



Making an Impact in Canadian Society

VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE
WWW.IBELONG.CA

In Brief...

RESEARCH

Before we began to build the iBelong! website, we hired Jessica Vorstermans, a doctoral student in Critical Disability Studies at York University, to conduct research to help us determine needs and gather suggestions for the content. We surveyed hundreds of young people with intellectual disabilities, their families and teachers using a paper survey and an online survey with different forms for each of these three groups. The feedback we received told us we would be meeting a significant need with this resource.

To the question on the families survey, "What is the greatest challenge you face?" all too often the response was similar to that of this parent:

"Finding people who want to stay in my son's life and spend time with him. He calls people on the phone and they say they will come over but they rarely follow through. I don't want people in his life that I have to pay to be there. He wants, as do I, people in his life that are there because they care for him in his unique and wonderful way."

A NEW WEBSITE TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE AND KEEP FRIENDS

We are thrilled to tell you about the launch of ibelong.ca. This attractive new website addresses a very real need for young people who have an intellectual disability. We know that many young people are lonely, especially after they leave school, and not all can live in L'Arche. Their loneliness is painful for them and for their families. Our goal is to assist people with a disability in the often challenging area of developing and sustaining friendships.

The impact of L'Arche is remarkable. Fifty years ago Jean Vanier did not imagine that L'Arche would become a global leader in how people who are vulnerable are seen and treated.

When L'Arche began, technology as we know it today did not exist. There was no internet, no world-wide web, and there were no cell phones. Today most people use the internet regularly, especially young people. Did you know that Canadians spend more time on the internet that anyone else on Earth!



L'Arche's new web resource enables us to reach far beyond the boundaries of our local L'Arche communities with a message of hope. We can touch the lives of tens of thousands of young people and their families who are struggling with isolation. Our vision is for everyone to have the friends and community they need to live a full life. This new website is one of the many ways that L'Arche is helping to make this vision become a reality for more people.

Thank you for your financial partnership that fuels the growing impact of L'Arche.

-Nathan Ball, Executive Director L'Arche Canada Foundation

A Highly Accessible Website

A major goal has been to make the website easy to use for the many young people with intellectual disabilities who today are learning how to use computers and gaining basic reading skills. The site is bilingual and the Young Adult's section is in plain language. Each page and sub-page and every story has a Listen button. The site has 147 stories and 60 short videos on the English side. On



the French side of the site there are 143 stories and 76 videos. Young people can learn from the

website with a support person or on their own.

-Beth Porter, Project Manager

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

"The site is great. First, I looked at Dating and Sexuality. Then at Internet Safety and Why Do We Lose Friends. I tried the games. Everything is good. I am telling my family about it. Families are important." - *a young man with an intellectual disability who is an actor in a drama troupe.*

"This is such a great website! I can't wait to share it with my teacher friends!" - *a classroom teacher, BC*

"The website is well-designed, informative and friendly. I appreciated the honesty in the area of friends, girl/boy friends, and sexuality. One cannot be too vague if the messages are to get across." - *a professor of Disability Studies, York University*

"What a website! It is complete, detailed and interesting. The videos that you made are inserted very well into the appropriate themes!" - *a parent in Quebec*

"We love the new website. We will be using it in our "In Action" day program." - *V.I.A.*

"The site is very interesting. I listened to some of the interviews and they constitute beautiful options for encouraging action and discussions on useful strategies. Good job. Hats off!" - *Development advisor, Quebec projects for Community Integration, Government of Canada.*

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L'ARCHE CANADA FOUNDATION

10271 Yonge Street, Suite 300
Richmond Hill, ON L4C 3B5

Tel: 1.800.571.0212 or 1.905.770.7696

Fax: 905.884.4819

Email: foundation@larche.ca

Charitable Number: 889909719RR0001

www.larchefoundation.ca

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Helping Young People Master Friendship Skills

The website deals with many topics related to friendship. There are ten main themes or pages and most of these have sub-pages. The sub-page *Friends Don't Always Use Words* has stories that help people imagine how to have a friendship in which one friend doesn't speak, and it points to resources on augmentative communication. The section on *Friendship Skills* includes a questionnaire to help young people recognize if a friendship is not good. Sometimes a friend is a bully... In the *Safety* section, there are suggestions for *Internet Safety* and *Physical Safety*. Besides the videos and stories and



Rebecca and Heryka

activities, the website provides some simple games to reinforce learning.

Resources for Parents and Educators



The iBelong! website offers resources and examples of inclusive practices for families, educators and others who give support to young people. A Community Forum enables the posting of events and the sharing of experiences and suggestions.

We heard many inspiring stories of families and teachers who have worked creatively to address the problem of loneliness that young people face. They have developed effective networks and helped their young people form circles of friends. Joan and Barb are two mothers who, when their daughters were still in school, began to dream of a life for these soon-to-be adult daughters that would be full and interesting, like that of their other children. Aware that services in their



Joan and Barb

area would not likely meet their needs, they worked with one other family over a period of three years to establish a board and found The ABLE Network. ABLE, a registered not-for-profit, provides work experience, recreation and friendship opportunities to fifteen young people. The iBelong! website includes six short videos in which Joan and Barb explain their planning process step by step. This is just one of several programs the site highlights in its *Good Practices* section. The young people pictured here are

among the group who have become friends at ABLE.



Andrew and Gemma