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Series note: Karis Disability Services is clear about its role as a service provider – but we strive for these services to be experienced in specific ways. This Reflection is part of a series covering our Service Principles, the third of which is, “We seek to value people’s gifts.”

“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:11, NLT)

Every so often we have the opportunity for further equipping in our roles. On May 10th, since part of my role is to connect with churches, I joined the [A Deeper Communion](#) conference on disability ministry and theology. Little did I know that joining the conference would help me bring so much encouragement to people in how they share their gifts!

The New Revolution Choir was a chance for people with developmental disabilities to come together and make music. It ran for fifteen years up until 2020, when it discontinued due to COVID-19. The choir sang at everything from small, meaningful events like a funeral for someone supported to big events like performing at televised gospel award shows and singing the national anthem at a Toronto Marlies hockey game. All volunteers, they reached tens of thousands of people with their music!

Nicole and Ken Michell supported the choir. Nicole was a Program Manager with what was then Christian Horizons, and Ken is an Assistant Professor of Music and Worship Arts at Tyndale University College in Toronto. Just over 12 years ago, as a labour of love, they recorded a CD with the choir. They made 1000 copies. You can even check out the promotional video [here!](#) Unfortunately, they only sold about 10% of the CD's. It was disappointing after having poured so much time and energy into the project. About six years ago, Christian Horizons donated a copy of the CD to everyone who attended family camp.

Fast forward to *A Deeper Communion* conference this year. In one workshop, I listened to a mother how her daughter Elizabeth had received this album at family camp! Elizabeth is an adult with disabilities. She likes CD's because she's able to play them for herself. In fact, Elizabeth *only* listened to that one CD of the New Revolution Choir for many months after camp! She discovered a love for worship music through the album – so much so that, during COVID, they contacted us for more music. I sent them CD's and Christian music videos, which have brought much joy during an otherwise difficult time.

It was meaningful for me to connect with Nicole and Ken following this workshop to let them know how that one CD – a project of love that didn't seem to be a success – had changed the lives of this mother and her daughter. Nicole wrote back, saying “What a blessing how God uses something through our small part to touch lives. That was truly a labour of love. Thank you truly for the encouragement of sharing this.”

We Seek to Value People's Gifts

In our third Service Principle, "We Seek to Value People's Gifts," we say that "we believe every person has gifts to share." This isn't just saying something nice, like handing out participation trophies to everyone who enters a competition. We truly believe that *everybody* has gifts. The challenge is often recognizing gifts and abilities that seem a little different from the norm. Our Service Principle goes on to say that people with disabilities are at risk of "not having their gifts recognized, valued, and celebrated." The New Revolution Choir CD did not win any major recording artist awards. Neither did it sell out – quite the contrary. Sometimes, though, all it takes is for one person to truly appreciate someone's gifts for that person to feel valued and celebrated. The choir shared their gifts of enthusiasm and music. Nicole and Ken shared their time, expertise, and care. Then, the mother and daughter shared their gift of encouragement, letting many others know how much the album meant to them.

A couple of things are needed to value and celebrate people's gifts, like we talk about in this service principle, our core value of "celebrating gifts," and in our 2024 theme:

1. We need to receive *everybody's* gifts! We each have a part to play in helping people to discover and share their gifts with others. We also have gifts, talents, and abilities to share with the world around us. Never forget that you *have gifts* and *are a gift* to those close to you and your extended community.
2. *Celebrate!* We value people's gifts in many ways. Maybe it's by fully enjoying and appreciating someone's gifts as they share. Maybe it's by letting someone know that their contribution made a difference!

It was wonderful to be able to tell Nicole and Ken how much the New Revolution Choir meant to others, and about the ripple effects it continues to have. Let's continue to encourage one another and build each other up, just as we have already been doing!

Making the Connection

- Share about a time you were encouraged in your gifts – particularly if these gifts were unique / seemed a little different from the norm. How did people "celebrate" you?
- Who could you encourage today? Maybe this is a co-worker, your supervisor, someone who uses Karis services, a family member or friend. Pick someone to encourage or let them all know how much you appreciate them!