

A Vision and Strategic Plan for a Farm Community & Regional Centre

AUTISM AND COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

A full-day workshop was held on Sunday, November 28, 2004 at the Orchard Park Conference Centre in Guelph. Participants included four self-advocates, 11 parents of adults with ASD, five parents of children with ASD, six friends and supporters, and two with professional interests in the project, one being our facilitator and reporter, Bruce Kappel. Guelph Services for the Autistic and Waterloo-Wellington Autism Services co-operated in funding this event and the earlier facilitated workshop on November 1st.

This Vision and Strategic Planning session was the final step in a process that included the earlier workshop, discussions through the web site, the preparation of background papers, and reviewing those background papers. Through this process, we accomplished the following:

- Identified the Core Values that will inform what we develop.
- Identified the Components of the Farm Community and Centre, including some principles related to each.
- Decided to proceed with some development steps that will help us get some things done soon, develop some experience with various approaches, and provide the context for us working together toward a common goal.
- Formed four working groups that will develop ideas further and report back to the larger group.
- Agreed to continue to meet monthly to develop as a community and to continue our discussions.

Our Vision

A community that inspires a sense of shared purpose and hope among all its members—persons with autism, family members, friends and professionals—so that all are represented in its leadership, management and sustained development. Values and rights include:

- *Respect for the individuality, self-expression and quality of life of each person with ASD.*
- *Tolerance of diversity*
- *Accommodation to individual sensitivities.*
- *Support for the right and responsibility that “everybody contributes”.*
- *Inclusion and inclusiveness*
- *Support the whole human being: this best happens in the context of living together as family, caring for and supporting each other,*
- *Welcome to the community without discrimination, and protection from discrimination.*

DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES

1. VALUES AND VISION

We agreed on the following **Core Values and Rights**. They are based on our review of the values stated in “ASD Farm Community and Centre” and “Vision, Mission and Values of Camphill Communities Ontario”. The discussion modified some of those statements and added additional ones.

a. VALUES AND RIGHTS

- Respect for the individuality, self-expression and quality of life of each person with ASD.
- Tolerance of diversity and respect for other members.
- Accommodation to individual sensitivities.
- A community that inspires a sense of shared purpose and hope among all its members.
- Ensuring that families continue to have voices and leadership roles, with self-advocates also represented, as well as supporters from the larger community. We have to guard against domination by paid staff or managers, or by any particular group in the ASD cause.
- Support for the right and responsibility that “everybody contributes”.
- Inclusion and inclusiveness –
 - include people with the full range of gifts and support needs as resident members of the community
 - inclusion of community members as resident members of the community, as well as visitors and participants, and
 - full inclusion of supported members in the life of the outside community.
- Support the whole human being. This best happens in the context of living together as family, caring for and supporting each other, and providing:
 - continuity of care and a lifestyle designed to maximize health
 - a learning process towards the greatest possible extent of independence
 - relationship building
 - security and safety for individuals with disabilities
 - a sense of feeling at home
 - an environment to develop social capabilities.
- Welcome people to the community without discrimination on the basis of level of ability, religion, sexual orientation, race, gender, colour, national, creed, or ethnic origin. And protect people from discrimination.
- We recognise the rights of the individual, including the right to:

- participate and contribute in all aspects of community life within both the Farm Community and the larger community as a citizen with full rights.
- freely choose to be a member of the Farm Community. Choice can be expressed in many different ways – through many means of communication, deep listening, watching how individuals react to situations, and so on. Choice should involve the chance to try things out before making a final commitment. Choice involves the individual and support circle.
- supports for personal choices that direct personal planning and decision making process. Supported decision making involving individual and support circle.
- a community culture that safeguards human dignity in an environment free from sexual, emotional, or physical abuse of any kind.
- fill one's daily life with meaningful work, meaningful dialogue and conversation, and meaningful cultural and educational experiences
- freedom of religious expression in the context of respect for others' beliefs and values.
- choose complementary medical and therapeutic treatments.
- a safe, aesthetic, and personalized home.
- autonomy of movement.
- experience fulfillment, happiness in life, and satisfaction in the environment.

b. COMPONENTS OF THE VISION

There are four major components to this enterprise. Each involves supports and services to people who might live as members of the Farm Community and/or in the wider community.

- **A HOME** (meaning any form of housing – single detached, townhouse, apartment, etc):
 - We will support individuals to live on the Farm. We will also support individuals to live in their own homes in the wider community.
 - We want an inclusive, integrated farm community. This means that the ratio of people with autism to others in the community should be 25:75 (or for every one person with autism, there should be three people without autism in the community).
 - If the “farm community” is located on more than one site, we want to ensure this level of integration at each site.
 - We believe that such a community will help ensure that natural supports are available from other members of the community. Paid support will supplement natural supports rather than the other way around.
 - To achieve this level of integration means that most people will be living in their own homes or

apartments with support, home sharing arrangements with families and other supporters, house parent arrangements, and so forth. One or two people with autism might share a home. Group living arrangements will be uncommon.

□ **WORK.**

- One of the reasons we like the idea of a farm or large rural property is that it provides the opportunity and flexibility for many different kinds of work, all the way from true agriculture to woodworking.
- The possibility of productive agriculture is an important part of our vision. This will help attract other members to the community and also provide work opportunities for supported members.
- The farm will provide many opportunities for work, paid and voluntary, for instance, in caring for crops, livestock and trees, and in related rural business services or services for other members of the ASD community.
- Individuals with ASD who do not live on the Farm will be able to work on the Farm.
- Individuals with ASD who live on the Farm will also be supported to work elsewhere in the broader community.

□ **ACTIVITY.**

- The farm may be used as a base for co-op day programs, respite and summer camps.
- It will provide an opportunity for people with ASD and other members of the broader community to enjoy a rural setting.

□ **CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE AND EXPERTISE.**

- A centre of excellence and expertise that brings together professionals with a key focus on ASD.
- Consultations and therapy of various kinds, to suit complex individual needs, can be provided to people living onsite and offsite in a comprehensive package, so families do not have to run around.
- The need for a resource centre of this kind does not necessarily mean it should be located on the Farm property. The need for the Centre is region-wide. It might be more conveniently located elsewhere.

LOCATION OF FARM COMMUNITY

- For practical reasons, the Farm Community should be located closer to an urban community so that interactions between the Farm and the broader community are easier.
- For zoning reasons, it might be necessary to locate a cluster of houses on one property and farming and business activities on an adjoining or very nearby property.

2. NEXT STEPS – Strategies and Task Groups

We agreed that we should not go out and look for a property at this time. There are specific next steps we can take, however, that can:

- help us learn about individual interest,
- help us figure out if we can attract other people to such an integrated community,
- provide opportunities for people right now, and
- begin development of the Centre.

From preliminary conversations, we think that the Ignatius Community could be open to our using parts of their lands and facilities for various purposes that would be compatible with the other users of Orchard Park and the Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph. The next step is to develop some concepts and proposals.

Four Task Groups were identified. Each will:

- develop an idea
- bring it back to the larger group for discussion and direction
- once the idea is developed, identify what kinds of resources will be required to move ahead
- bring the resource plan back to the larger group for discussion and direction.

In other words, the Task Groups will be accountable to the larger group.

Group 1: Agricultural Work

Three men agreed to develop ideas of how we might work on the parts of the Ignatius lands (and other land, if indicated) for such things as gardening, agriculture, pruning the orchard, woodlot management, cutting grass, trail maintenance and related activities. These can provide opportunities for work and small business development. Individuals can discover if they enjoy or are interested in such work.

Group 2: Summer Camp, Respite, Day Program Initiatives

Two members of our group agreed to develop ideas related to the possible use of resources at Ignatius for various other activities such as summer camp (residential or day), respite, and day program initiatives.

Group 3: An Initial Community

Another idea is a first effort at community involving the 25/75 ratio, attracting other people to be part of such a community, and being able to include people with ASD who have a variety of support needs. This would involve a smaller group of people living on one property. This idea would take longer to develop.

Group 4: Centre for Excellence

3. GOVERNANCE

One of the values stated in the ASD Farm Community and Centre paper was – “A community that inspires a sense of shared purpose and hope among all its members—persons with autism, family members, friends and professionals—so that all are represented in its leadership, management and sustained development.” This raises the question of how leaders and managers will truly represent people with autism who live on the Farm or are supported by it, their family and friends, other members of the Farm Community, and professionals. We have agreed that “we have to guard against domination by paid staff or managers, or by any particular group in the ASD cause.”

The larger issue is where control is vested and how decisions get made, by whom, and about which issues. For some things, there may have to be one or more corporations. For others, individuals and their support circles may be in control. Some of the areas of decision making and control include

- the overall effort – final control of the vision, values, and direction of all components of this enterprise
- property – ownership of and decisions about the farm property
- Farm Community – who belongs, what the community does, etc.
- farm activity – actually managing farm enterprises
- support arrangements for individuals
- hiring of personnel for support
- what the Centre does.

Possible decisions makers could include:

- the person with ASD
- family, friends, support circle
- other members of the Farm Community
- organization(s) that might receive support dollars
- organization(s) that might own property
- organization(s) that control the Centre.

For the time being, it is agreed that the group of people interested in moving the idea of a Farm Community and Centre forward will be the centre for discussion and decision. The various issues of governance do not necessarily have to be resolved in the near future. Various efforts and projects can proceed using existing organizations to flow money.