



## Advocacy in Action: Moving from Gaps to Solutions

Adam Richards

Over the past few years, we've seen growing strain in the systems meant to support our most vulnerable neighbours. Access to long-term care remains limited. Clients leaving second stage housing face significant barriers finding stable, permanent homes. Brain injury survivors often struggle to access the coordinated, wraparound supports they need to thrive. These aren't isolated issues, they point to broader systemic challenges. Too often, services operate in silos, each with limited resources and competing pressures. The result is that people with the most complex needs can sometimes fall through the cracks. We find ourselves bridging widening gaps, stretching our teams to meet needs that exceed what any one agency can sustainably provide.

And yet, we offer something incredibly valuable: decades of experience.

Our programs have served this community for generations. Our leaders and frontline teams understand where systems function well and where they fall short. With that insight comes responsibility. We have a role to play in shaping better solutions.

At The Cridge Centre for the Family, advocacy means moving quickly from identifying problems to recommending practical, collaborative change. We engage government, partners, and sector colleagues to help strengthen systems so they truly work for the people who rely on them. In this issue, you'll read about how we're using our voice to promote meaningful solutions and pursue change where we can. For us, advocacy isn't about criticism, it's about stewardship, collaboration, and ultimately, better outcomes for the clients we serve.



Learning through play and positive experiences.

## Helping Children Find Their Voice

Christine Wosilius

At The Cridge Children's Services, we are often privileged to be with children from their infancy through the toddler years and into elementary school, as many continue with us as they enter out-of-school care. We delight in watching children grow, and we take their development seriously at every age and stage.

A central focus of our work is supporting children in discovering and valuing their own strengths. Our team nurtures each child's self-worth so they can move through the world with confidence. We aim to equip children to care for their own well-being while becoming respectful members of their community. We do this by teaching children to develop agency, the ability to make choices and have a say in things that affect them. Practicing agency helps children recognize their abilities and value themselves, which builds self-respect.

With self-respect as a foundation, children gain the confidence to actively advocate for themselves. Together, these skills create a positive cycle: exercising agency builds self-respect, and self-respect empowers children to speak up and act with confidence.

Self-advocacy is especially important for teaching consent and building healthy relationships. When children can express their needs and respect their own limits, they are better able to ask for permission, say "no" when something doesn't feel right, and honour the choices of others. How this looks depends on a child's age: for infants, it might mean telling them you're about to wash their face rather than surprising them; for toddlers, asking if they want help with their shoes; and for older children, allowing them to decline a hug, even from a loved family member.

Teaching children to advocate for themselves helps them grow into confident, caring individuals who respect themselves, others, and the world around them.

# Advocating for Your Child: Turning Love into Action

Linda Pityn and Heather Stevens

When raising a child with support needs, parents quickly learn something powerful - love is not always enough. Love must become action. It must become research. It must become persistence. And sometimes, it must become advocacy.

The Cridge R & R Family Services understand that, while advocating for a child can feel overwhelming, parents are not powerless. They are their child's most consistent voice, and when informed and prepared, they can be their most effective advocate. We support parents to navigate the complex systems, confusing policies, and government decisions that affect their child's daily life.

Through one-on-one meetings, regular "Lunch and Learn" sessions, and a monthly newsletter, The Cridge R & R Family Services helps to equip parents to be advocates. Some of our key areas of focus are:

## 1) Understanding programs, funding, and support services available to their child and their family

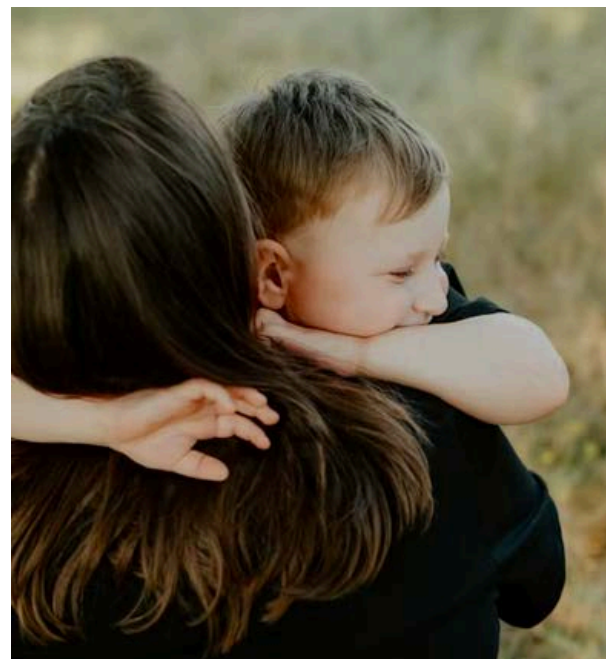
One of the most empowering things a parent can do is become informed. Resources may include early intervention programs, school-based supports, government funding or tax credits, therapies, and family counselling services. If something hasn't been mentioned, it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Asking questions and seeking guidance can uncover valuable supports.

## 2) Navigating school systems and knowing when and how to escalate concerns

Few moments feel more destabilizing for a parent than being told your child can only attend school for limited days or reduced hours. When this happens, parents have the right to ask important questions, and to know where to turn within the system when initial responses do not address their concerns.

## 3) Choosing the right advocacy approach includes knowing when to stay calm and factual, and when emotion has a place

Advocacy does not mean being adversarial. Calm, focused advocacy conveys knowledge and confidence, and positions parents as informed and collaborative partners. We help parents to be informed, prepared, and focused on their belief that their child deserves equitable access, dignity, and opportunity.



Every act of advocacy is an expression of love and support.

# Working Together to Effect Systems Change

Andrea Zeelie-Varga

The Cridge Centre for the Family has been working with women escaping violence and brain injury survivors for over 35 years. In 1991, we opened The Cridge Transition House for Women to support women leaving unsafe situations, as well as MacDonal House, a residential home for survivors of brain injury.

Through serving women fleeing violence and individuals with acquired brain injury, we began to draw important connections between these two populations. There is a significant group of women who are both fleeing violence and living with a brain injury sustained before they were able to secure safety, and this intersection has shaped our work in Intimate Partner Violence and Brain Injury (IPV-BI).

We have decades of experience providing specialized support to people navigating complex circumstances and rebuilding their lives. This experience means we understand how to best support our clients. But it also means we recognize the ongoing challenges they face as they work toward safety, stability, and independence.

When it comes to keeping women safe, this experience has enabled us to be effective in helping women rebuild their lives through the provision of affordable childcare and safe housing, while providing support navigating financial, legal, and social supports. For brain injury survivors, we provide support along a continuum from supported living to community reintegration with employment or community involvement.

At the same time, we have seen firsthand the barriers that persist. Sometimes, challenges can be addressed with persistence and financial resources. Others feel nearly impossible to overcome, regardless of collaboration or creativity, because there are structural gaps and service shortages that even the most innovative efforts cannot bridge.

For this reason, our work extends beyond direct service. In partnership with other service providers, researchers, advocates, and survivors themselves, we are advancing collaborative advocacy efforts to drive system change for women fleeing violence, for brain injury survivors, and for women living at the intersection of both. Together, we are calling for more coordinated responses and policies that better reflect the complex realities survivors face.

Just as we want systems to work together more effectively for the people we serve, we have been intentional about building strong partnerships that strengthen coordination, reduce gaps, and improve outcomes for survivors. Read on for updates on what we are doing to support our clients.

## Women Fleeing Violence

We have met with Members of the Legislative Assembly to urge the provincial government to work with justice partners and community organizations to strengthen enforcement, mandate IPV and lethality training, close inter-system gaps, and align housing, income, and childcare policies with the realities of safety and recovery. We are in ongoing dialogue with Honourable Nina Krieger, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General; the Honourable Diana Gibson, Minister of Citizens' Services, and the Honourable Grace Lore.

In response to a recent local tragedy, The Cridge Women's Services, together with other women's services and anti-violence organizations, convened a gathering and press conference to highlight the urgent need for action to prevent further loss of life. We are grateful to work in partnership with Battered Women's Support Services, Victoria Women's Transition House, Cowichan Women Against Violence Society, Sooke Transition House, Bridges for Women, Inter-cultural Association of Greater Victoria, and others to advance specific recommendations. These include the implementation of consistent and mandatory intimate partner violence risk assessments that trigger intervention when high risk is identified; meaningful enforcement and monitoring of protection orders and release conditions; coordinated provincial leadership to align responses across police services and ministries; sustained investment in frontline anti-violence services as essential public safety resources; and prevention efforts that occur proactively, rather than in the aftermath of tragedy.

A copy of our open letter, published in the *Times Colonist* on International Women's Day, is available on the following page.

### **Survivors of Brain Injury**

The Cridge Brain Injury Services was a community partner in the BC Consensus on Brain Injury Participatory Action Research Project, an initiative of the CGB Centre with research undertaken by University of Victoria's Cortex Lab, the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at the University of British Columbia. Together we helped generate knowledge and data to shape priorities to better serve people experiencing the intersections of brain injury, mental health, and addictions in British Columbia.

Tori Dach, Manager of The Cridge Brain Injury Services, is a member of the delegation advocating for passage of Bill C-206, the National Strategy on Brain Injury act. A national strategy would ensure that prevention, rehabilitation, and lifelong support receive the targeted attention they require to ensure survivors have access to care, proper diagnosis, long-term rehabilitation, and community integration.



Left to right: Amanda McFarlane (BrainTrust Canada), Barb Butler (brain injury survivor), Tori Dach (The Cridge Centre), Ali P (BC Brain Injury Association), Maggie Spizzirri (Brain Injury Alliance), Janelle Breese-Biagioni (BC Brain Injury Association), Linda Sankey (South Okanagan Similkameen Brain Injury Association), Helena Konanz (MP, Similkameen-South Okanagan-West Kootney), Michelle McDonald (Brain Injury Canada), Karen Mason, (SOAR), Rita Forest (BC Brain Injury Association)

### **Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence and Brain Injury**

The Cridge Centre for the Family has partnered with the CGB Centre and Saanich Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit to host 'Shattering the Silence' to promote coordinated action in addressing IPV-BI. The intent was to build capacity for an informed, survivor-centered response to brain injury in the context of intimate partner violence. Together, partners and participants developed calls to action for individuals, organizations, and policy makers. Read our event report online at [cridge.org/sts](http://cridge.org/sts).

# Women's safety *is* public safety.

**Intimate partner violence impacts everyone. It crosses every boundary - age, income, culture, and community. It is not “someone else’s” issue. It could be your mother. Your sister. Your daughter. Your friend. It could be you.**

Women must be believed when they say they are afraid. When a woman says she fears for her safety, this is a critical risk factor that must be taken seriously. She deserves protection that is comprehensive, consistent, monitored, and enforced.

Right now, that protection is not being delivered. Too many women are being failed by the very systems meant to keep them safe: policing, the legal system, and child protection. Instead of being supported, women are too often left to shoulder the responsibility for their own safety and the safety of their children. This expectation is unrealistic at best and lethal at worst.

**We do not lack knowledge about what needs to change. The solutions have been identified repeatedly for decades.**

Most recently, our provincial government has highlighted three priority recommendations from Dr. Kim Stanton’s 2025 report, recommendations that can and must be acted on immediately:

- Create a new provincial policy framework that directs all legal, child welfare, police, and victim service providers to make women’s safety the top priority.
- Implement risk assessment and safety planning that informs every stage of criminal and family court processes.
- Establish a government mechanism for accountability to ensure recommendations are implemented, timelines are met, and ministries work together rather than in silos.

**Violence against women and femicide are preventable public safety failures.**

We are calling on government to act now. These recommendations are not optional. They are the minimum required to begin addressing the epidemic of violence against women.

We are asking our community to stand with us. Raise your voice. Demand action. **Write, call, or email your MLA and tell them you support immediate implementation of these critical changes.** Women’s lives depend on it.



**“I’m so lucky and grateful for all of you. I can’t begin to express how much it helps and means to me that you believe in me and support me.”**

Client, The Cridge Intimate Partner Violence & Brain Injury Services

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**1307 Hillside Ave, Victoria, BC V8T 0A2**



You can donate with a credit card online at [cridge.org/donate](https://cridge.org/donate) or call our donor specialist Sharon at 250-995-6427.

Your information is never sold or exchanged with any organization. You will receive an official annual receipt for income tax purposes. The Cridge Centre for the Family is certified by the Canadian Council of Christian Charities and is accredited by the Imagine Canada Standards program.



## Chef's Corner: Borscht

### Seasoning Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon dill
- 1/4 teaspoon oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 tablespoon salt

### Soup Ingredients

- 2 cups beets, peeled (half diced, half grated)
- 500 ml canned red beets, pureed
- 1/2 cup carrots (half diced, half grated)
- 1/4 cup onion, diced
- 1/4 cup celery, diced
- 1/4 cup potato, diced
- 1 1/2 cups green cabbage, shredded
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 cup fresh spinach
- 3 cups vegetable broth
- 3/4 cup canned diced tomatoes
- 1/2 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 tablespoon white vinegar

### Garnish Ingredients

- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1/2 tablespoon white vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh dill

### Directions

- Heat olive oil over medium heat. Sauté onion until soft. Add diced carrots, celery, beets, potato, and garlic. Cook 5 minutes.
- Stir in tomatoes, seasoning, vegetable broth, and cabbage. Reduce heat and simmer gently for 30 minutes.
- Add pureed beets, grated beets and carrots, spinach, and vinegar. Simmer 5 minutes more.
- Mix sour cream with dill, and vinegar. Serve with a dollop on top.

We acknowledge with respect that this is the traditional territory of the Ləkʷəŋən - speaking peoples, known today as the Songhees First Nation, Xwsepsem First Nation, as well as the WSÁNEĆ Nations and Sc'ianew First Nation, original caretakers of this land. As they continue walking here gently in the way of their ancestors, we seek to do the same.

We recognize that reconciliation is not only about the past, but about how we live together today. As a Christian faith-based organization, we commit to ongoing learning, listening, and acting in ways that uphold Indigenous self-determination and dignity, and reflect the biblical teachings of peace, justice, and love.



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