

Near North Community Gathering

Introduction

A good mix of people interested in the practice of Independent Facilitation gathered on June 8 in Huntsville. Self-advocates, family members, and service agency staff, coming from communities in the near north including Huntsville, Parry Sound, Gravenhurst, Timiskaming, and Timmins.

Organizations and service agencies represented included:

- Muskoka Family Network
- Community Living Huntsville
- Community Living Parry Sound
- Community Living Timiskaming South

What Is Inspiring Independent Facilitation Now?

Leaders from local Community Living service agencies in Huntsville, Parry Sound, and Timiskaming recognize the need for planning and facilitation that is separate from the delivery of direct services. There is a clear understanding that the future of service delivery must be directed and shaped by the vision and needs of people with disabilities and their families.

Huntsville has attempted efforts to move forward this kind of planning and facilitation work in the past through short term projects and grants. As is the case in other areas of the province, the nature of projects and grants has left people with an experience of start/stop that has been unsustainable.

A fledgling Family Network is developing in Huntsville, and serves as a hub of support for families and an incubator of ideas for supports and services that can be directed by the aspirations of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Timiskaming is now moving forward with planning and facilitation that is individualized and is sorting out solutions for people who have very complex and complicated situations for which current service delivery models are unable to respond.

Understanding What Independent Facilitation Is In Practice: The Ongoing Journey Across The Gap Between Current Reality And A Desired Future

THE GROUP'S STORIES THAT EXPLORE WHAT INDEPENDENT FACILITATION IS ABOUT

Each participant was invited to:

- think of a person with a disability who they knew well enough to have a sense of a life that would:
 - make them happy
 - engage them
 - provide a sense of purpose
- draw, with pictures and words, a picture that captures this desired life
- in small groups, make room to listen to each other's vision of this life they have drawn
- have a conversation about what they noticed these stories had in common — choose 2 or 3 of these ideas to share with the larger group.

In the large group we created a composite image using the common ideas shared in the small groups.

Desired Future	Current Reality
• Control of My Life...the simple and basic idea of being in charge of my own life, having a say about what happens in my life. • Being the Lead Player In My Life...feeling like “it is my life...not my parent’s, not the agency’s, not the staff’s, not the government’s...but MY LIFE”. • Independence...growing in my ability to do things and make decisions to take care of myself. • My Home...having a place that I can call my home, in the community that I choose, with the people I want to live with. • Happy...simply being able to feel good about myself, about who I am, and the life that is mine.	• No control over decisions...people experience decisions about their life being made by other people — parents, staff, agencies, government. • ...even less for people without family...when a child grows up in the child welfare and foster care system, it feels like they have lived their whole life with other people making decisions that do not have anything to do with them. • Not having a choice of where I live, and with whom...as an adult, people with disabilities often do not have the ability to choose where they want to live, and who they want to live with. They are either stuck living with their family, or they are “placed” in a “vacancy” in a group home. • DSO is between person/family and service agencies... people are unable to directly arrange for support that can work for them with service providers because they must go through the DSO. • DSO fills “vacancies”...the DSO identifies programs that have “vacancies”, and that is what is offered to people and their families, regardless of whether it is what people want or need. • Service agencies choose...the ultimate decision though rests with the service agency who decides whether they can, or want to, provide service to the person.

Desired Future	Current Reality
• Purpose...participating and making a difference in something that is bigger than just me —the community where I live, and even the world. • Gifts...being recognized for my unique gifts —being seen as someone who has value that can be contributed to the lives of other people. • Leader...actually taking on a role in leading, not just participating, or following other people's lead. • Teacher...being recognized as someone who can teach other people about what is important, and how people with disabilities are more than their disability.	• Everything is seen through lens of money...decisions are made based on whether people have money allocated to their support, and how much. • Based on deficits...to get access to funding, everything is based on deficits, on what is wrong with someone, or how big their problem is. • Scored lives...people seeking funding for support feel as though their lives are scored, getting more points for money if they are seen to be a bigger problem. • Must paint a picture of a grim life...in order to get funding, people with their families feel that they must paint a very grim picture of their life and circumstance. • Makes people feel that they are not worthy...the process of seeking support leaves people feeling that they are not worthy, that they have to prove that they need and deserve the resources to support their life. • Lack Of Self-esteem...the whole process of seeking resources and support leaves people with a low self-esteem, that they are a problem and a burden.

Desired Future	Current Reality
• Relationships...having a life filled with loving, mutually beneficial relationships, with family, friends, neighbours, community members, co-workers. • Learning How To Relate...actually being supported to learn how to form and maintain relationships. This was particularly expressed by a self-advocate who had grown up without family in the foster care system. • Reciprocal –to give and receive...to have relationships that are sustained by the contributions exchanged with each other, the experience of both people giving AND receiving. • Being Part Of Something Bigger...being part of a network of relationships that is bigger than just two people —an extended family, a community, an association, a faith group, a movement.	• Lack Of Community Acceptance...there is still an experience that many people in the community see people with developmental disabilities as “others” who do not belong. • “There is a place for him”...sometimes community members simply believe that there are “places” for people with disabilities, separate from community life where they will be taken care of. • “There are people”...sometimes community members believe that they do not know how to relate with people with disabilities, and there are “special” people who know how to do this. • Lack of Positive Experiences...the range and nature of lived experiences is limited for people with developmental disabilities and their families, and most experiences are not positive.
• Having A Voice...being able to communicate (in my own way) and be listened to and heard. • Powerful To Remove Barriers...speaking up about my experience so that the barriers in my way can be removed • Thinking Outside The Box...one of the advantages of disability is the “outside the box” thinking that is required to participate. There is a value for other people that comes from this outside the box kind of thinking. • Self-Advocacy...to join with other people in speaking out about injustice and prejudice, to create changes that make our communities and society more inclusive.	• Tell my/our story over and over again...families and the people they love, feel like they have to tell their story over and over and over again, every time they need support. It feels like no one is listening as they get passed on to the next service. • Experience “LACK of”everything...it feels as though there is not enough support anywhere. • No portability of money and services...if for any reason someone needs to move from one community to another, the resources that they had do not go with them. • Bottom of the waiting list...when they move they find themselves at the bottom of the list with other people waiting.

Desired Future	Current Reality
• CHOICES...to have a range of opportunities to choose from. To be able to follow my interests. • To risk and learn...to take chances and try new things, have new experiences. To learn from these experiences, especially when they don't go as we have planned. • To have ways to get around...to have transportation that is accessible and affordable to be able to go to the places I need and want to go, when I need and want to go there. • To have a way to communicate...to have technology or teaching accessible and available that makes it possible for me to communicate in my relationships and in my community.	
• Meaningful Work...to be doing something that has a purpose and value to other people. • Earning Money...to do work that is valued so I can earn a living, and be able to support my own life. • Volunteer...to spend time making contributions to the community in ways that are needed and appreciated.	• Lack of Money...People are poor - they are unemployed or underemployed, and ODSP keeps them poor. There is not enough money for support available through individualized funding mechanisms like Passport. • Families pooling money...families have begun pooling resources available through Passport in order to maximize the support people have available. To do this they are effectively recreating congregated supports instead of individualizing options for people. • Lack Of Freedom...people and their families feel that they lack freedom, that they are constrained by rules, policies, funding, availability of support, and the decision making of other people.

Since many people attending had very little knowledge about the practice of Independent Facilitation, a significant focus for the day was on deepening understanding of the role of Independent Facilitation.

PETER ZICHY'S STORY

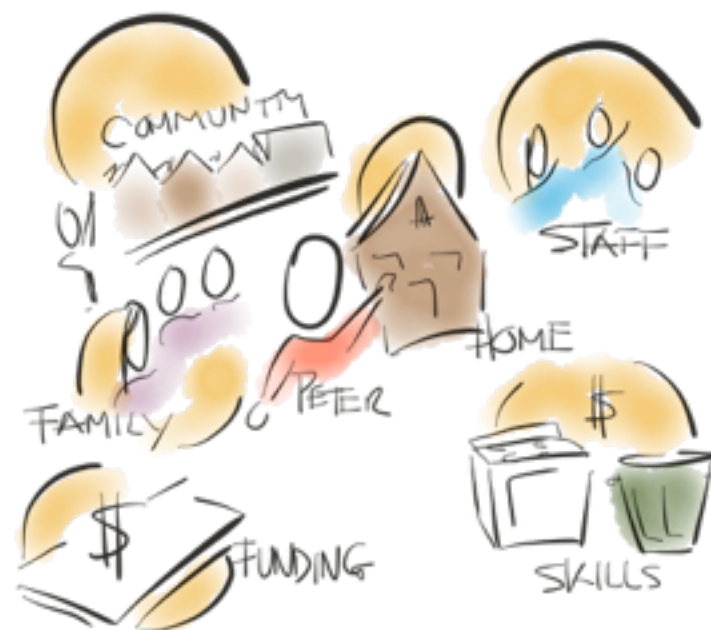
The story of Peter Zichy in Windsor was shown using the video, “My Life, My Choice” (www.inclusion.com/dvdmylife). Peter’s story captures:

- the experience of being sent to live in an institution during his adolescent years
- returning to live in his family home for most of his adult life where he had little responsibility for his life and decisions
- his mother passing away at the age of 74
- his brothers and sister living far away
- Peter’s decision that he wanted to stay living in his family home
- the need to mobilize support to enable Peter to live in “my home”:
 - funding
 - staffing
 - community connections
- developing Peter’s capacity to take responsibility for taking care of his own life and decisions.

In a situation such as Peter’s, there are many parts that need to be able to be moved and connected to one another so that Peter’s life can work. Before deciding what services are necessary, and where the location of his home will be, someone needs to connect with Peter, to listen, free from the constraints of service delivery models and his family’s limited understanding of what is possible. The “independent” aspect of Independent Facilitation relates to this, someone who is not confined or “encumbered” by the limits of service delivery that exist in agencies; or the reality that families often don’t listen to ideas because of the time and effort it will take for them to act on these ideas without support from the system. The Independent Facilitator is the person’s listening post, who hears their story, circumstance, desires, and needs, and assists in mobilizing the supports necessary.

In Peter’s story, there are many parts that need to be activated and connected:

- Peter's vision for his own life and his belief in himself
- his family's desire and ability to be supportive
- his home:
 - as a place to live
 - as a valuable asset that needs to be managed and maintained
- Peter's need for some support, and his decision that he wanted to recruit and choose people he can "trust":
 - to help him learn skills to take care of his own life
 - stay connected to what is happening in his daily life making sure he is OK
- accessing and utilizing funding that can enable Peter to live in his own home
- his neighbourhood and community where Peter can be engaged and supported.



An Independent Facilitator: is a person who can pay attention to Peter, and all of the parts that need to work together in his life; is creative in identifying resources and making connections, some available through government programs, others found in the community, and among friends and family; someone who believes that there are possibilities beyond what exists in the service system; an ally for Peter, assisting him in managing important relationships in his life; assisting Peter in identifying what he wants and needs; helping him find the resources and support that can best meet his vision and his needs. An Independent Facilitator stays connected with the person, their family and allies over time, enabling people to adjust and realign support as life changes.

Every person's situation is unique, and complex due to the nature of different relationships and circumstances. Peter's story just provides a beginning framework for thinking about Independent Facilitation. An Independent Facilitator takes on each situation as unique, and works to customize support to fit the person and the situation.

Independent Facilitation is the work of supporting people over time as they move across the gap between current reality, and a desired future where people can be happy, safe, engaged and recognized as valued contributing citizens. The “Independent” aspect of Independent Facilitation, relates to being independent of, not tied to, the limitations of a system and services that were designed for different purposes than the desired futures people expressed. When people work within services, there are always constraints within the culture of an agency related to the design, policy, procedures, and practices of that agency. Being independent from these, a facilitator can fully support a person to dream and imagine the future they want to see, and then begin to look for the best resources available to support that vision.

Independent Facilitation involves:

- meeting a person where they are at
- listening to the person - this involves discovering the way that they communicate, and paying action to things like:
 - what is important to them
 - who is important to them
 - what would they imagine for their future
 - what are their gifts, capacities, and contributions
 - what brings them joy and happiness
 - what kind of support they need
- getting to know their family, and helping the family listen to the person
- learning about their current reality
- facilitating planning for action to move toward a desired future
- support in finding and accessing resources that make it possible to move forward, including:
 - funding programs:
 - disability specific

- other focused (eg. housing, employability)
- community resources available to all citizens
- people, places, and groups that can offer participation and/or support
- supporting the person and their family in exploring decisions and the potential consequences and responsibilities that are involved.

Steps to Move Forward...

COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

A group of people (see list at right) enthusiastically expressed interest in following up on developing the capacity to deliver Independent Facilitation in the Near North. The group consists of self-advocates, family members, allies from service agencies, and people interested in developing their capacity to serve as Independent Facilitators.

A follow up meeting will be organized (Carla to take lead role in convening).

ALLIES

Community Living Huntsville will plan to host learning events that are relevant to developing capacity to deliver Independent Facilitation.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

The group was encouraged to:

- sign up for updates and news about Independent Facilitation on the oifn.ca website (at the bottom of the Home page)
- Save the Date for the upcoming OIFN “Common Threads” Conference to be held Nov. 16-17, 2016
 - bursaries may be available for families and people with disabilities.

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This event is facilitated by the OIFN with support of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) through funding of the **OIFN Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project (IFDP)**