



## A Brief History of OIFN

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network has grown out of the collective vision of independent facilitators, people who have a developmental disability/self-advocates, and families, who have come together in conversations, for shared learning and mentoring, and to build a principled context for the work of independent facilitation.

There has been a great deal of work done in Ontario over the last two decades to support people to appreciate and to understand the value of ongoing Independent Facilitation in the lives of people living with developmental disabilities, along with their families and/or loved ones. The family and community engagement and policy and advocacy work of the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) has contributed immensely to this broader awareness.

In the late 1990s, IFCO held two large events aimed at bringing together provincial and national leaders and international experts on Individualized Funding. These events acted as a catalyst for people and families to think differently about what they wanted to see happen. As a follow-up to these events, IFCO held a provincial two day “Workfest” event in 2004, which acted as a major impetus for bringing people, families, and independent facilitators together from across the province to reflect on and expand the work.

Throughout OIFN’s history, IFCO’s continued research and jurisdictional reviews taught us about the importance of a citizenship-based model of support – one where people living with disability live full lives as citizens, with valued human rights, directing and making decisions with support. Research demonstrated the role of Individualized Funding in supporting people living with disability to have more choice and control in their lives. Additionally, IFCO-sponsored research in Ontario taught us the importance of infrastructure supports for Individualized Funding, including Independent Facilitation, that need to be ongoing and separate from the direct service system.

**To learn more, see the following reports:**

- [Individualized Funding: A New Vision, ‘Report from the 1998 Symposium’](#)
- [Linking Individualized Supports and Direct Funding: Making Money Work for People – A Pathway to Self-determination and Community Involvement for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Rationale for Independent Planning and Facilitation in Ontario: Why MCSS Should Move Quickly to Implementation](#)
- [Moving Toward Citizenship: A Study of Individualized Funding in Ontario](#)

## A Timeline of OIFN's Evolution

2004	<p><b>IFCO Workfest</b> As an action step, the vision for 'connecting as facilitators' is birthed. A commitment is made to form a working group of facilitators and develop a Terms of Reference.</p>
2004-2005	<p><b>Ad Hoc Working Group</b> A Terms of Reference is developed through a series of teleconferences and meetings.</p>
2005-2006	<p><b>Laying the Ground Work and Gathering Information</b> Three facilitator forums were hosted by the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) to gather information and obtain more clarity about the value of facilitation and what people, families, and independent facilitators deem would be helpful into the future. The importance of developing a Provincial Network and Community of Practice was identified as one of the goals for the future, as was the importance of linking with local facilitation networks that were starting to develop.</p>
2007-2010	<p><b>Moving Forward with a Provincial Network and Regular Forums</b> Beginning in 2007, IFCO hosted three informal gatherings aimed at bringing together people who were actively offering and/or passionate about Independent Facilitation to explore a shared vision and common agenda. Following these events, IFCO took a lead role in obtaining an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant in 2008-2010 for the Modelling Community Change and Innovation Project (MCCI), which focused on using a community development approach to expanding Independent Facilitation options across Ontario. Supported by MCCI, three more forums were held, and the provincial network continued to grow in vision and strength. Partners and volunteers were mobilizing interest across the province and clarifying their role in shaping the practice and defining the values and principles. In 2010, the Network adopted a community of practice approach to organizing itself.</p>
2011-2012	<p><b>Growing, Strengthening, Learning, and Expanding Connections</b> After MCCI project funding ended, volunteers, sponsors, and partners continued their commitment to grow and strengthen the network by holding forums and finding ways to stay connected between events. Although it was used informally since 2009, the name <i>Ontario Independent Facilitation Network</i> was officially adopted in 2011. Learning and sharing continued; energy and excitement grew, as did the need for more volunteer involvement and networking. An invitation was extended to network contacts to join the Ad Hoc Website Committee.</p>
2013	<p><b>Planning for the Future and Expanding Our Reach</b> In early 2013, the development of a website began, with a launch planned for the spring. Priorities and next steps were identified by participants/members who attended two strategic planning days:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand connections and linkages to local and regional groups.</li> <li>• Support the practice of Independent Facilitation provincially.</li> <li>• Address gaps.</li> <li>• Seek out funding/support and write proposals.</li> <li>• Establish governance and shared leadership.</li> <li>• Form additional Ad Hoc working groups to take on priority projects.</li> </ul>
2013-2014	<p><b>MCSS-funded Network Activities</b> In late 2013-2014, OIFN received grant funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), which has since been re-named the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (MCCSS), to strengthen the network's provincial presence through education and capacity building activities, website development, and expansion of the Community of Practice.</p>

	<p><u>Outcomes included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hosting of a two-day Common Threads Conference to explore the origins, vision, and roots of person-directed planning.</li> <li>• Hosting of a 1.5 network forum in the Near North to share, discover, and learn from the experiences of Independent Facilitation across Northern and Southern Ontario.</li> <li>• Eight face-to-face and twenty teleconference meetings of the OIFN Planning Group to oversee planning and development.</li> <li>• Website upgrades to enhance website functionality, increase Community of Practice engagement, and create a growing library of Independent Facilitation resources.</li> </ul>
2015-2019	<p><b>Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project</b></p> <p>In 2015, the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN) received two years of funding for the Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project (IFDP) through the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), which has since been re-named the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (MCCSS). The project intended to expand the capacity of Independent Facilitation for people with developmental disabilities across the province and learn more about the benefits of Independent Facilitation. The project was extended for an additional year in 2017/2018 and again in 2018/2019. The project formally ended on March 31, 2019.</p> <p>The Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project had three objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To increase the number of people who are receiving Independent Facilitation and planning;</li> <li>2. To evaluate the outcomes of Independent Facilitation and its impact in the lives of people who choose it;</li> <li>3. To build the capacity of grassroots Independent Facilitation Organizations so they are able to retain facilitators and operate sustainably.</li> </ol> <p>Over 1,600 individuals experienced Independent Facilitation funded through requests to and referrals from the Ministry’s DSOs to an initial 7 Independent Facilitation Organizations* that were funded through this project, and which offered capacity building, mentoring, and support for Independent Facilitation.</p> <p>OIFN convened gatherings in 6 communities across the province_ Thunder Bay, Near North (Huntsville, Parry Sound, Timiskaming), Hamilton-Brandt, London and area, York Region, and Kingston- with an intention to expand Independent Facilitation across the province.</p> <p>OIFN continues to focus on the importance of genuine inclusion, belonging and raising people’s voices in the decisions that affect their lives. The need for change is more important than ever. OIFN is committed to collaborating with everyone who wants to work on what’s possible. We look forward to continuing our work together.</p> <p>*Initial 7 Independent Facilitation Organizations involved in the IFDP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridges to Belonging Waterloo Region (formerly Facile Waterloo)</li> <li>• Citizen Advocacy Ottawa</li> <li>• Facile Independent Facilitation (formerly Facile Perth)</li> <li>• Families for a Secure Future</li> <li>• Facilitation Wellington Dufferin</li> <li>• Partners for Planning</li> <li>• Windsor Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports</li> </ul>

2019	<p><b>Creating the Future We Want</b></p> <p>OIFN remained passionate about raising the voice of people with developmental disabilities and their families, loved ones, and friends, in pursuit of an everyday, ordinary life in neighbourhood community, where everyone’s contributions are needed, welcomed, and valued.</p> <p>People and families continued to share stories through a family-led initiative called the Independent Facilitation Matters Coalition, highlighting the difference and contribution Independent Facilitation has made in living the life of their choosing. We have learned over time that adults with developmental disabilities and their families/loved ones know how powerful it is to build a meaningful life in their neighbourhoods and communities. People and families have shared stories about what it takes to stay together and build their resilience and courage.</p> <p>OIFN maintained its strong social media presence by distributing weekly social media posts and quarterly newsletters to share stories, experiences, and connections to ideas about what more is possible and to delight, inspire and start conversations that matter.</p> <p>OIFN continued to focus on the importance of genuine inclusion, belonging, and raising people’s voices in the decisions that affect their lives. We continued to hear from people and families who want something different – a full life in their neighbourhood or community - highlighting that the need for change is more important than ever.</p>
2020	<p><b>Priorities 2020</b></p> <p>To maintain our presence and momentum, OIFN engaged in significant visioning and focused our energy and efforts to address the following key priorities:</p> <p>Engaging and Strengthening the Community of Practice of the OIFN  <i>Being brave enough to start a conversation that matters:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convening Reflective Practice conversations on line, monthly</li> <li>• Inviting in ‘everyone who wants to work on what’s possible’, connecting and reconnecting to people who have experienced independent facilitation or would like to experience independent facilitation, friends and family members interested in the support and practice of independent facilitation, independent facilitators, allied developmental service organizations interested in independent facilitation</li> <li>• Fostering connections to local and regional Communities of Practice</li> <li>• Re-connecting with communities where some community development has happened with respect to independent facilitation</li> </ul> <p>Building/ re-building and supporting Independent Facilitation across the province  <i>OIFN is often asked: “How do I become an independent facilitator?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OIFN offered a series of Shared Learning Events to build training and mentoring capacity and appreciation for ongoing learning/development/reflective practice</li> </ul> <p>Increasing visibility and accessibility of independent facilitation for people and families who want it  <i>OIFN is frequently asked by people and families: “How do I find an independent facilitator?”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OIFN relaunched the OIFN Map/Independent Facilitator Listings on <a href="https://www.oifn.ca">oifn.ca</a></li> <li>• OIFN developed and promoted foundational documents on the practice of Independent facilitation and why it is important</li> <li>• OIFN engaged people and families to update “Questions to Ask Your Facilitator.”</li> </ul>

2021-present	<p><b>Building on our priorities from 2020, OIFN remains committed to:</b></p> <p><u>Growing and Engaging the Community of Practice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to host CoP gatherings, including Community Conversations and Book Club meetings, and staying connected and communicating with local and regional Communities of Practice.</li> <li>• Telling OIFN’s story and highlighting both OIFN’s history and documents, as well as the work and resources of our allies others who share our values and principles.</li> </ul> <p><u>Building Capacity and Visibility of Independent Facilitation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to offer OIFN Shared Learning Events to further build capacity of Independent Facilitation and build appreciation for ongoing learning and development.</li> <li>• Promoting and maintaining OIFN’s Independent Facilitator Listings, which were re-launched in 2020, and highlighting resources to support people and families to find independent facilitators.</li> <li>• Preserving the integrity of Independent Facilitation by continuing to nurture and ground the Community of Practice in the principles and values of our work.</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributing to Collaborative Ally-ship</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserving the integrity of Independent Facilitation by creating spaces for conversations that matter and growing and learning together with our allies and supporters.</li> <li>• Investing in What Matters by deepening our relationships with people and families, independent facilitators, autonomous self-advocacy and family groups, grassroots organizations, supportive agencies, and others and supporting initiatives and movements for social change.</li> </ul> <p><u>Sustaining the Network</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking strategically about our Developments and Investments, so that OIFN can continue to foster a Community of Practice that is committed to facilitating change for people to live everyday, ordinary lives.</li> <li>• Recognizing and acknowledging the many gifts of Community and Practice members and welcoming and inviting the contributions of people who are interested in offering their gifts in meaningful ways.</li> </ul> <p>As part of all of these goals, OIFN continues ongoing maintenance and development of OIFN Social Media platforms and our website, which serve as spaces for the Community of Practice to connect to, inspire, and learn from one another.</p>
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