

Thinking about your Future:

What will life look like after
Graduation?





Introduction

Very soon, you will reach one of the most exciting milestones in a young adult's life - **GRADUATING** from High School! Along with excitement and a sense of accomplishment, there is a lot of planning that needs to be done to create the life you want when school is behind you. This process of thinking about the future, and planning for it is called **transition planning**. But don't worry; it's not something you have to do alone! **Transition planning** is a journey that you will take with people you count on most to help you make decisions...your family, your friends, your teachers and your Community Services Worker from Family Services.

Planning for your life beyond your school years can be a challenging and exciting time. Just remember everyone...your Mom, your Dad, sister, brother, Aunt, Uncle and friends had to plan to move ahead with their dreams and goals after High School. **Now it's your turn!**

As you think about life after school, we'd like to make sure you know about "In the Company of Friends" (ICOF), because if you have a CSW and you are eligible for Community Living disABILITY Services, ICOF is an option available to you. And those same people that you count on to help with your transition planning, might be the people you ask to become part of your ICOF Support Network, if you decide ICOF is for you! That's the beauty of ICOF! It enrolls the people you already trust and count on to help you create a life of your choosing after you finish school and start to make your way in the bigger world!

What is ICOF?

In the Company of Friends (ICOF) is a funding model offered throughout Manitoba to adults who are eligible for Department of Family Services Community Living disABILITY Services.

An individual would choose ICOF if he/she prefers to self-direct and self-manage day to day living with the support of a network of family and friends. This option would be chosen to ensure that design, responsibility and management of daily living is in the hands of the individual...YOU! (with the support of your family and friends...your network!)

People who choose ICOF receive their monthly budgets directly from the Department of Family Services. With this money they hire their own staff, manage their own finances, pay their own bills, and decide where to live, work etc. It is based on the guidelines of the **Vulnerable Person's Act (VPA)** and the principle of **Supported Decision Making**.

A **Support Network**, people chosen by you, is the structure that makes this happen!



Why did other students choose In the Company of Friends?

- ✓ "It's about having control and choice."
- ✓ "The great flexibility within my budget adds much adventure to my life. I have the opportunity to save money and use it in fun, exciting and limitless ways. There are so many financial guidelines to other programs that discourage from the adventure."
- ✓ "I feel more like a citizen rather than a client. I believe it really models people self - directing their lives, making choices, taking risks and learning from these experiences."

What is a Support Network?

- A **Support Network** is a group of people who you choose to be part of your In the Company of Friends process. They may be family members or friends who intentionally come together to celebrate your gifts and talents, enjoy a great relationship with you and each other, and when needed, agree to assist you to self - manage day to day living tasks – in the company of your friends! Your Support Network will help you to make choices and encourage you to be responsible for the choices you will make! They offer you advice and support - rather than making choices for you.
- You choose who will be on your Support Network. It's an important decision because you are choosing the people you want to turn to for help, advice and support.
- When you and your Support Network work together everyone will feel good about the things that happen for you! You will feel a sense of control over your life. Your Support Network will feel prepared to help you! You will grow to depend on one another.

Thoughts about how your Support Network might look?

Who are the family members that you think would be able to help you by being on your network? _____

Who are the friends that you could ask? _____

Are there any teachers or past EAs that you trust and could look to for support? _____

What about neighbours, co-workers, or people you've met through volunteering?

Why would you need a Support Network?

Your Support Network is the structure that is in place to help you self – manage your day to day life in the company of friends. They provide a connection for **Supported Decision Making**.

- Your Support Network is in place to assist with decisions and other processes if needed.
- The members will help you with tasks such as hiring your staff, paying your bills, and keeping track of your money.
- Not only will these people help you, they will keep you safe. You are safest in the world when you are surrounded by people who care about you.

What would your Support Network look like?

We all have Support Networks, circles and groups of people that we each turn to for advice and suggestions about things we want to do. People we trust for guidance and help, when things come up that we're just not sure about. People we count on and who count on us!

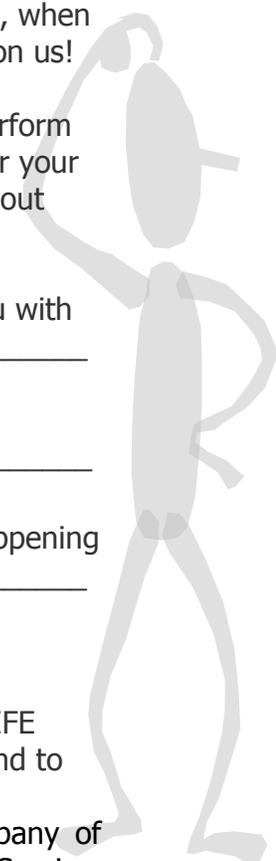
An ICOF Support Network provides important relationships and ideas. They also perform **functional** roles that help you to be successful, such as helping with your staffing or your finances. When you think about people who could be part of your network, think about those roles, and you might come up with other ideas about who you could ask.

Is there someone you know who is really good at financial things that could help you with your own finances and banking? _____

Who do you know that is really good at hiring and working with staff?

What about the fun stuff!? Is there someone you know who really knows what's happening in your community, and helps to connect you to those things? _____

These are just a few ideas to think about when thinking about your own network. However, network development isn't something you have to do alone. Innovative LIFE Options Coordinators are available to help you think about these things and more, and to help you to reach out to the people to have join your network. The following chart outlines your new responsibilities if you choose In the Company of Friends, while highlighting the difference between In the Company of Friends and a Service.



Service Model	In the Company of Friends
Agencies have an Executive Director who manages day to day operations.	You, along with your Support Network manage things. We call this self - directed support.
An agency is responsible for hiring and overseeing staff.	You, along with your Support Network hire and guide your staff.
Agency Staff report and are supervised by the Executive Director.	Staff report and are supervised by you and your Support Network. You become the employer.
Housing is typically at a predetermined location.	You choose where you would like to live - anywhere in Manitoba - urban or rural communities - a house or an apartment.
Individuals receive Employment and Income Assistance.	You are no longer on Employment and Income Assistance... funding is received through ICOF.
Individuals have a medical benefits card through Employment and Income Assistance to cover dental, optical, and medication costs.	You purchase a health plan that suits your needs... just like everybody else!
Agencies are required to meet regulations through Residential Care Licensing, including restrictions on the location of your home.	You are not bound by licensing requirements.
Agencies typically focus on the importance of friendships and community connections. A Support Network is optional.	Friendships, relationship development and community connections are a critical and intentional part of the design of ICOF. Support Networks are not optional - they are essential!
An agency is responsible for hiring and overseeing staff.	You, along with your Support Network hire and manage your staff. We call this self - directed support.

ICOF ESSENTIALS!

You will need to build a Support Network!

- ✓ Will you **promise** to make a commitment to maintaining, building, and creating a Support Network?
- ✓ Will you **trust** others to help you with your decisions?
- ✓ Will you **accept** the opinions and advice of others?

Q - How might you do this?

You will be making many choices and decisions!

- ✓ Will you be open to ideas, input and guidance from other people?
- ✓ Will you ask for help when you need help?

Q - How do you do this now?

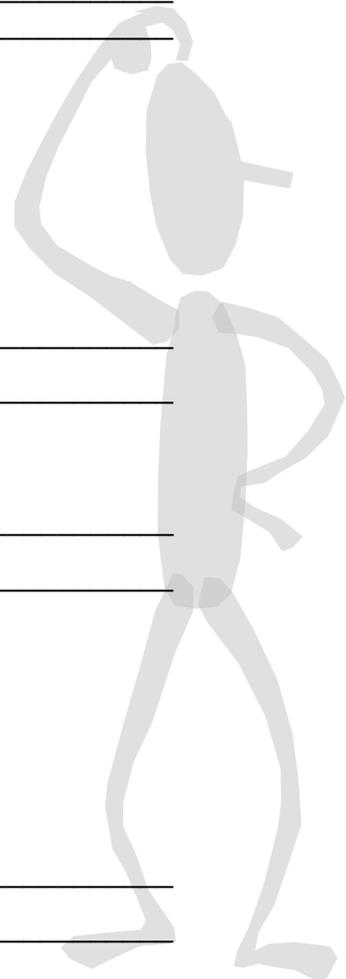
Q - Would this look different in the future?

You will have responsibilities!

- ✓ Will you learn to manage your money?
- ✓ Will you learn how to budget?

Q - What responsibilities do you have now?

Q - What responsibilities do you expect if you choose ICOF?



Together, begin talking about the future!

Did you know.....planning for your future is a 5-7 year journey of talking, meeting and making decisions that is driven by you and your family? Get ready! The sooner you start thinking about your future, the better prepared everyone can be when the time comes! That includes your school, so they can help you learn the skills you are going to need to be successful in your life after school, and Family Services so that they'll know what you want and what it will take to help you achieve it!

There is really good information about important age timelines in the Manitoba Department of Education transition booklet called. ***"Bridging to Adulthood: A Protocol for Transitioning Students with Exceptional Needs from School to Community"*** starting on page 10. But always keep in mind, planning should begin by **age 16!** If you want to start talking about transition planning earlier, that's even better...so let you family and teachers know! For a copy go to:
<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/policy/transition/index.html>



How will your teachers help?

Your teachers/school will help you and your family to take the first steps. Your High School can help you create your **transition plan** which will help you develop the skills, pursue interests and overcome any obstacles, but you need to tell them what you want! You might ask other people to be involved.

Your Teachers/Schools will plan an annual planning meeting with you and your family. You might know that planning as a 'PATH'. Remember, if it gets forgotten you have the right to ask that one be done so that everyone knows what your hopes and dreams are as you move into your adult years.

Your teachers will also give you information about adult options and the transition planning process - this is their job in helping you create the life you want! "In the Company of Friends" is one of the adult opportunities you and your family may choose to explore.

How can your family and friends help?

Your family and friends can have the job of making sure that the plans you make reflect your interests and values. They can help you by:

- Attending meetings with you at your school to talk about your life after you graduate.
- Ask questions about the planning process.
- Share with other people what they know about you...your abilities, your strengths, your interests and the things that may challenge you!
- Offer their opinions and help you with making decisions (this is what's called Supported Decision Making), and ensure you are involved in the decisions that are being made.
- Encourage you to stay focused and take part in your meetings.
- Help you make your goals happen.
- Help you carry out the responsibilities assigned to you as part of your transition plan.

What will you do?

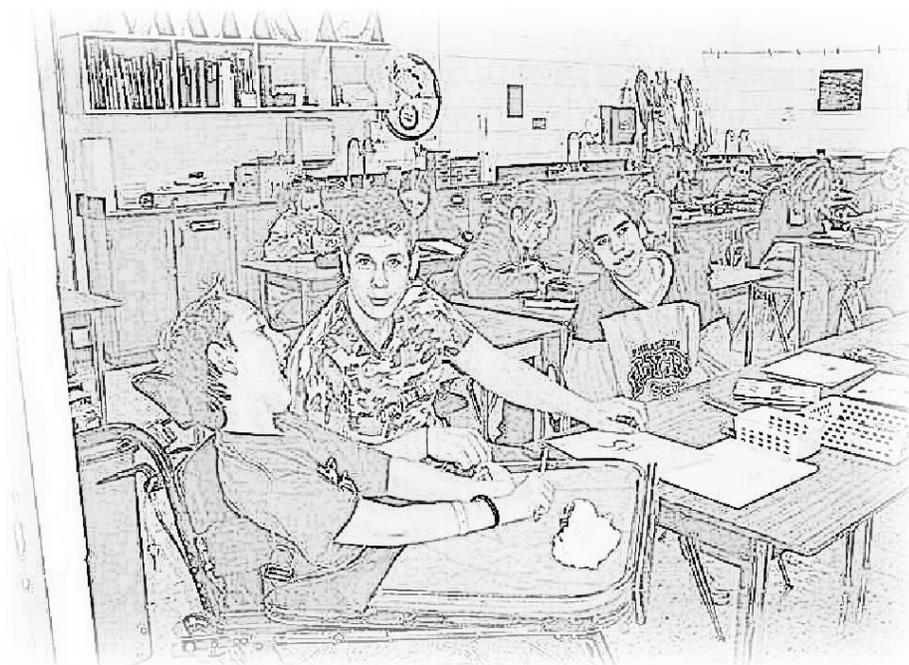
- Attend meetings at your school to talk about your life after you graduate - your family and friends will be there for you!
- Ask questions about the planning process.
- Talk about the things you like, where you would like to live and work, your interests, your hobbies, your dreams and the things that may challenge you. People will be asking you lots of questions!
- Be involved in all decisions being made...that's part of how we learn to make decisions for ourselves! Tell people what you think.
- Do your part to make your goals happen.
- Carry out the responsibilities assigned to you as part of your transition plan.
- Learn more about making decisions, choices, and responsibilities.
- Learn about adult options.



How could ICOF be involved?

If you would like to learn more about In the Company of Friends (ICOF) we're here to help you! Taking the time to learn about the type of support available to you after graduation is key part of your transition planning. ICOF will offer you booklets and We know this will be a big decision so, working through the booklets with someone you trust, your family, a friend or your teacher will help you. You will be challenged you to think about:

- Building friendships
- Staying connected with your family
- Making choices and decisions (how do you do this?)
- Accepting opinions and advice from others
- Responsibility
- Managing your own life with the help of people who care about you



For the student:

- Do you want t to be **part of** the things that affect you every day?
- Do you want the opportunity to **learn** how to self - manage?
- Do you want to have more **choices**?
- Do you want your choices **heard** and respected?
- Do you want to **focus** on the things you do well?
- Do you want to **share** with others - "This is who I am"?
- Do you want the people you **trust** and **care** about to help you with your decisions?
- Do you **accept** the opinions and advice of others?
- Do you want to **hire** your staff?
- Do you want more **people** in your life?

THOUGHTS?

Thoughts for Family!

Whether you are familiar with services or exploring options for the first time, take a minute and focus on what is important to your son/daughter. . .How might you maximize his/her choice, voice, and desire to lead a full and meaningful life? How might you provide support to deepen relationships and assist him/her to be a contributing member of the community? Are these things important? If so, explore this unique funding model - In the Company of Friends (ICOF)!

Why did other families help their son/daughter choose In the Company of Friends?

- ✓ “As a parent I want to still be involved in my son's life and I think his SN, who all care about him, can help him make the best choices. I think having that Support Network formally in place adds an extra level of comfort to all.”

- ✓ “Other choices are not acceptable because for the most part the participant seems to have to fit their program and they are not really providing for individual needs.”

For the family:

- Are you and your son/daughter open to ideas, input and guidance from people other than yourselves?
- Are you open to the ideas and opinions of others, specifically people your son/daughter deems as important enough to include in his/her ICOF Support Network?
- Are you prepared to strengthen and develop the relationships your son/daughter will need to be successful within ICOF?
- Is there a commitment to maintaining, building, and creating a Support Network?

How to get started?

Here are some initial things you can do:

- ❖ **Talk to your son/daughter** and discuss the ICOF option. Before you can even begin this journey it is important that he/she is informed, interested and willing to proceed.
- ❖ Discuss the ICOF option with your son/daughter's teacher or school Resource Person.
- ❖ **Call Innovative LIFE Options Inc (LIFE)** if there is interest in learning more; they will provide you with additional information about ICOF. Request a meeting to learn more!
- ❖ Bring several families together and talk about your fears, dreams and plans.

Final Thoughts!

The first step to a good decision is gathering information. We hope that reading this book has helped you take a few steps towards making a decision about In the Company of Friends.

- ✓ Talk to people, discuss the ICOF option.
- ✓ Learn how LIFE can help you.
- ✓ Take some time to think about all that you have learned.
- ✓ Talk with your classmates; they may be making a choice about their future also - help each other.

After taking these steps you can make an informed choice! Often choices take time, especially big choices and decisions. It's important to understand all sides before making a decision to ensure that decision is the BEST one for you! We know choosing ICOF is a big decision! **Good Luck!**

Would you like to learn more about In the Company of Friends?

If you are interested in learning more about ICOF, contact Innovative LIFE Options. We'd be happy to meet with you and explain more about the opportunities awaiting you In the Company of Friends!

Where to find us?

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Other Publications:

An Introduction to LIFE
LIFE and the CSW! A Unique Partnership
ICOF Entrance Process and First Steps!
ICOF Guidebook - Tips For the Individual and Support Network
ICOF Protection Book: A Guide to Reporting Abuse and Neglect
ICOF Support Network Planning
What Every Family, Friend and Community Member Should Know!
What You Should Know! - A Guide for the Individual

For information on Manitoba's Vulnerable Person's Act go to
<http://www.aclmb.ca/justice.htm>

“The future is always beginning now.”

-Mark Strand

www.innovativelifeoptions.ca

Revised August 2013