

York Region Community Gathering

Introduction

What Is Inspiring Independent Facilitation Now?

A good mix of people with disabilities speaking for their themselves, family members, people interested in the practice of Independent Facilitation, and people who work in local service agencies gathered to focus on the potential of Independent Facilitation in York Region.

The York Region Lifetime Independent Facilitation (YRLIF), has been a force for Independent Facilitation in York Region, and played a key role in organizing this gathering. They have organized and hosted learning opportunities with John Lord (johnlord.net), providing training for people interested in becoming Independent Facilitators, and including agencies committed to supporting the development of Independent Facilitation in the region.

In addition, YRLIF had just been awarded funding through the Developmental Services Housing Task Force for the **“Why Wait” Project**:

*An initiative being conducted in partnership with **Montage Support Services** and **York Support Services Network**.*

The project will support eight individuals in four unique housing models. It includes a learning and collaborative series — conducted by an independent facilitator and a number of developmental services agencies — to support families’ plans for the future.

Organizations represented at the York Region Gathering included:

- York Region Lifetime Independent Facilitation
- York Support Service Network
- York South Community Living
- Kerry's Place Autism Services
- Vita Community Services
- Community Living Huronia

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.

We then asked the group to state what current reality is like in relation to these desired future ideas. A narrative summary of the of the composite picture is captured in the table below:

OIFN York Region Community Gathering
Independent Facilitation: The Journey Across the Gap
May 28, 2016



Desired Future	Current Reality
“I want people in my life”...it is as simple as that. People want to be in relationship with other people, mutual and reciprocal relationships. Variety of people...people want the opportunity to get to know a variety of people, have a variety of relationships, family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, acquaintances, members of faith communities and associations of interests, etc. Dynamic relationships...people want relationships that grow and change over time, that do not become stagnant. I want a support circle...one person said that she wanted to have a support circle, a group of people who could gather, think with her, and support her to move in the direction of her hopes and dreams.	Stagnant in developing relationships...by the time people reach adulthood many find that they are not moving forward as it seems to get harder as people get older and no longer have the context of school. Families don't know how...many families do not know how to play a role in connecting adult sons and daughters to other adults and support them in developing relationships. Struggling alone...in this very important aspect to anyone's life, parents and family members find themselves struggling alone. Paid relationships...when people do end up spending time with other people it is usually people who are paid to be supporting them. While it is good to have solid relationships with people who are paid to support, it is not the kind of reciprocal relationship that people are seeking. “Feels a little like falling off a cliff”...one person said that trying to step out and form relationships with people feels like “falling off a cliff”.
Happiness...people have a desire to be happy, to enjoy life, to feel good about myself and my life. Positivity...to be able to live in such a way as to be positive, to be cheerful, to have a good outlook on life, to look forward to possibilities. To love and be loved...at the core of being happy is the experience of loving, and being loved.	

Desired Future	Current Reality
To be a real part of my community...to feel that I know people, and I am known, as a member of the community. Participating and involved...people want to be involved, actively doing things in their community with other people. Having relationships...people want to know people in various places and ways in their community. They would like friendship, but also being known at the local coffee shop or grocery store, hairdresser or barber, church, synagogue, or temple, in the neighbourhood, and at work. Transportation...ways to get around...people want to have the ability to get to the places they choose to be involved. They want a way to get around that is available when they need it, accessible, and affordable.	Services don't have skills...it has been the experience of many families that the services and programs that are available to them don't actually have the skills and structure needed to support people to become a valued part of their community. Sit on a waiting list...approaching the DSO for support has often lead to people being placed on a waiting list. If for some reason a family or individual moves, they go to the bottom of the waiting list again. Services are reactive to crisis...families experience the DSO and service system as being designed to be reactive to a crisis. It is not proactive, designed to prevent a crisis. So if you are not in crisis, you get less attention, or you feel forced to present your situation as if it were a crisis.
Accepted for who I am and where I am at...people do not want to be seen as a "problem," or someone who needs to be "fixed". They want to be OK as they are, knowing that we all grow and change over time. Valued...people want to be valued as people, and then as people who make contributions. Recognized for my gifts and strengths...people want to be recognized for their gifts and strengths, and not simply be identified with their disability.	

Desired Future	Current Reality
Having a sense of purpose...people want to have sense that they have a purpose, something that they do that is important and makes a difference to other people, and the community as a whole. Educating other people...people have a role to play in educating other people in the community about seeing people with disabilities differently, recognizing the value, abilities and contributions they can make. Helping the community see how it needs to change to become more inclusive in ways that benefit everybody.	School system leaves people at home...in spite of the fact that there is something called “transition planning” that begins while people are still in school, the school system leaves their sons and daughter at home when school is over. No connection to adult life...families do not experience the school system as being connected to much of anything that relates to adult life and most families find that there is no link between what people do in school for 15 years and what happens after.
My VOICE heard...people need and want to develop their own voice, their ability to express their own ideas, their own feelings, their hopes and dreams. The want to be able to communicate and to be respected and heard. Self Advocacy...not only do people need and want to express their personal hopes, dreams and feelings, but also to gain strength and ability to speak up about the many ways that they experience the prejudice and injustice that many people with disabilities experience.	People tell us what to do...in contrast to having a “voice” and being heard, many people experience that other people (family and program staff) tell them what to do.

Desired Future	Current Reality
Growing in self-reliance...people want to increase their ability, power, and responsibility for their own lives, to grow in their capacity to take care of themselves. Financial security...people want to get out of the poverty trap, to be able to earn money, to be able to save money for their future. People want to be able to learn how to develop financial security, how to get and take care of the money that is theirs. Choices... people want to have access to a wider range of choices in all aspects of life, a range of choices that is similar to most other citizens. Choices related to home, where they live and who they live with; how they spend their time, where they go and what they do. Control...people want to be in control of the things that impact their life, to be able to make decisions. Dignity of risk...all learning requires doing something new, taking some chances, facing some risks. People want the opportunity to expand their experiences. Make mistakes...reflect to learn...people need the opportunity to try, make mistakes, and learn from what happens, and then try again, or try something new. Seek advice about potential consequences/results...when trying or exploring new things, getting advice is helpful. The right support at the right time...it is not that people do not want or need support, but they want to have a say about that support, and they want the right kind of support at the right time.	Expectation that people will go to “programs”...it is commonplace for families to experience that the system, and people in the community, expect that people with disabilities have a place in programs. There is no expectation that people will live as active citizens in community. Prescribed life...people with disabilities experience other people prescribing what their life will be, what they are capable of doing, where they will live, where they can go, what they can do. Limit choice...families and the service system limit the choices that people have. Sometimes this is in the name of “protecting” people and ensuring they are safe, and sometimes this is because the person’s choice has implications for families and staff. People should work for free...it is not uncommon for people to experience that others think they should work for free. There is a view that hiring people with disabilities is good “charitable” work that benefits the person, but not the employer. People are not recognized and valued as employees.

The conversation in the morning about current reality, left some people who work in the education and service system feeling that they had been unjustly and harshly criticized. It can be hard to hear these messages when we are doing good work in agencies and organizations to help people and families. The stories families and people with disabilities shared were related to their lived experiences, and their interactions with systems that are not designed to enable the desired futures. The messages were not personal, they were revealing systemic limitations. To some degree these systemic realities that don't, and in some way cannot, lead to desired outcomes, is precisely the reason why Independent Facilitation has emerged.

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 that was 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 do 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 (such as, 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...

Participants viewed a video created by OIFN, with leadership voices sharing experiences of what it takes to get this service offering up and running in their community. The video highlights 6 key elements of getting started:

1. Parents as the driving force for something different being offered that can be useful in customizing support. Family stories provide the inspiration and ideas for innovation.
2. It takes committed leadership, people who are willing and able to take on the work of creating something new in their community.
3. Family groups and networks empower families through sharing stories, experiences, resources, and connections.
4. Allies, in the form of individuals and organizations can support the development of Independent Facilitation, without controlling it.
5. There is a need to build the capacity to deliver Independent Facilitation, through education, training, and mentorship with experienced Facilitators.

6. It is critical to be clear about what is important, the values and aspirations of Independent Facilitation.

The groups self-organized into 3 groups and had planning conversations to identify some next steps that can be taken.

- **Mobilizing Families As The Driving Force And To Empower Each Other**
- **Committed Leadership To Actively Work On Developing Independent Facilitation In York Region**
- **Allies Who Can Support The Work Of The Development Of Independent Facilitation**

Out of these smaller group conversations, some next steps included:

- Find ways to get **families connected** to other families
- Agencies are a **vehicle for information** regardless of family affiliation with that agency, and can play a role in getting the word out to families, raising awareness and playing a role in the continuation of families supporting other families
- Agency allies are interested in how to **transform services**, such as building awareness about the difference between planning versus facilitation, ways to communicate in schools (such as the Autism Task Force's work)
- Leveraging **existing tools** such as individualized funding, so they are seen as more than funding fee for service programs
- Learn from other parts of the world and what others are doing
- **Build capacity** with community, the Family Network, educating families, and educating facilitators
- **Work with businesses and co-ops** to talk about hiring people with disabilities, and what they would need to do change how they hire
- Have a deeper conversation with **OIFN** about what OIFN can do to support York Region, and how to **access more training and mentoring support**

York Region has the unique experience of having a small group of committed people who are already on the way to developing and expanding capacity for Independent Facilitation in the Region. York Region Lifetime Independent Facilitation (YRLIF) is embarking on a number of initiatives that include:

- the “WHY WAIT” Housing initiative that will support 8 individuals in creative customized housing options utilizing Independent Facilitation
- establishing training and mentoring of Independent Facilitators with John Lord
- solidifying the organizational structure and design of YRLIF to best serve the people and their families in York region

The participants of this community gathering expressed a desire to reconvene people interested in Independent Facilitation again, to further deepen understanding, imagine possibilities, and expand the pool of people who are aware and interested. Kelly Casey, of YRLIF, will take on the task of gathering people who are interested in planning these kinds of events. There is a strong desire to strengthen the network of families and people with disabilities in the region.

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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