

# Microboards™, Social Capital and Quality Of Life

Plain Language Executive Summary  
of a Two Year Research Project

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CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR INCLUSION AND CITIZENSHIP  
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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# Definitions



## MICROBOARDS™

Vela Canada describes a Microboard™ as a small group of dedicated friends and family who “join together with the individual to create a non-profit society.” This non-profit society supports one person with an intellectual and developmental disability.

Microboards™ were created to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities use the money provided by government to purchase the supports they need by using individualized funding.

The purpose of a Microboard is to help an individual plan their life, brainstorm ideas, advocate for what they need, monitor services, and connect the individual to their wider community.

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## SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social Capital is what we call all the people, connections and networks we have in our lives that we trust and that can help us when we need it.

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## QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of Life means how much we feel satisfied in our life. How much do we feel satisfied with the things we do, the people we know, the chance to do the things we want to do and to be the person we want to be. When we think about quality of life we think about our general well-being, health, safety, stability and self-determination.

When we think about social capital, quality of life is about the people we know and places we go that help to make our lives better and make us feel better about our life.

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# About the Study



## Why we did this study and what did we want to know?

Some people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have trouble making friends, developing relationships and becoming involved in their communities. This can mean that they have limited social capital—or limited connections and networks of people that they trust and who can help them.

Some other research tells us that the more connections a person has, the greater Quality of Life they will have. So, if a person has a lot of other people they trust in their life, they probably have a better life than people who don't have many people they trust and care about them in their life.

We wanted to know how Microboards™ might help to connect people to their communities and increase social capital and quality of life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



## What we did.

Researchers interviewed people involved with a Microboard. The people were members of the microboard or the person who had the microboard. The researchers asked everyone the same questions using an interview guide. An interview guide is a set of questions we wanted to ask. Because this research study involved talking with people, the researchers had to get permission from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board. This board monitors all UBC research involving people to make sure certain rules like getting consent and keeping the people's information confidential, are followed.

## How we did it.

Vela Canada sent information about the project to 212 people involved with Microboards and asked people to volunteer to be interviewed. 31 people initially reached out to learn more about the study and 21 people agreed to be interviewed to share their stories. Researchers shared information about the reasons for doing the study and told people that all the information they shared during the interview would be confidential and that their names would not be used in the report. People who agreed to be interviewed gave their informed consent by signing a consent form.

Researchers interviewed people by meeting with them in person or over the telephone. The interviews were recorded and then the recording was written out in words. The researchers looked at all of the interviews together and looked for the same kinds of things people were saying. When the same types of things were said by different people, these things were grouped into themes. The researchers used the themes to describe how Microboards work instead of just reporting on what one person said.

**Who was involved.**  
(Demographics—Information about the people who were interviewed.)

13 Microboards were represented, with a total of 21 people over the age of 18 from different regions in BC interviewed by a researcher.

Everyone interviewed was involved in a Microboard in some way. 3 people had an intellectual or developmental disability, 15 people were Microboard members, 2 were paid staff, and 1 was a community member.

**Table 1: Demographic Results**  
(Information about the people who were interviewed)

Participant Demographics	Group	Total
Participant Category	Parent and Board Member	12
	Board Member only	3
	Self-Advocate	3
	Staff	2
	Community Member	1
Age Range of Person with IDD	20-30	2
	31-40	3
	41-50	3
	51-60	2
	Unknown/not shared	3
Geographical Region	Vancouver Mainland	7
	Vancouver Island	2
	Interior BC	2
	Okanagan	1
	Northern BC	1
Length of MB in Years	1-10	3
	11-20	6
	20+	3
	Unknown/not shared	1

Results.  
What did we learn?



We thought that participants would say that having a Microboard helps build the social capital of the person with an intellectual or developmental disability, but they did not exactly say that.

Instead, an overall finding of the study is that Microboards act as a “platform” or “vehicle” to increase social capital and quality of life for the person with the disability. This is what some people said:

“ Our Microboard is the vehicle that we were able to actually have a program and have the funding to pay [our support] people. ”

“ The Microboard is in the background making sure she is happy enough and keep sending money. ”

“ We use our Microboard as our sounding board right now—asking for advice, asking for help if we needed...It’s a safety net is what it is. ”

There were two major themes, or groups of ideas, that people told us about how Microboards helped them. The 2 themes are **Quality of Life** and **Social Capital**.

People told us that there are 4 characteristics microboards have that help grow and improve an individual's Quality of Life and Social Capital. These 4 characteristics are: Autonomous (not part of other organizations or groups), Person-Centered (always focus on the person at the centre of the Microboard and what they want and need), Empowering (making them feel like they can do and be what they want), and Interconnected (being part of the group and everyone being connected to each other). See Figure 1 below.

This is how one person described what it's like to have a Microboard:

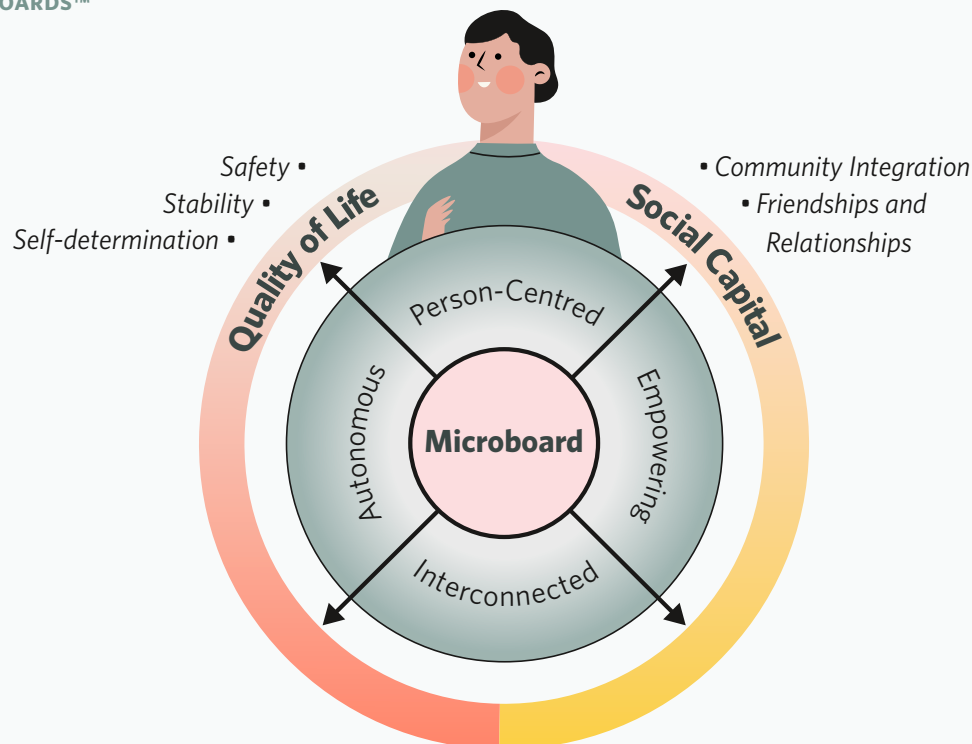
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*Having the Microboard just makes it really flexible for somebody with such high complex needs to not just exist, but to truly live. And without the Microboard, [he] wouldn't have the unique, rich life that he does have.*

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FIGURE 1.

**THEMES & CHARACTERISTICS  
OF MICROBOARDS™**



### THEME 1

## Quality of Life

Many participants spoke about increases in general well-being, health, safety, stability and self-determination of the individuals supported by the Microboard.

### THEME 2

## Social Capital

Participants said that they saw or experienced an increase in social capital of the person being supported. They said people were included more in their community and had more friendships and relationships (including personal and professional).

Many participants said that this increase was not because of the Microboard itself, but instead was because of the front-line staff that were hired by the Microboard to support the person with the disability. Many participants noted that the ability to choose, hire, and manage these employees created an opportunity to hire people who felt like the best fit to support the person with the disability in a positive way.

*His worker is flexible so if there's a good play production going on, then she will take him to plays in the evening and adjust her work hours. [...] That really helps him to participate in the community.*

**CHARACTERISTIC 1 — AUTONOMOUS.** *Autonomous means independent or self-directed. Not part of other organizations or groups.*

Participants noted that Microboards are autonomous—or independent—meaning that the person with the disability can be flexible and have more control over

things such as budgeting and handling money, creating their own programs and services, hiring staff, choosing where to live and being able to take their funding and programs wherever they go.

**CHARACTERISTIC 2 — PERSON-CENTERED.** *Person Centered means always focusing on the person at the centre of the Microboard and what they want and need.*

Participants spoke about Microboards as being person-centered. This means that decisions are made to meet the needs or goals of the individual with the disability who has the microboard. Everyone who was interviewed said the person with the disability was included in decision-making about things like where they live, what kinds of activities they want to do and how they wanted to be included in the community.

**CHARACTERISTIC 3 — EMPOWERING.** *Empowering means to give power to. Making the person feel like they can do and be what they want.*

Participants reported that because members of the Microboard cared about the person who has the microboard and supports their vision and goals, the microboard helped to empower the individual.

People who were interviewed said that board members support individuals in overcoming obstacles to get closer to their visions and goals. Also, board members take on the challenge of looking for opportunities for individuals so they can flourish in their communities (i.e., find and build relationships and friendships, find a job, advocate for more inclusion in their community, develop life skills) and develop a sense of pride in their own achievements. Microboards™ help find ways and opportunities to promote self-awareness and self-determination, and to maximize an individual's potential for independence.

**CHARACTERISTIC 4 — INTERCONNECTED.** *Interconnected means being part of the group and everyone being connected to each other.*

Participants said that having many board members allowed for a variety of values, connections, experiences, expertise, and perspectives to influence the decision-making process. Also, board members often acted as a source of support, including supporting the person directly and providing support in other ways like using their own networks to connect the individual to the larger community in different ways.

The many different roles Microboards have (planning support, funding administration, human resource management, decision making support, active participation and relationships, support coordination) creates a special blend of jobs. If a person does not have a microboard then they might need staff from different agencies to do the same types of jobs the people on Microboards do. Or the person with the disability might not get any support at all.

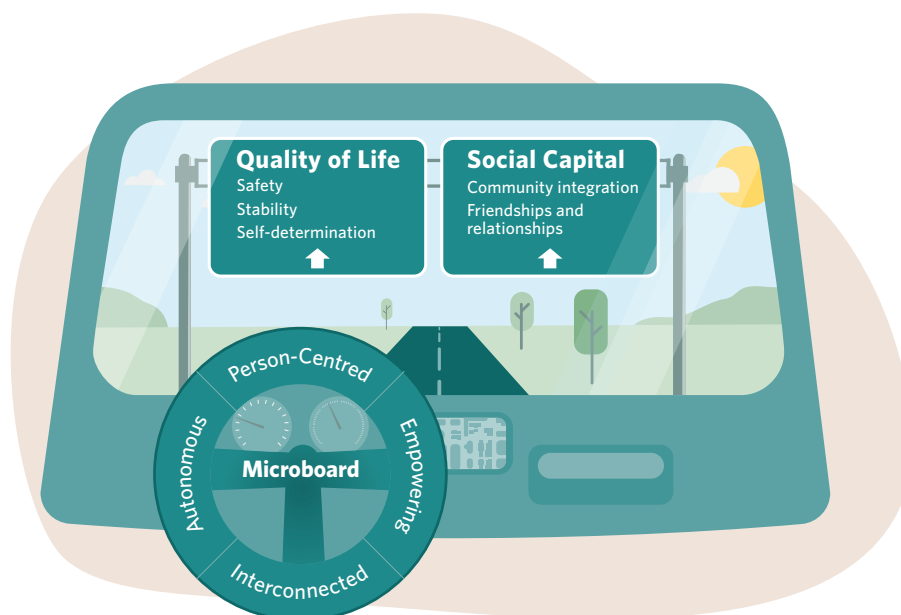
This study shows how social capital helps increase people's quality of life outcomes like self-determination, empowerment, intimacy, personal fulfillment etc.

Microboards use social capital two different ways. First, it uses the social capital of microboard members (their networks and connections) to support the person with the disability to build more connections for themselves. Second, because the person with the disability who has a microboard has improved quality of life, they increase their own social capital.

Because of how Microboards are put together they provide supports like finance administration and management of supports so paid staff don't have to do these things.

Since microboard members have their own social capital, this could mean that they replace the need for the person with the disability to have help from paid staff or organizations and they are more natural supports.

It can be hard for some Microboards to keep working and sometimes the mother of the person with the disability does too much of the work.



Microboards™ serve as a “vehicle” supporting an individual, contributing to increases in both social capital and quality of life.

## Discussion

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When Microboards™ work well, money might be saved because the person with the disability has a better quality of life and more social connections so they might not need paid staff or other help from organizations.

## Recommendations

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The results of this project highlight several areas where changes might improve outcomes for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A number of recommendations are presented for Microboards, for community organizations that provide funding or management of Microboards at an administrative level, and for future research in this area. Please see the full report by visiting the Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship website.





# Conclusion

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It is clear that Microboards™ have a lot of potential for improving the Quality of Life of the person at the centre of the Microboard.

Microboards are another way a person can be supported instead of living in a group home or other model of support and Microboards are better at using social capital (people's connections) than services that use mostly paid staff.

The main characteristics of Microboards identified in this study—autonomous, person-centered, empowering, and interconnected—contribute directly to both social capital outcomes of friendships and relations and community inclusion as well as the Quality of Life outcomes of safety, stability and self-determination.

There is more information to learn about social capital and there is a need for another study that compares Microboards to other kinds of supports. Also, a larger more detailed study would help us to understand how age, location (rural/urban), gender, complexity of disability, whether the person is Indigenous, and race influence the impact of Microboards.



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