

Background: One family's journey to sustain a good life, now and into the future

About the Bloomfield Family

Gerald and Elizabeth Bloomfield arrived in Ontario in January 1969 with twin infants and have lived in Guelph ever since. One factor that anchored them in Guelph was the autism diagnosis in 1972 of their son Andrew. Gerald was a founding director of what has become Autism Ontario and provincial president for several years in the 1980s. Elizabeth was active in the local autism chapter from 1974 and in various other efforts to increase awareness and develop services. They became very experienced in advocacy, service planning and fund raising at all levels, with the idea of improving services and outcomes for everyone.

After Andrew's twin sister died in a road accident in early 1996, the Bloomfields' focus shifted to more direct and individualized planning with Andrew himself and his circle of friends. Advocates like Malcolm Jeffreys and other leaders within the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) and Family Alliance Ontario (FAO) were helpful.

In the 16 years since then, Andrew has made remarkable progress which he has recounted in the brief *Odyssey: Ten Years of a Good Whole Life in My Own Home* (2008) and his more detailed autobiography *Bridges Over Barriers in My Life with Autism* (2011). Andrew and his friends have pioneered several kinds of support mechanisms that interest others and could help people with a range of special needs with their families and friends. In his own words this is how Andrew describes what has helped him build bridges in his life:

- **“Supported decision-making about everything that affects me**, using what mode of communication works for me, which has also led to the formation of a self-advocates' group called Bridges-Over-Barriers.
- **Aroha entities of personal support, legally incorporated cores of circles of friends.** An Aroha is the generic Ontario name for what is called a micro-board in BC, and some other jurisdictions or in some parts of the US a "self-directed support corporation."
- **Creating a home of my own, supported by a housing trust**, a role pioneered by Guelph Services for the Autistic.
- **Personal support agreement for self-directed use of direct individualized funding.”**

Final thoughts from David DeVidi's foreword to Andrew's book, *Bridges Over Barriers in My Life with Autism* say it all. ***“For Andrew's family, Andrew's good life, in which he makes important decisions for himself and has good friends . . . is the reward for their work. If we set to work, maybe more of us can have similar rewards from helping others achieve similarly good lives.”***

