



OIFN Reflective Practice Conversation
August 15, 2020

Claiming Hope, Staying Brave

Our Conversation Story



OIFN believes ***“in reflective practice and shared learning through a Community of Practice*** that engages people with disabilities, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and other allies, in a collaborative approach, to co-create knowledge and reflect deeply on principles and practice.”

Why Reflective Practice Conversations?

OIFN is a [Community of Practice](#) that includes people with developmental disabilities, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and other allies who are interested in supporting people to live meaningful, everyday lives in their chosen neighbourhoods and communities.

As a Community of Practice, OIFN is committed to expanding and strengthening relationships and bringing people together for shared learning, collaborative action, and mutual growth. Reflective practice is about exploring ideas and making meaning together. When the Community of Practice comes together, we remain open to change and reflect deeply on principles and practice.

To make the best use of our time together, most of the Reflective Practice conversation took place in small “breakout” groups of about 5 people, so that space was created for meaningful connections to happen, for all people to have opportunities to share and have their voices be heard, and for shared learning and growth to be cultivated.

Framing Our Time Together

Inspired by the energy of and building on the momentum from the first OIFN Reflective Practice Conversation in June 2020, OIFN’s Community of Practice continues to gather regularly for opportunities to grow and learn together and contribute to a greater movement for people living with developmental disabilities.

Many people who participated in the June 2020 gathering were moved by and interested in further exploring the idea of “moving from safe spaces to brave spaces.” The Planning Group responded to this feedback and decided to create this opportunity to reflect deeply together on what this means from the diverse perspectives of Community of Practice members – people, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and supportive allies.

Almost 60 people expressed interest in participating in this session, with ultimately 29 people participating in the conversation.

This conversation on “Claiming Hope, Staying Brave” was grounded in the following OIFN Core Belief:

We believe in the rights of all people to set the pace and direction of change in their lives so that they will be included in their neighbourhoods and communities and have the same freedoms and responsibilities of any other citizen, as upheld by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People Living with Disabilities, Article 19.

OIFN’s Core Beliefs can be found in full on the OIFN website:
<https://www.oifn.ca/what-we-believe/>

As a Community of Practice, we draw courage and support from one another, so that we can hold onto hope and continue to bravely work for change.

Sharing our Places of Hope

Welcoming participants into a space of reflection and hopeful dialogue, Wendy Newbery - an independent facilitator from Kitchener, Ontario - led a reading of **“We Stand Where We Stand”, a Poem by Victoria Safford, Gates of Hope.**

We stand where we will stand, on little plots of ground, where we are maybe “called” to stand (though who knows what that means?) –in our congregations, classrooms, offices, factories, in fields of lettuces and apricots, in hospitals, in prisons (on both sides, at various times, of the gates), in streets, in community groups. And it is sacred ground if we would honor it, if we would bring to it a blessing of sacrifice and risk.

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope –not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges (people cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through); nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of “Everything is gonna be all right.” But a different, sometimes lonely place, the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and its condition, the place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, as it will be; the place from which you glimpse not only struggle, but joy in the struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing, asking people what they see.



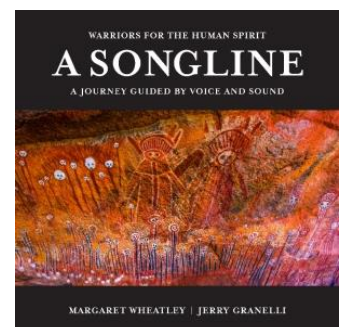
*Excerpted from Where Do We Stand by Beth Mount and John O'Brien.
Free e-book download available from [Inclusion Press](#).*

Moving into Breakout group, participants had an opportunity to connect with one another in small groups and share how we stand in places of hope.

Reflecting on “Brave Spaces”

Following a shared listening of a short clip from **The Warrior’s Songline** by **Margaret Wheatley and Jerry Granelli**, Colleen Mitchell, an OIFN Steward and independent facilitator from [Windsor Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports](#), offered a poignant reflection on the importance of staying brave.

- When we create “brave spaces,” we are able to challenge our thinking and take risks to work together for change.
- As talked about in *Songline*, it takes bravery to do things that are worth doing, even if there is a good chance that we will not succeed.
- Brave actions give us clarity and renewed energy; even if we fail, we did the right thing.
- Bravery values relationships over achievement.



<https://margaretwheatley.com/the-warriors-songline/>

[Click here to listen to Colleen’s reflection.](#)

Light Bulb Moments

Following small group discussions on what it means to “stay brave” and possible actions that we can take to continue staying brave, participants were invited to share a single word, a picture or image, a quote, or a gesture to express their thoughts.

Common themes and patterns emerged as people shared:

- **Perseverance and Resilience**
 - “We didn’t come this far just to come this far.”
 - Our work for change is reflected in imagery of water wearing away stone. Water is soft and flowing, but persistent.

- **Courage to Think Differently**
 - From Margaret Wheatley’s work: courage comes from ‘la coeur,’ which means ‘from the heart.’
 - We have to get comfortable with discomfort; change does not come without struggle.
 - Challenging the norms and having a level of uncomfortableness can bring about change in so many ways.

- **Claiming Hope and Staying Brave through Meaningful Relationships**
 - Bravery and hope are about trust.
 - To be courageous and brave, it takes vulnerability and transparency in relationship.
 - Staying connected has been so important and will continue to be important. Our personal connections remind us that we are not alone.

“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.”
- Valclav Havel

Moving Forward

We concluded our time together by listening to the song “**Change of Heart**” by **Holly Near**. Holly’s lyrics echoed the theme of our conversations, reminding us that bravely working for change that affords all people rights and freedoms leads to positive change that benefits us all.



CHANGE OF HEART by Holly Near

Something changes in me when I witness someone's courage
They may not know I'm watching, I may not let them know that
Something changes in me that will last me for a life time
To fill me when I'm empty, and rock me when I'm low
Something changes in me anytime there's someone singing
All the songs I've never forgotten, let out voices sing them strong
Something changes in me anytime there's someone standing
For the right to be completely all the good things that we are
There's a change of heart
Anytime there's someone counting
All the lives that won't be thrown away
There's a change of heart
Anytime you join the choir, be a voice up on the mountain
Or see a fire... in the rain
Something changes in me when my arms are held wide open
Fear and hate are set aside and only love remains
Something changes in me and I feel a deep emotion
While the ones who offer help replace the ones that just complain
Do not forget the children, they are
singers in the storm
And when their hearts are threatened, well a fire is bound to start
It wakes us up at midnight, we feel an ancient pain
And I do believe that love directs the flame

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36rJaAQgUR0>

We invite you to stay connected to OIFN for updates about upcoming opportunities for us to once again come together *in hopeful and brave spaces*.

Voices of the Community of Practice

When asked to share any additional comments about the gathering, one participant said:

“I appreciated the space to both personally reflect and learn from the reflections of others about bravery and how that may look, feel, and be manifested...”