



**OIFN Reflective Practice Conversation  
May 5, 2021**

*Tending to Our Roots: Growing Together in a Grassroots Movement*

**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

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. Emerging from feedback shared at previous gatherings, the theme of this Reflective Practice Conversation created space for participants to learn about the origin and role of OIFN and the history of Independent Facilitation in Ontario and reflect on locally-driven approaches to community development.

65 people expressed interest in participating in this session, with ultimately 32 people participating in the conversation, representing a good mix of people and family members/loved ones, independent facilitators, and other supportive allies. We warmly welcomed many familiar faces, as well as a number of new people who were inspired to join us. The response to OIFN’s Reflective Practice Conversations thus far has been very encouraging, and we are pleased to know that these conversations are valuable and to see more family members and independent facilitators connecting!

This conversation on “Growing Together in a Grassroots Movement” was grounded in the following OIFN Core Belief:

***We believe that partnerships and collaboration are necessary vehicles*** for bringing about justice and social change. We seek common ground with others to make shifts within systems and in society to achieve equity, fairness, and respect for all.

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

## Working Together for Change

Setting the tone for our time together and inviting participants into a space of inspiration, connection, reflection, and growth, Roz Vincent-Haven - an OIFN Steward and parent from Waterloo, Ontario – shared the following reflection by Al Etmanski.

### You Don't Need to Start Another Movement

By Al Etmanski

The question I get asked most often is, “How do you start a movement?”

My answer is always, “You don't need to start another movement. All you have to do is contribute to the movements that you are already part of.”

In order to do so you have to let go of your belief that your idea, your program, your innovation is the one that other players should rally around.

A movement isn't a marketing tool. It's the antidote to “old habits die hard.” It prepares the ground for new and different ways of thinking and acting. It creates cultural receptivity and popular support for new approaches. It makes it easier for a host of innovations with similar objectives to stick, to thrive and to have lasting impact. Including yours.

The work nowadays is less about perfecting or scaling your own work and more about completing your work through the work of others. If a new movement is needed it will emerge through those interactions.

If you want to take your movement responsibilities seriously:

- Make a list of the players in the movement(s) you belong to
- Identify those whose values and actions you would like to align with because you can't work with everyone.
- Link up and connect the dots.

When you do you will be pleasantly surprised. Your specific work will be enhanced. So will the culture.

Movements are a powerful response to the corporate, technological, militaristic and ideological forces that are harmful to life. Your movement(s) are already in motion transforming culture. They would benefit from your peaceful presence and whole hearted participation.

*Read the original blogpost at:*

*<https://aletmanski.com/impact/you-dont-need-to-start-another-movement/>*

Moving into Breakout groups, participants had an opportunity to connect with one another in small groups and reflect on cultural shifts in the world today and from where we can draw inspiration.

## Independent Facilitation – Origins and Evolutions

Over the past year, OIFN's Reflective Practice Conversations have fostered renewed energy and offered space for people who care about this work to come together. As more people have been connecting to OIFN and joining in this shared learning journey, there has been growing interest from the Community of Practice in learning more about the history of OIFN and Independent Facilitation. In order to be responsive to the curiosity and passion of this community, the Planning Group organized a panel presentation at this gathering to explore the following topics and questions that have emerged:

### What is the history of Independent Facilitation in Ontario? How did OIFN begin?

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network has grown out of the collective vision of independent facilitators, people who have a developmental disability/self-advocates, and family members/loved ones, 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. 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. (OIFN History - <https://www.oifn.ca/history/>).

On behalf of the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario, Michelle Friesen shared a presentation in two parts. The slides can be found on the [IFCO website](#) at the links below.

#### Part One - A Walk Through Some History

This presentation provides an overview of IFCO's historical work and the evolutionary learning and understanding about the importance of planning and support mechanisms for people using individualized funding, and what is now commonly called Independent Facilitation. The presentation begins with some early milestones in Ontario. It continues with the establishment of the 'coalition,' sharing about initial and later activities, and references the connection between individualized funding and planning and facilitation with people and families living with disabilities over the years.

<https://individualizedfunding.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/ifco-walk-through-history-may-5-2021-part-1.pdf>

#### Part Two - What 24 Years of Experience from Around the World is Telling Us

This presentation provides highlights from international research — a systematic review — that was done on individualized funding interventions/studies from around the world that met certain criteria and occurred between the years 1992 and 2016. We believe that the information from the 'review' offers affirmation for 2 decades of work done by the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario and what we believe.

*Note: The review published in 2019 is called: "Individualized funding interventions to improve health and social care outcomes for people with a disability: A mixed-methods systematic review". Researchers were: Pádraic Fleming, Sinead McGilloway, Marian Hernon, Mairead Furlong, Siobhain O'Doherty, Fiona Keogh and Tim Stainton.*

<https://individualizedfunding.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/ifco-experience-from-around-the-world-may-5-2021-part-2.pdf>

## How has grassroots community development supported the presence and capacity of Independent Facilitation in Ontario?

### What do we mean when we say separation of functions? Why is this important?

Marlyn Shervill, an OIFN Steward and independent facilitator from Essex, Ontario, provided an overview of grassroots community building work that led to the development of Independent Facilitation in Windsor-Essex county.

- Today, Windsor Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports is a transfer payment agency that provides independent facilitation, brokering, and mediation and negotiation services.
- It took years of work before Brokerage opened its doors, with the knowledge and commitments of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, some service providers, people and families, and involved community members.
  - There were some key projects that led to the Brokerage Project.
    - **Coming Home Project:** This was the first time that there was an 'independent' planner, who worked with people who were leaving the institutions in Windsor-Essex and in St. Marys. The overseeing committee ensured that people were not simply being 'placed,' but they had choices and were reconnected with their families. This was the beginning of agencies thinking about supporting people to plan for their lives, not for services.
    - **The Innoventions Project:** As a result of this project, there was agreement among the Ministry and local service agencies that if people moved or did not want to work with a particular agency any more, then their support dollars would "move" with them.
- In late 1996, MCSS funded 3 provincial projects that looked at different components of individualized funding. All 3 projects received very positive evaluations with recommendations going forward.
  - Choices in Thunder Bay
  - Options in Toronto
  - Brokerage in Windsor
- The **Brokerage Project** was formally launched in October 1997, and a Steering Committee was formed, consisting of MCSS personnel, Executive Directors and staff from local service providers, family members, and the president of People First Windsor.
- Following a funding proposal submitted in 1998, MCSS funded 1 position in 1999. A second broker/facilitator position was funded in 2000, and a third position was funded in 2001.
- Brokerage's work is rooted in an Empowerment Model, which is grounded in the **separation of functions**, so that people and families hold the power. Through partnerships, people's support dollars are individualized and separate from services and supports, advocacy, and planning.
- Brokerage was birthed out of partnerships and continues to partner with autonomous family groups and agency allies today.

### Who is OIFN today?

On behalf of OIFN, Lynda Kahn, an OIFN Steward from Toronto, Ontario and Director of Development for Inclusion Press, reviewed the role and current priorities of the network.

OIFN works to promote justice and social change by connecting people and convening gatherings for a process of collective learning. We engage in conversations, gather and share resources, and deepen shared knowledge and understanding about the contribution and impact of Independent Facilitation as one aspect of supporting a person in living a meaningful, everyday, ordinary life. OIFN partners with others provincially, nationally, and internationally to explore opportunities for broad social action and change.

*To learn more about the role of the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network, please visit:*

<https://www.oifn.ca/what-we-do/>

In 2020, OIFN invested in the following priorities, which continue to guide our work.

- Engaging and Strengthening the Community of Practice of the OIFN
  - “Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters”
- Building/ re-building and supporting Independent Facilitation across the province
- Increasing visibility and accessibility of independent facilitation for people and families who want it

*To learn more about OIFN's Vision and Priorities, please visit:*

<https://www.oifn.ca/mission-and-practice/>

Grounded in our clarified vision and priorities, OIFN has engaged in the following work to convene and connect people, communicate what matters, and engage in shared learning:

- **Reflective Practice Conversations:** In June 2020, OIFN launched its first virtual gathering of the Community of Practice! Five gatherings have been held to date (June 2020, August 2020, October 2020, February 2021, and May 2021), and OIFN is committed to hosting these conversations every few months.
- **OIFN Book Club:** Joanne Goode and Susannah Joyce sustain and catalyze the OIFN Book Club, which meets monthly, initially in person and, more recently, virtually over Zoom.
- **OIFN Shared Learning Events: In 2020-2021, OIFN invested in 5 course offerings**, led by Judith McGill of LifePath Facilitation, in an effort to build capacity in Independent Facilitation. Course topics for this first round of offerings include:
  - Power of Social Roles - November/December 2020
  - Developing Leisure Identities - January 2021.
  - Conscious Listening and Speaking - March 2021
  - Deepening Mindful Practice - May 2021
  - Fostering Conversations about What Matters – June 2021Following the successful launch of these events, OIFN is planning for more courses to be offered in the fall/winter.
- **OIFN Independent Facilitator Listings:** OIFN has launched a [Facilitator Map](#) as a resource for people to find and connect with independent facilitators.

### **Calls to action!**

We invite you to stay connected and continue to engage in the Community of Practice.

- **Follow us on Social Media!**

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/OIFNCommunity/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/oifncommunity/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/OIFNcommunity>
- Subscribe to OIFN's Newsletters: <http://www.oifn.ca/sign-up/>

- **Visit [oifn.ca](http://oifn.ca)!**

Our website is rich with resources, reports, articles, stories, info charts about Independent Facilitation and its impacts. We have invested in developing documents that clarify the scope of practice of Independent Facilitation.

- Key messages
- Core Beliefs
- Questions to Ask Your Facilitator
- Framework for an Everyday, Ordinary Life
- Scope of Practice of Independent Facilitation

- **Please let us know if you would like to be more engaged in our ongoing efforts!**

## **Mindful Practice and Grassroots Community Development**

Inspired by the commitments, investments, and work over the years that have brought us to where we are today, small groups considered the key components needed to cultivate change and chart the path forward. The following themes emerged:

- **Honouring our rich history**

- Expressing gratitude for past work, which gives “goosebumps” of inspiration.
- Reflecting back to know what it means to move forward.

- **Continuing the Journey Ahead**

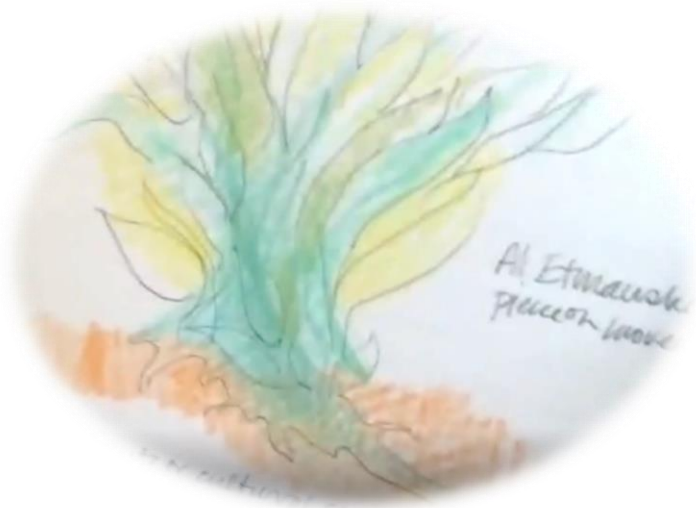
- Staying hopeful, resilient, and tenacious.
- Broadening our reach, building connections, and engaging our collective energies for change.
- Mobilizing the next group of people to get excited about this work.
- Continuing discussions – there is power in conversation.

- **Investing in sustainable options**

- Heightening citizenship.
- Demonstrating the value of Independent Facilitation, which is evident in our history.
- Clarifying and amplifying our messages:
  - Supporting people also supports families and/or loved ones.
  - Infrastructure is needed, in order to bring individualized funding into reality in Ontario and to shift Independent Facilitation to a “credible career choice.”



*Relying on our deep, strong roots to push through the 'concrete.'*



*"Growth"*

*By Wendy Newbery*



*"All links of the chain are important"*

*By Y Bloom*

## **Moving Forward**

To provide us with some inspiration moving forward, Wendy Newbery - an independent facilitator from Kitchener, Ontario – shared the following quote by Danielle Doby.



We then concluded our time together by reflecting on the song “There Beneath” by The Oh Hellos.

## “There Beneath” by The Oh Hellos

There beneath the willow tree  
I learned a lot about the way of things  
I learned that everything (the wind, the leaves) has breath inside  
They were pointing ever east  
To see the ever-turning aeon cease  
Their wills were ever bent on waiting with all their might

I know (I know)  
I know this  
There is beauty in the way of things

There beyond the palisade  
I saw the morning lead a cavalcade  
They made a marvel of a display  
And it made me cry 'o lai'

O lai (o lai)  
O lai lord  
There is beauty in the way of things



**YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooPPmtl2aKA>**

We invite you to [stay connected](#) to OIFN for updates about upcoming opportunities for us to connect, continue our conversations, and share in our learning.

### Voices of the Community of Practice

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

*“I liked everything about the event. It was very informative and inspirational.”*

*“I have been talking with other facilitators and appreciate [these themes] coming up in this context.”*

*“I appreciated learning about the vivid history of Independent Facilitation.”*