An Aroha: What is it? How can it help?

* **What is an Aroha?**

A legally incorporated not-for-profit entity that is the core of an individual’s circle of friends or personal support network. In functional words, a ”self-directed support corporation”. The idea was invented in Manitoba by David Wetherow—as a Microboard more than 30 years ago and most fully developed in British Columbia where more than 1000 units are associated with the Vela Microboard Association. In Ontario we had to find an alternative generic word as Vela had patented Microboard which also sounds cold and hard and can be confused with a computer component. We chose Aroha (a New Zealand Maori word) for its meanings of selfless love, community, friendship, caring, nurturing, pity, charity, empathy, compassion, family (wider than biological), trust, understanding, respect. It’s tempting to think pf Aroha as a mechanism or tool, but it is much more than that--far wider and deeper. Proper use of an Aroha is integral to a good life in community.

* **Why should progressive people and groups be concerned with Aroha?**

Aroha values match those of progressive organizations—finding and keeping friends, building community inclusion, self-determination and supported decision making; “nothing about me without me”, a way to have choice and control, deep listening, respect for each unique individual, person-directed planning and self-directed funding, to create and sustain a good life that lasts beyond parents. An Aroha can underpin many benefits and blessings. It is also a support and safeguard that can be created in advance so the person and family have allies to negotiate necessary funded supports and overcome transitions and crises.

* **Why should a family group consider an Aroha?**

Best mechanism yet developed to ensure the person has choice and control in shaping a good life that can be seamless and sustained now and into the future. Strategy that families can start without waiting for Government permission or funding. Small families may find it essential but it is good and wise for anyone who is vulnerable. Everyone could do with an Aroha! Let’s consider what an Aroha can do for sometimes who is vulnerable and different because of a disabling condition of some kind.

* **What can an Aroha do to sustain the good whole life of our family member?**

1. Widen circle of friends who, individually and as a group, offer interests and connections supporting the best possible quality of life--now and in the future. Above all, directors should be respected and trustworthy friends who really know and care about the focus person, share Aroha values, and have no conflict of interest. We aim for balance of ages and diversity of experiences that are relevant to the focus person and the mission of the Aroha.

2. Exercise legal powers to safeguard the person’s interests in relation to interests of agencies or governments. As a legal entity, can take responsibility for receiving government funds or administering trust funds, owning or renting property, making contracts with employees or service providers.

3. In sum, Aroha can help sustain a seamless quality of life NOW and into the FUTURE through whatever transitions are necessary.

* **How do we set up and maintain an Aroha?**

Think through rationale and process. Build on circle or network.

Use proven templates of objects of incorporation and bylaws.

Listen to your focus person about priorities and to your friends for ideas of ways and means.

Decide on most important roles to be objects of Aroha. Choose corporate name.

Apply to be a not-for profit corporation without share capital in Ontario or perhaps federally.

Be aware of ongoing responsibilities of “corporate maintenance”.

* **How could collaborative action around Aroha help new families?**

So far about 20 families in Ontario have acted on their own to form an Aroha or Microboard in the past 10 years. The time has come for more formal collaborative action in Ontario. We can learn from the Vela Microboard Association, a “small non-profit organization that does a big job” in supporting at least 1000 Microboards throughout British Columbia as well as some other pioneers. Some American states have microboard associations.

**Resources**

**Aroha web pages on OAARSN site**:

<http://aroha1.blogspot.ca/p/what-is-aroha_24.html>

<http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/aroha.shtml>

<http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml> Includes [Questions and Answers](http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml#1); [Guelph Focus on Microboards](http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml#2) (report of first Ontario workshop in 2001); Guide to Incorporating an Aroha: [Models: Strategies, Objects and Bylaws](http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml#3); Story of [Ontario's First Aroha](http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml#4)

**Wetherows’ history of Microboard development**:

**Microboards and Microboard Association Design, Development and Implementation by David and Faye Wetherow;** Revised August, 2004  Clearly sets out the essentials of setting up an individual MB and some important factors in developing an "umbrella" Association of MBs, including choice by individual MBs as to how much they use the Association. <http://www.communityworks.info/articles/microboard.htm>

**Vela Microboard Associaiton of British Columbia**: <http://www.microboard.org>

**Vela: Microboards and Individualized Funding:** <http://www.velacanada.org/resources/microboard-and-individualized-funding/148-microboards-individualized-funding-brochure/file>

**Vela: More about Microboards** <http://www.velacanada.org/resources/microboard-and-individualized-funding/150-more-about-microboards-brochure/file>

**Andrew Bloomfield, Aroha pioneer:**

Ontario’s first Aroha was incorporated around me and includes me as a director. This is my account of how my life has been transformed by my Aroha, self-expression using Supported Typing, homeownership and other interrelated strategies. ***Bridges over barriers in my life with autism****.* By Andrew Bloomfield. Guelph: Friends of Andrew Bloomfield and Guelph Services for the Autistic for Bridges-Over-Barriers, 2011. 190 pages. ISBN 978-0-9866586-2-4 <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/AB-2011-blurb.pdf>

Introduction to my 2014 book, ***Communication and Relationships***: <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/AB-C&R-2014-intro.pdf> and a page of thoughts about needing to trust my Aroha director friends, from <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/C&R-2014-aroha.pdf>

A new short video about my Aroha was made in 2016 by Josee Boulanger of the Ottawa area and was shown publicly for the first time to a retreat of family caregivers there. Link to first instalment, in my voice: [https://vimeo.com/189787285](https://www.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fvimeo.com%2F189787285&h=YAQGn1DuBAQE3wQy1iXmDzj2xIBiKK0hRNEv6JLOtAjwY_w&enc=AZO-7gAchNztAPu42szZbgHivPsckDPoibRvqD_R-yJJQUoqffDFoOgq4rHAfqMNWzxYzpM1R4FkzoYz7xDxU6r6ywrce-8qIOMTuCHGLJSFfLWm9Z38O-1wtKF7DeHuh0nEHg_YFkeKgkXNgqN3xKrSk95E0qNZ6gbxfeRdUz-BHnmJBkiQ-BTACxjtly_oDr8&s=1) The second video will consist of edited interviews with the Aroha director-friends.

Aroha entities in practice combined with other strategies in the GSA model of support. ***Creating a Home and Good Life of My Own: the roles of a housing trust.*** By Elizabeth & Gerald Bloomfield. GuelphServices for the Autistic, 2012, 192p. ISBN 978-0-9866586-3-1 <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/GSAmanual-blurb.pdf>

See Chapter 3: “Aroha entities for personal support”, Chapter 5 “Aroha in practice”, and Appendix 2: “Incorporating an Aroha Entity” (model objects of incorporation and model bylaw).

Elizabeth Bloomfield, Guelph, April 2017