

# A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA IN ACTION

## *Representation Agreements and Inclusion Reflections on our visit to British Columbia*

**Hi,** I am Václav Štrunc, from the Non-Government Organization (NGO) Instand of Czech Republic, social worker by education, and working in the area of social services and deinstitutionalization processes in my country.

I had the special opportunity to spend five days in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), and to meet and talk to so many wonderful people there. I was there with my colleagues from Instand, a member of our partner organization League of Human Rights, and officers from the city of Sokolov (public guardian and regional court).

We came to Vancouver absolutely on purpose, to see, study, and learn as much as possible about the unique and matchless system of supported decision making. We read about it before, we translated the

Representation Agreement to Czech and discussed your related law, we tried to find out more about the whole system and organization. But we still had many, many questions. Now, when the visit is finished, we still have questions, but we understand better.

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We saw things we could not imagine to be possible, and that is probably the main message for me personally. We are dreaming here in Czech Republic about the future, where people with disabilities will have their full rights and recognition. We have now seen how these things are possible.

A big part of our visit was mediated and organized with the help of Nidus and Joanne Taylor. To her and staff of Nidus belong our many thanks. We met so many committed and enthusiastic people — social workers, academics, family members, NGO workers — all of them with the same vision and grasp of collective work to back that vision up.



Visitors from the Czech Republic met with Nidus to learn about Representation Agreements. From left: Barbora Rittichova (Lawyer with League of Human Rights), Jaroslava Sykorova (Executive Director Instand), Lenka Benesova (Assigns and monitors guardians through the court), Skyland Kobylak (Interpreter), Irena Cerna (Social Worker with the public guardian), Romana Trutnovska (Instand), Vaclav Strunc (Instand Coordinator).



For me, most empowering was how everyone collaborates on the same vision. I know that it is not easy at all to persuade someone about laws and the needs of people with disabilities. People in BC, especially Nidus, did a great amount of work.

The system in British Columbia — law, Representation Agreement, individualized funding, microboards, support networks,

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and other tools — is being recommended by the United Nations as a system that addresses most statements of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The system is renowned in Czech Republic and I believe also in other countries. Our new civil code was partly inspired by your law and we hope our new law on guardianship and supported decision making will be even more inspired by yours.

I was very much surprised, when in one meeting at the InclusionBC conference that we attended in Vancouver, some people said they do not know about the Representation Agreement and related things.

I would recommend and encourage you to support and nurture what you have achieved and are achieving in BC. I am convinced that there is much more potential in the people and system you have there and that it is going to be better and better.

I wish you good decision making with who and how you will support.

Václav Štrunc



Presenters at the Nidus workshop on Representation Agreements at the InclusionBC Conference held in Vancouver, BC, on May 23, 2013. From Top : Joanne Taylor (Executive Director, Nidus), Cathy Anthony (Representative of Josh Kuntz), Bob Geddes (Self-Advocate), Arlene Shouten (Individual & Family Support, MSA Society), Dwight Grose (Self-Advocate).