

Remembering Barb Fowke

Speaker, writer, poet, and painter - friend and colleague to many

Respectfully prepared by Michelle Friesen



Lots of us with the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) will have fond memories of Barb Fowke as an active leader with the 'coalition' over many years. We were saddened to hear the news that Barb passed away on January 27, 2022. Because Barb had an integral role with IFCO during some creative and crucial years, and many of us got to know her personally, we decided to share a few things to remember her by. Barb loved writing poetry, painting and music. She was someone who overcame incredible barriers, living her life with kindness, and wanting to give back to others. She gave back using her voice, talents and time in her home town of Kitchener and at a provincial level over the years. She gave back sharing her poetry which raised people's spirits many a time.

Barb's LinkedIn page lists her professional roles as: Speaker, Writer and Poet – so true. Kory Earle, co-chair with IFCO, and Barb's friend and colleague, calls her first a Connector. He says Barb had a way of bringing people together, and that she was a kind person with a good sense of humour. He recalls how warm and welcoming Barb was when he first joined the People First of Ontario board in 2007.

Barb did an amazing job when volunteering and working with IFCO. Her voice for people who were labeled with having a developmental disability was strong. She would remind us that people wanted real jobs, wanted to be included, did not want to live in institutions, needed affordable places to live, needed support and opportunities so they would not be lonely, and needed someone to encourage them to 'Keep their Dreams Alive'. She would often remind us that IFCO needed to use plain language more. We will be forever grateful to John Lord for introducing Barb to IFCO, knowing the gifts she contributed in Kitchener-Waterloo, their home town.

In 2005, Barb was part of the team from People First of Ontario who assisted with the creation of ***Common Vision for Real Transformation, Part One and Part Two***. This is a set of documents that describes in detail what is needed to live a good life in Ontario. Barb Fowke, Peter Park and Richard Ruston, worked hard together, along with a skilled advisor, to prepare and share what would support people to live their lives as full citizens. They would meet the night before our "day long" meetings talking things through, drawing and writing down their ideas. The next day they worked even harder along with representatives from 3 other grassroots groups to discuss and develop a 'common vision' for Ontario. Barb took this work seriously over the many different days she gathered with the other representatives from IFCO, Family Alliance Ontario, the SSAH Coalition, and People First of Ontario.

In 2006, Barb was part of the writing team for IFCO, along with Charlotte Dingwall and Kristi Kemp, that developed the document: ***Creating a Good Life in Community, A Guide on Person-Directed Planning***. This guide, as well as the Plain Language version continues to be popular for downloading from the IFCO website. It is legacy work that Marlyn Shervill recalls Barb being 'especially proud of' - and rightly so. Like the *Common Vision* documents, these guides are as relevant today as they were in 2006.

In 2007, Barb was elected the President of People First of Ontario where her partnership with IFCO and other groups grew stronger. In 2008, Barb was video taped by Inclusion Press, at the Toronto Summer Institute where she was able to share what is important to People First of Ontario, herself and others – including 'speaking out'. The video is a nice reminder for all of us, and a good way to remember Barb. You can watch the video at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8LuDK7dmSI>

Over the years, Barb offered so much of herself while working positively and optimistically for change in Ontario. Yona Frishman, IFCO co-chair, fondly remembers Barb's participation as a leader with IFCO's community engagement work through the *Modelling Community Change and Innovation* project work that was led by Charlotte Dingwall, and funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Barb spoke at independent facilitator forums where people, families, facilitators and allies gathered to grow and learn on a regular basis. She continued to support plain language in materials. Barb's involvement as a leader with the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN), which was established following the Modelling Change project, has been noted with appreciation by independent facilitator, Susannah Joyce. Barb had been an amazing volunteer with OIFN over many years. Some of us were blessed to receive poems in our emails every now and again from Barb during those times.

Below are the links on the IFCO website where you will find the legacy work that Barb Fowke was part of creating with the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) and others.

Common Vision for Real Transformation, Part One and Part Two. Go to this page on the IFCO website and scroll down until you see the links to the two documents.

<https://individualizedfunding.ca/resources/citizenship-participation-and-transformation/>

Creating a Good Life in Community, A Guide on Person-Directed Planning:

Here is the link to the page on the IFCO website where you will find all versions of this guide:

<https://individualizedfunding.ca/resources/independent-planning-and-facilitation/>

Reflections about Barb from IFCO leaders

"The world lost an incredible person, the world lost an amazing leader, the world lost an inspiring person, the world lost someone who know how to bring people together! Barb Fowke you have touched so many lives, you have made our world a better place for everyone! Your outstanding poems that you did, have helped so many! Thank you for your friendship, enriching my life and so many! I will never forget that phone call in 2007, you were the first to congratulate me and welcome me to the board. I will miss your amazing sense of humor, your laugh and smile!! RIP my Beautiful friend ❤️"

Kory Earle, Co-chair IFCO, Past President People First of Canada

"I will always remember and appreciate the assistance Barb Fowke provided IFCO with plain language and with the thinking around what people need to live a good life. What stands out most for me is Barb's vital work as part of the writing team with Charlotte Dingwall and Kristi Kemp on "Creating a Good Life in Community, A Guide on Person-Directed Planning - especially with the Plain Language version. Her voice and message representing people was also truly valued during the community engagements events and facilitator forums held during the Modelling Change project. I have so much appreciation for Barb."

Yona Frishman, Co-chair IFCO

"I will never forget my mother meeting Barb on one of our IFCO trips to Toronto. My mother was getting a ride to our meeting location, and would be spending a few days with her sister from Scarborough. With Marlyn at the wheel, we picked up Barb in Kitchener along the way. My mother was intrigued with Barb's life story - enjoying the conversation and laughing with her. She was quite taken with Barb as she shared openly and with how much she had overcome in her life. Barb's sense of humour, honesty and kindness shone through. Their common interest as "artists" was part of their bond, as was their unique 'senses' of humour, and their similar values. My mother was a painter; Barb was a poet and painter. As my caregiving shifted with my mother and daughter needing more support, I lost touch with Barb. However, I will forever cherish the memory I have of both of these strong women, and the joy that Barb gave my mother that day."

Michelle Friesen, Past co-chair, IFCO, Family Leader

Barb's Gift of Writing and Poetry

One of Barb's personal legacies will be her gift with words - her writing and her poetry. Below are two poems she has written. One fitting for the work she has done with People First, the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO), and the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN); it is called *Planning*. The other a poem to bring hope as we look to spring and a better future is called *Spring*.



Planning

Planning is preparing for the future
Planning is your day or preparing a meal or what to wear
 Planning is facilitating
 Planning is an idea
 Planning is a journey
Planning isn't so easy sometimes
 Planning is a lot of fun
 Planning is listening to you
Planning is caring about your interests in what you do and what you want
 Planning is a challenge
 Planning is a helping hand
Planning is a goal that you wish to accomplish
 Planning is a thought
 Planning is an opportunity
 Planning takes time, a long time
 Planning is support
 Planning is having fun
Planning is a chance to make new friends
 Planning is a choice
 Planning is not sad
 Planning is happy

Spring

Spring begins with a smile
Spring sings a song of cheer
Spring brings warmth, brightness and shine
Spring brings smiles and laughter
 Spring brings showers
Spring brings a lot of sweetness
 Spring brings lots of green
Spring brings flowers of every kind
Spring brings butterflies that dance freely
 Spring brings buds of fruit
Spring gives a touch of goodness
 Spring gives sweetness
 Spring is a touch of tender care
Spring gives a rainbow from time to time

