

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

## CELEBRATING SEVEN YEARS!!

Bridges-Over-Barriers has been a kind of miracle. Some Toronto friends who communicate more or less the way I do—because we cannot speak with our voices—visited Guelph for a day of conversation in early January 2004. We had no idea that we were starting something like this.

By mid-2005, we had attracted a group of eight communicators with their supporters who met monthly. Now we are a growing community of communicators who find joy in our gatherings and have distant members and friends all over the world. Our experiences together have helped to transform the lives of some of us.

Thanks to Guelph Services for the Autistic agreeing to be trustee, we have been able to use donations for Bridges projects of helping people to learn to communicate with Supported Typing or to attend special workshops and conferences.

Our largest project so far is producing the DVD and book *In Our Own Words* in late 2010. See the back page for a full description. Copies of these have gone to many countries—England, France, Korea, Japan and the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, Mexico, as well as all parts of Canada and several US states. Members of our group have featured the DVD at events of their organizations, and have bought copies to send to family and friends as gifts.

We very much want to expand the work of Bridges so people who cannot speak with their voices can make themselves understood. We are thinking of all possible ways to “grow Bridges” We are fortunate to have various friends and allies who will do all they can. Please help in whatever ways you can!

Read inside:

Ken’s Farm Story...page 2

Bridges Hansard-...pages 3-7

Supported Typing, an essential bridge in my good life...pages 8-9

In Our Own Words..page 10

How to reach us: Postmail: Bridges-Over-Barriers, c/o GSA, 16 Caribou Cres, Guelph, ON N1E 1C9.

Please make donations payable to GSA, with “Bridges” on the subject line. Tax receipts are issued for donations.

Webpage: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/oaar/bridges.shtml> Email: [ebloomfi@uoguelph.ca](mailto:ebloomfi@uoguelph.ca)

## BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

**KEN'S FARM STORY:** celebrating five years of working on the Gilford Farm  
June 6, 2006: My first day at the farm I went and looked in the barn and saw Wesley, Lady, Heidi, and Barney. I thought they were very big horses and I was afraid of them because they were so big. After that first day I was not afraid because the horses are friendly and they like me giving them their pails of carrots and their hay in their stalls.

My Dad and I started to work in the barn together cleaning out the stalls and putting the manure in the wheel barrow and dumping the manure in the garden. We also worked in the mow together throwing down the hay and straw bales to the barn floor to feed the horses. In the beginning I was afraid to go up the stairs to the mow because it was dark but now I go up by myself because I am not afraid and I know the stairs now.

When my birthday came in July I had a ride on Barney to celebrate my birthday. I really enjoyed my ride on Barney. He is such a gentle horse. I sat very high on Barney since he is a big horse. On another day at the farm David gave Mom, Dad and I a wagon ride out in the field and I got to hold the reins to drive Barney and Wesley. That was a lot of fun driving the horses. I think I could do that again. One of the other jobs Dad and I do in the summer is cut the thistles in the field. The thistles are very sharp so we have to wear gloves.

In June 2008 my sister and I came to live at the farm with David. We lived in a yellow school bus made into a trailer. We lived in it for 3 months then we rented our own house in Lefroy. We enjoyed living on the farm with David. We ate all our meals with him and spent a lot of time together. I am so happy David let us stay with him for 3 months. We had good times together and we liked being out in the country. It is so peaceful and the birds sing everyday. The cats follow us around to get food from us. I like it in the country with the nice trees and green grass. The people are happy and relaxed to see me.

In 2009, I met a new worker at the farm and she worked with me for two months. She taught me to ride Whistler. I enjoyed learning how to ride him very much. She was good at teaching me to ride the horse.

I like being at the farm with my friend Peter. He knows me well and we enjoy talking to each other very much. We like spending time at the farm together and we enjoy working in the barn. We like being there with David because he likes us and accepts us as real people. We are welcome to be there and we give our best work at the farm. I think I will be happy coming to the farm all the time because we are good friends and enjoy being together. Ken Moon

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

## BRIDGES HANSARD: NOTES ON RECENT GATHERINGS

Since we last printed a newsletter in November 2010, we have hosted six gatherings. Two were in late 2010 at which *In Our Own Words*, the new Bridges-Over-Barriers DVD and book, were distributed to Bridges members. We thank everyone who had helped us to get to this point— notably Christine and others she recruited to help, as well as all our facilitators and communication assistants and those who spoke our words. We offered a special introductory price and several families gave our book and DVD as seasonal gifts to relations, friends and supporters. We have sent copies to friends and allies we have got to know in the past six years.

One way or another, we have distributed nearly 250 sets of *In Our Own Words*—both as a celebration of Bridges-Over-Barriers and as the first stage in our larger plans of making it possible for more people to express their thoughts and feelings.

I am glad I have my Bridges friends to share this good thing with. We are all stars in this. This has been a long process but well worth the wait. It is showing others we are smart and we are lights in this world of uncertainty. I feel good to share this joy with new and old friends

At our Nov-Dec gatherings, we also discussed our plans for 2011, as individuals and as the Bridges group. In 2011, we have continued to gather at Guelph on the Saturday of the month, with a recess for the worst winter weather.

In **March 2011**, our focus was on catching up on everyone's lives during the winter months, reporting on how the *In Our Own Words* DVD and book had been received, and sharing ideas for topics and activities during 2011. We also discussed these questions:

*What do we do, how do we cope, when we really want to tell someone something, or express our feelings and thoughts, and there is no S-T device or communication assistant?*

*What does the word "therapy" mean? What kinds of "therapy" have helped me? Is the word "therapy" helpful? Would I prefer to describe it another way?*

**Our April Gathering was inspired by ACCPC's Communication Access to Justice project.** See more at <http://www.access-to-justice.org/>

The project declares that people like us who cannot use our voices reliably have rights to:

- *Use a variety of ways to communicate*
- *Have communication assistance that ensures the accuracy and authorship of our messages*
- *Have their testimony recorded in ways that protect the integrity of our communication*
- *Receive information in ways we can understand and access.*

## BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

We discussed our communication options and all spoke up for Supported Typing and the use of boards and devices, some of us liking these to have voice output. I think communication is to express my self, my thoughts and what I need, and my beliefs and ideals that nobody can guess if I don't have a way of communicating. If we cannot count on our voices, we need choices of ways to express ourselves. I like to type and sign and point and shake my head. I also look into your eyes. I need communication partners who are able to use all my modes. I have a few different kinds of keyboards and like them to have a voice.

Ken told us: "I can speak my thoughts and ideas on the board or a computer. I like to communicate with people who will listen to me. I like listening to other people talk who are my friends because they let me talk to them. I like talking by the computer. I like the board too but the computer shows what I type which is better. S-T is the best way to talk to speaking people. You need to ask me if I need help and I can tell you yes or no. I appreciate all the support you give me Mom. I enjoy being out in the community. I think people should listen to us talk on our board and include us in their conversations. I think my workers are happy they can ask me yes or no questions because they keep my letter board in the car with them. I enjoy talking to them about what I want to do."

### **How important is it to record and save the words we type, the messages we compose with Supported Typing (and in other ways)?**

Most of us mentioned our concern that some of what we type is private and not meant to be shared widely. But some of us spoke up for keeping a record of most of what we say.

Ken said: I think we should save our words so we can read them later and share them with other people if we want to. I think we need a record because we can't be repeating our words with our voices. In this way people can read our words for themselves.

I myself think it is important to keep a record because it is hard work to type and I don't want to have to repeat things. It also helps at times if you get me to listen to what I have said later and to keep talking about my words. Yes I always want my words recorded into a story that I can read and copy type. It is very important to me. It is important so I can reflect on what I have said and get support I need to help me with making things happen. I think it is a good question for people to think about and share with their supports so their words are heard.

In the afternoon, we thought about **A Credo for Support** by Norman Kunc and Emma Van der Klift which begins:

*Do Not see my disability as the problem,  
recognize that my disability is an attribute.  
Do Not see my disability as a deficit.*

*It is you who see me as deviant and helpless.  
Do not try to fix me because I am not broken.'  
Support me.*

We all liked it, generally agreeing with Matt's eloquent comment:

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

“I like best the part about respect. Respect is the way to connect with each other. Real dreams are shared when respect is given. Freedom is real friends and freedom is respect for the real freedoms of others. The real reason that we are here is to give each other respect and friendship. We are here to create a space for the sharing of ideas and freedoms.”

We thought about keywords for a Bridges Credo. We all thought respect is a key quality of support, with listening to our voices, freedom and equality, inclusion and being real. I added controlling my own life, inviting me to be your neighbour, and helping me with support, not fixing me. I also want to be respected as a whole person, all of me. Being me is the best I can be. I try myself to be always polite. I always try to see both sides.

We also shared Betty’s recommendation of this new book:

***Real People: Regular Lives: Autism Communication and Quality of Life***. 2011. Available from AUTCOM Bookstore, Institute of Disabilities, University of New Hampshire. US\$22.

<http://www.iodbookstore.org/products/Real-People,-Regular-Lives.html>

What might it mean to gain access to expressive language late in life? *Real People, Regular Lives* addresses this question by introducing the reader to ten nonverbal autistic adults who gained access to expressive language through Facilitated Communication. The book traces the amazing journey and unique personality of each person and how typing to talk can be a catalyst for a positive spiral of change. Although every story does not have a "happy" ending, it becomes apparent that word-based communication can potentially improve quality of life in ways that nothing else can. [From the publisher]

## **“What music does for me” was the special topic at our May meeting.**

We had each brought CDs of pieces we had chosen and said why we like them. Then others commented after listening to the music. The music we listened to in the morning was mainly very mellow and calming, while in the afternoon we tried more lively and stimulating pieces.

Ken spoke for most of us: “I like music and listening to it is calming and also music can open you up and make you feel like dancing. I think we should say music for relaxing and learning, and music to sleep by and music to enjoy hearing and listening to.”

Several of us mentioned that music calms us and that it is important for helping with our movement differences. John MD also noted that “music assists my memory.” Sara said: “Music is communication...It works on getting things out. Music makes me move and that feels good.” Some of us noted our reactions of what we were hearing in terms of other senses as well.

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

Our musical tastes differ a bit. Some of us prefer to hear human voices singing words. Some don't like nature sounds alone, but want accompanying instruments as well. While most of us found music could calm our stress, some music was just too calm and sleepy-making for some of us.

Music helps me to have playing while I am communicating with S-T. It helps keep me going on my thoughts. I enjoy music so if I am enjoying it I feel like talking more to share my enjoyment with others. I shared my dislike of the term music therapy as this sounds as if we are broken and have to be fixed....I prefer the idea of music as a bridge or something like that. Music connections or music communicating feelings, or just music making.

Some of the lively pieces were good because they are stimulating. Their vibrations and rhythm can float me out of being stuck and encourage me to keep going. Music acts on my sensory system to balance me. I am thinking that music is different because musicians have different moods which means we can play it for different moods too.

At the May gathering, we also swapped communication partners, something we will continue to try. While we intended only a small trial, passing very simple messages, two of our communication pairs (who had never done S-T together before with one another) were very successful. WE will continue to try this and other ways of reducing our need for physical support.

**Our special June activity was painting ourselves as we would like to be on the Bridges Mural.** We met at my home this time. Heidi, my art mentor, and I had prepared the materials and we set up the tables on my terrace under the awning. This is my idea of the mural which I shared beforehand:

*I want everyone to share something that is important to them. I hope everyone can express themselves with colour. I want it to be fun. I want to have everyone come together on the bridge. I want to create a feeling of togetherness. I think it means all of our differences coming together on the bridge to be friends. We all have good things to offer each other even if we are very different from one another. I give hope to others by being a good host to offer this. I am interested in what others like, not just my own interests. This [empathy] gets better with trying. People don't need to make it hard, just fun. Please think of how you would like to be represented? We need not look exactly or photographically like ourselves. Instead we could choose (and draw) an image of how we think of ourselves. For example, I want to show myself as the Green Man running, but I won't show my own features. You might use a symbol for qualities that are you, in your own mind. We might add images for absent Bridges friends as well, or they might send us ideas of how they would like to look. I hope everyone's picture or image will be smiling and positive with bright colours.*

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

*Once the mural is made, we can put it up at gatherings. There might also be opportunities to show it as part of special events featuring Bridges and Supported Typing. Our work on the mural will be helpful in planning the Bridges t-shirt we have had in mind for some time.*

We each had very definite ideas of how we wanted to appear on the bridge and used paints to suggest this. We discussed the amount of physical support we wanted to paint, comparing this with the support we have for S-T. As Kevin V remarked, physical support is less needed if we are painting abstractly. Our strong senses of colour and of auras were clear in how we painted ourselves.

Matt: I want to be seen on the water in blue.

Kevin R: I want to be seen as a man running on the bridge. I like green and purple.

John C: I want to ride my horse in yellow and orange.

Kevin V: I want to convey the idea of communicating through photography and art and writing. But I also see myself as a tall blue flower with green leaves because a flower seems to be silent but it has a deep message and desires to be noticed.

John MD: Man doing S-T on the bridge, in blue and orange which are my colours.

Sara: I want to painting myself dancing in the sunshine, with music and flowers that are pink.

Stephen: I like red and blue. I also see myself as a person who is carrying a book and music notes.

After our painting experience on the terrace, people then commented on how it felt and expressed their wishes as to next steps. Several asked Heidi and me to help with details. Heidi and I are also working on the background of bridge and its parkland setting.

## **Ideas of Topics and Activities for 2011 Gatherings**

1. Matt's mother Susan offered to lead the Bridges members in a session of movement exercises or Yoga for people with special needs. We look forward to that on Saturday July 30.
2. We will comment on the draft Bridges mural and also discuss the Bridges T-shirt as we have planned for some time since Kevin V first suggested this bright idea. As Ken says: I would like to do the T-shirt so we can wear them out in the community and show people that we are friends who can talk by typing and be good to each other. We enjoy being together and other people would learn from us how to accept each other the way we are without trying to change us.
3. Sara's idea of thinking and talking about flowers and how we sense them through smell, sight and touch. Lea (who led us in a session in July 2009) will develop this topic more in September.
4. What next? How can Bridges make Supported Typing better understood and accepted? A focus for our August gathering?
5. When weather allows, Ken: would like a longer walk outside and to talk about our times with other people out in the community.
6. I propose two other topics soon--our sense of spirituality; and activism, getting involved in things to help our world. Like green projects that help our cities and peace causes.

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

## SUPPORTED TYPING—AN ESSENTIAL BRIDGE IN MY GOOD LIFE

*Guelph Services for the Autistic is very important in my life. It is the housing trust that owns and maintains my home in trust for me for my lifetime. GSA also shelters our Bridges-Over-Barriers group, administering the funds that people have donated for our projects including the book and DVD **In Our Own Words** that we published in late 2010. I am a pioneer and active member of GSA and help its mission by sharing my experience with others who want good self-directed lives in homes of their own. This is my message to GSA's AGM 13 June 2011:*

One of my projects for 2011 is composing my autobiography about the barriers I have faced in my life and how various bridges have helped. I have been able to type about some difficulties for the first time. I am doing this mainly for myself, to make sense of my life. I also plan to share my experiences and thoughts as a book, *Bridges Over Barriers in my Life with Autism*, to be published this fall. The book will include some of my new poems since my last book of poetry in 2006.

I want my friends to know how thankful I am for their supporting the many good things in my life in the past 15 years. My life is full of so many positives now.

- Planning with me a life that is designed for me. Through my past experiences we had learned why person-directed lives are so important.
- GSA's legal and practical support for my home that is the basis of my whole good life. I love my home because it is constructed around my needs. I like how quiet it is, not having to share with strangers, and everyone asking for my input. There is space for everything--music, art, learning, gardening, cooking, hosting--and I am responsible for so much.
- Recognition of my Aroha entity of friends who care about me and what makes my life worth living. It is a way to keep my life going, as we have designed it.
- Accepting and respecting my ways of communicating. Communication means expressing myself, my thoughts and what I need, and my beliefs and ideals that nobody can guess if I don't have a way of communicating that people accept and listen to.

I want to say a bit more about the role of Supported Typing (S-T) in my life, so my friends realize its importance and how thankful I am for GSA's support of Bridges-Over-Barriers in the past five years. In being introduced to a way to communicate more deep thoughts, I began to develop as a person. Before S-T, people knew basically what I wanted or if I was upset. But nobody knew my thoughts. S-T was like being admitted to a university and the more I typed the more my brain power grew. I knew I was smarter than they all assumed. But I had no experience with higher thought, world issues, and advocating for myself and others. Two barriers were: first, not having a way to express higher thoughts, and second, not using my brain to its fullest until I had a way to express myself.

Once my abilities were revealed, others gave me more input and materials to grow with. *Listening to Andrew*, the film we made in 2000, was a big step in building a life based on my needs. It showed

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

my capabilities and reminded others to listen to me and not control me. It helped me to begin to advocate for myself. I started to see I could be a teacher and a leader. My experiences are my own, but so many people cannot talk for themselves and have not had the opportunities I have had. So if my thoughts open minds and doors, I can be a bridge too.

Bridges-Over-Barriers grew out of these discoveries. It is exhilarating to meet with real friends in gatherings made for us: we have a safe environment to talk about being autistic, and obsessions and lack of control, and making friends. I think we have proved autistics can have feelings for others and can stay focused for a long time. Supported Typing and Bridges-Over-Barriers have been the most significant bridges in my life. I want to build Bridges into a centre to help others to communicate their deeper thoughts and plan their lives.

Supported Typing gives me the confidence to be myself. I am able to express my thoughts rather than just show my feelings of anxiousness which lead people to not understand me. With Supported Typing I share my deep thoughts and opinions that surprise many. I want everyone to be listened to. We have to keep talking so people keep listening. If no one listens nothing can change.

What am I most proud of in the first 43 years? Bridges-Over-Barriers has made me very happy--it has extended the family I have with more friends all the time. I tell others about my ideas through poems. I have my home. I make decisions about my future by communicating my thoughts. Gardening in my home and outside--it looks like a paradise of green. I am an artist and love to paint. I have learned to be a friend. I feel about others and I let them know. When I was younger I cared but didn't show it well. I can express myself and this has helped everything in my life. I am happy and I want to share it. I feel it is my responsibility to help others now. I want to work on my dream for a Bridges centre. I am hoping it will happen. Bridges is getting bigger and more people need to be able to experience it. I feel we could share it with so many. I will have so many friends I will have to get a bigger heart to love them all. *-Andrew Bloomfield*

I have also started a new blog called Andrew's Bridges. I like this idea and the way it looks. It may inspire other people enjoy running and gardening and also to type what they think and feel. The blog is a great way for my Bridges friends to find out what is happening in my life and I can share a bit of my good life everyday maybe. It will be helpful to others and also a way to share my own blessings and remember how happy and blessed I am. I like this. Lea is helping me to make it a very special place to share things that are important to me. My blog is still under construction but you can see the basic outline at <http://andrewsbridges.blogspot.com/> Pages are: Who Am I? About Myself: \* Aroha: Circles of friends and legal entities of personal empowerment. \* Bridges-Over-Barriers: my community of communicators. \* Green Man: my passion for gardening and caring for our environment. \* Host in My Own Home Supported decision-making and role of housing trust. \* Poetry, Music and Art: How I express my thoughts and feelings. \* Health and Fitness \* Neighbourhood and Community \* Lifelong Learning.

# BRIDGES-OVER-BARRIERS

## IN OUR OWN WORDS

**The DVD** consists of two main parts—a series of conversations about the importance of Supported Typing in coping with Autism and planning our own lives (23.25 minutes), and eight participant profiles in which most of us introduce ourselves (18 minutes). Our families and friends have supported our typing and some have spoken our words for the DVD. We are thankful to everyone who took part in the conversations at our gatherings and in making the DVD:

Wonderful friends and allies have helped us in this project—especially our videographer Christine Zorn. Deborah Seabrook, music therapist, composed and played the theme music. Christine also interested some of her friends and colleagues to contribute to our project.

**Bridges-Over-Barriers [electronic resource] :  
in our own words**

**Andrew Bloomfield, script writer & editor, narrator,  
founder of Bridges  
Christine Zorn, PAN Video Services Inc. video producer &  
director / camera & video editor**

ISBN 978-0-9866586-0-0

1. Autism spectrum disorders--Patients--Ontario--Guelph--  
Biography.  
I. Bloomfield, Andrew, 1968-  
RC553.A88B73  
2010a                      616.85'8820092                      C2010-903227-6

Scenes include The Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph and The Guelph Enabling Garden.

Contributors using Supported Typing, a form of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) were supported to type, and their words were spoken, by family members and friends:

**The book** accompanies the DVD and is almost all in our own words. The book has 112 pages in six chapters:  
-Our Community of Communicators  
-Recognizing Our Needs to Express Ourselves and Our Rights to be Heard  
-What It's Like to Live with Autism: Understanding our Movement Differences  
-Let's Talk about Our Senses  
-Sharing Struggles and Strategies to Improve Our Lives  
-The Bridges Dream: Sustaining our Hopes

**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Bridges-Over-Barriers : in our own words / Andrew Bloomfield ... [et al.] ;  
edited by Andrew Bloomfield.

ISBN 978-0-9866586-1-7

1. Autism spectrum disorders--Patients--Ontario--Guelph--Biography.

I. Bloomfield, Andrew, 1968-

RC553.A88B73 2010

616.85'8820092

C2010-903226-8

© 2010 Bridges-Over-Barriers, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Editorial Assistance: Elizabeth Bloomfield    Cover design: Christine Zorn

Kevin Vasey with Gloria Pearson-Vasey and Jim Vasey  
Kevin Rockefeller with Judi Henry, Brenda Hofland, Michele Druitt and Beth Komito-Gottlieb  
John Morris-Dadson with Anne Morris-Dadson, Jim Dadson and Paul Morris-Dadson  
Ken Moon with Maebeth Moon and Doug Moon  
Tim Marmura with Elizabeth Marmura and Lea Tran  
Matt MacDonald with Jacquie Ferguson  
Sara Lyne with Judi Henry  
John Crawley with Tara Houser  
Andrew Bloomfield with Beth Komito-Gottlieb, David DeVidi and Jane Forgay  
Ingrid Clark: Narrator of introductory and concluding passages composed by Kevin Vasey and Andrew Bloomfield  
Deborah Seabrook: musical composition and performance.  
Andrew McPherson and Brian Ward lent the use of their recording studios.

