policy for dismissing or terminating staff

There are many skills needed to be an employer and some will be new for the individual and his/her support network. Resource Coordinators from a non-profit organization called Innovative Life Options will provide employers and support networks with information, resources and guidance to help them develop these skills.

Funding

In the Company of Friends funding is provided directly to each individual. The amount of funding is determined through guidelines of the Department of Families based on a person's individual daily living and staff needs. Funding is deposited into the individual's own bank account every month and is managed by the individual and his/her support network. If the person is already receiving EIA funds, he/she will continue receiving EIA funds.



Innovative Life Options is a non-profit organization that assists to develop and maintain strong support networks and provides tools and resources that help the individual to create a meaningful life.

We are honored and pleased to support ICOF employers.



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