Meet Our New Board Chair: Carlos da Ponte

As our new Board Chair, Carlos da Ponte brings a long-standing connection to SelfDesign, along with a practical, forward-looking approach to supporting the SelfDesign community.

Below, Carlos shares a bit about his path to SelfDesign, what he is learning, and the values that guide him.

A long-standing connection to SelfDesign

Carlos: In a lot of ways, SelfDesign feels like something I have been connected to for a long time, even before I knew the organization existed.

Growing up, I was a “world-schooler” before that was even a term people used. From Grade 7 through Grade 10, I studied through the Vancouver Correspondence School while travelling by boat with my family. That experience shaped how I think about learning: it is not one-size-fits-all and should leave room for curiosity, agency, exploration, and real life.

When I first learned about SelfDesign. I remember thinking, how did I not know this existed? The philosophy just made sense to me, and it matched how I believe education should work.

Both of my kids are registered with SelfDesign, and having that connection as both a parent and a board member has made the work feel deeply meaningful.

Learning as board chair

Carlos: I have been on the board for a few years and served as vice-chair, so the role itself does not feel totally unfamiliar.

What I am most looking forward to is learning more about SelfDesign's story. SelfDesign has been around for decades, and that history matters. Understanding where we have come from helps us make better decisions about where we are going.

It is also about understanding people, not just policies or structures. Everyone carries a perspective shaped by their experience with the organization. When we take the time to listen and learn those perspectives, it becomes easier to find a path forward that people can actually support.

How the board approaches its work

Carlos: People join the board at SelfDesign because they care about SelfDesign and the community it serves. The board is here to support the organization's long-term health and to help the leadership team succeed.

A big part of that is making sure people feel heard. There is real value in having clear ways for questions and feedback to move through the organization, so concerns do not disappear into a void. Even when answers take time, it matters that people know their voices are being taken seriously.

At the end of the day, the board's focus has to be the organization as a whole. SelfDesign is composed of many roles and perspectives, and the community's strength depends on staying connected to the bigger picture.

Discovering SelfDesign

Carlos: I am still learning how all the pieces connect, especially in an organization with a long history and a lot of moving parts.

There is a real opportunity to build stronger bridges between teams and roles so we can move more smoothly and respond quickly when something needs to change.

We have to stay focused on what makes SelfDesign a strong choice for learners and families, and we keep evolving in ways that stay true to our mission.

Values that guide decisions

Carlos: is a big one for me. I believe in consistency, too: showing up the same way across situations and doing what you say you will do. Your word matters.

I also think a lot about the ripple effect of decisions. What we do today shapes what becomes possible tomorrow. That is true in leadership, in organizations, and in day-to-day life.

Progress requires a bit of courage and a culture that supports learning, not perfection.

Life outside of board work

Carlos: Family first. Our household is very busy: we work from home, we homeschool, and life tends to happen all at once.

One of my favourite things is the everyday stuff: my kids sitting next to me working through math while I am at my desk, or the small moments that make you realize how quickly kids grow up.

I also love projects. If there is something to build or improve, I will happily dive in and probably spend too long on it. And yes, that includes building Lego.

We are also hoping to get back to travelling more as a family. That sense of exploration has been part of my life for a long time, and I want to keep making space for it.