

Guelph Spring Conference, 2005

Creative Supports for Vulnerable Citizens

Displays and Poster Presentations

We invited groups and organizations to display information and success stories about their creative initiatives, such as:

- "deep listening" to vulnerable persons who do not speak
- helping self-advocates to direct their own supports
- creating and maintaining circles of friends to support good lives now and in the longer future
- circles of support for vulnerable persons who have no family
- creative options to have a home of one's own
- independence technologies
- recruiting volunteers to be informal friends
- ways to screen, train and appreciate excellent volunteers
- bridging gaps between adults with special needs and their neighbourhoods and communities
- supporting adults who want to continue learning, formally and informally
- enabling people to develop micro-enterprises
- artistic self-expression as therapy
- contributing to our communities
- lifesharing communities in households or larger units
- planning for good transitions—from school to adulthood, and for life after parents age and die
- caring for the caregivers
- how brokerage works
- what aroha/microboards can do

Displays were grouped to match the four workshop themes.

* indicates more detail is printed below in alphabetical order

† see workshop

Planning with the Person and Support Circles

Inclusion Network—with MAPS, PATH, CIRCLES

*Consumer/Survivor Initiatives in Mental Health

*Planned Lifetime Networks (Waterloo-Wellington-Oxford)

*Safe & Secure Futures (Extend-A-Family, Toronto)

Speaking Differently

Support Clusters Network—Canadian Mental Health Association

*Ubuntu Initiative

Homes Not Just Housing

*Aspergers Society: Housing Committee

- *Dave's Success Story
- Guelph Services for the Autistic (as housing trust)
- *Homes for Life, Peterborough
- †Housing Options, Community Living St Marys and Area
- *Independence Technologies by Hamilton Health Sciences

Meaningful Work and Recreation

- Micro-enterprises
- *Community Music Therapy Services (CMTS)
- Energy therapies, e.g. Reiki and Therapeutic Touch
- *Exercise Therapy: Mind, Body and Spirit in Balance
- Job-Fit, an initiative of the Learning Disabilities Association
- *Ju-Lis Delights, Guelph
- *Options Mississauga
- *Rebecca's Dream: new video *Revel in the Light*
- *Spark of Brilliance, Guelph

Co-ordinating Sustainable Good Lives

- *Transition initiatives and resources
- *Aroha entities of personal empowerment and support
- *Autism Society Ontario
- *Balancing Act: Personal Coaching & Workshops for Caregivers
- *Families for a Secure Future
- *Family Networks of Family Alliance Ontario
- *Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario
- *Special Needs Planning Group
- St Francis Advocates: Stepping Stones
- †Windsor-Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports
- †Windsor-Essex Family Network

There were also book displays from Parentbooks and AACI

Aroha Entities of Personal Empowerment and Support

- A mechanism that can keep a good life going beyond the parents, by giving committed friends sufficient legal powers to act with and for the vulnerable person
- Functions like a microboard (BC) or self-directed support corporation (some US states),
- Aroha is Maori word (Aotearoa/New Zealand) for love, caring, friendship, commitment and community in active not just abstract ways
- Can be incorporated under Ontario laws (though cannot be a charity for tax-creditable purposes as for benefit of one person)
- Can own a home, receive and manage support funds, hire and employ support workers, advise on best use of trust funds.

<http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/entities.shtml>

Aspergers Society of Ontario: Housing Committee

A group of parents of adults with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and individuals with AS who are concerned about the lack of housing. A committee of the Aspergers Society of Ontario, chaired by Dr. Kevin Stoddart.

The focus of our work is to create supportive housing, tailored to individual requirements for personal space, attention to sensory sensitivities, and unique personality traits. We feel that most adults with AS want to live in a self-contained unit (i.e., kitchen, washroom, bedroom). For those who choose to share living quarters, the building they share should have both private living spaces for each person and common areas to provide opportunities to build social skills, relationships with others, and other life skills. An essential part of our model is to build a circle of support for our sons and daughters.

We have been researching various supported living options that would meet the specific needs of adults with AS. We have visited Rougemount Co-op and Deohaeko Support Network; are establishing relationships with key community organizations; and have contacted and met with politicians. *Display by Sim Wong of Toronto*

ASPIRE: Autism Support Project: Information, Resources, Empowerment

A pilot initiative begun in August 2002 in Waterloo-Wellington, by Guelph Services for the Autistic with funding from Waterloo Wellington Autism Services.

Its broad goals are to support adults and older teens with ASD, with their family members and friends, to:

- Express their priorities and goals for good lives
- Make informed choices among available funded services
- Create relevant supports that may not be available from the traditional service system:

ASPIRE has made possible PATH events (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) for persons and their families and friends. PATHs are facilitated by professionals using the strategies that were pioneered by Inclusion Press.

ASPIRE's distinctive hallmarks are:

1. Concern for a whole life that suits each person's unique abilities, interests and needs, as these are known from the person herself/himself;

2. Respect for the personal support network of family and friends as a vital resource and safeguard for quality of life now and in the future;
3. Creative, individualized ways of ensuring that adults with autism have the most appropriate and empowering choices on all elements of a good life, including:
 - a personal support network of friends and family
 - a home of one's own that reflects one's preferences and needs
 - ways to express thoughts and feelings, make informed choices, and be heard
 - ways to continue learning and growing
 - ways to contribute meaningfully to the community
 - a safe and secure future.

<http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/aspire-project.shtml>

Autism Society Ontario's Adult Project

In May 2004, ASO began a project to promote, develop and enhance services for adults with ASD in Ontario. Activities include:

- Compiling a list of adult service providers in Ontario, key volunteers and/or advocacy groups on adult issues related to Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- Planning a survey to learn about numbers and needs in various Ontario regions. Discussions so far have shown the top issues to be Individualized Funding, specialized supports for adults, more networking/communication, better affordable housing, more support groups, information on ASD numbers and best practices, and increased advocacy re: ODSP regulations and income/employment supports.
- ASO's manual focusing on living with ASD in the adult years, including personal accounts and success stories, should be available by May 2005.
- ASO has advocated to the Ontario Government on adult issues--to MCSS on *Transforming Services in Ontario for People who have a Developmental Disability* in November 2004, and in most of the policy forums in this process; to the Legislative Committee on the changes to the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* related to the MCSS's planning for Ontarians with Developmental Disabilities; and to Ontario's Minister of Finance.
- In partnership with The Autism Group, ASO produced first hand accounts of adults on the Autism Spectrum in a booklet and a video.

<http://www.autismsociety.on.ca/>

Display by Patricia Gallin of London for ASO.

Balancing Act:

Personal Coaching for Parents/Caregivers

Balancing Act is a firm that offers personal coaching, consulting and training to individuals, groups and organizations, will introduce this growing new field of coaching and personal development.

Shirley Edwards offers coaching methods and tools to help parents and caregivers find that elusive balance. As in our advocacy efforts, the individualized approach rules.

Shirley is a trained Personal Life Coach and certified non-profit manager with an extensive background in program, project and organizational development and management in the non-profit disability field.

Shirley is a member of the Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario. Her passion is supporting others to create the lives that they want. As a parent of an adult son with multiple disabilities and a caregiver/coordinator for an aging parent, Shirley knows first hand the “roller coaster” of balance and change in living with disability and health challenges.

Since 2000, Shirley has been studying and working in the Personal Development field with a passion for bringing the benefits of this work to fellow parents and people who face challenges and change in their lives.

Consumer/Survivor Initiatives in Mental Health

From Madhouse to Our House is a new DVD launched March 2005, to illustrate evolution in mental health care. A rare look at consumer/survivor initiatives in mental health, it was produced as a new way of introducing an emerging model for mental health care to a wide audience.

Consumer/survivor initiatives (CSIs) transform in a fundamental way how people with mental health concerns are supported. They go from being consumers of services and survivors of the system to active participants who support one another and work for community change.

“While there are many efforts underway to reform or improve mental health services, this one is unique in that it puts consumers in control of their own supports,” said Geoff Nelson, a [psychology](#) professor at Laurier and the principal investigator of a five-year study of CSIs. “With the help of the government, individuals who have experienced mental health issues have developed their own organizations, ones that are operated exclusively by and for mental health consumer/survivors.”

While such initiatives have surfaced around the world, they are relatively new and limited in number. Ontario became the first province in Canada to fund CSIs in 1991 and is now home to 60 initiatives.

Information provided by Dr Joanna Ochocka, Project Manager, and Director, Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

73 King St. W., Suite 300, Kitchener, ON N2G 1A7

<http://www.crehs.on.ca/>

Community Music Therapy Services (CMTS)

A non-profit charitable organization, comprising a small group of music therapists and a board of directors, and encompassing the Waterloo and Wellington regions. The mission of CMTS is to provide music therapy services to persons with special needs and to promote music therapy as a

profession. Beginning in the Fall of 2005, CMTS will be providing services to persons of all ages.

Specifically for adults, music therapy can enhance the quality of life, increase self esteem, provide an outlet for emotional and self expression, and support physical and cognitive functioning. Creative experiences in instrumental playing, improvisation, singing, movement, and song-writing are used to support all goal areas. *Contact: Susan Lemessurier-Quinn, 822-8873*

Dave's Success Story

Dave's family had a vision in 1974 and he has achieved their dream. Dave continues to prove his life is flourishing and successful. He has his own home and micro-enterprise/small business. He runs "Dave's Deliveries" with support from one of his personal assistants. Dave (now 30) rents his small comfortable accessible home, and lives on his own with support from personal assistants, friends, relatives and neighbours.

Dave's courage and determination to live in the community led to his achievement of independence in his own home 2001. To many (like the doctor who diagnosed him) this would seem impossible. To him and our family a much desired and achievable objective. We keep on repeating loud and clear "just keep watching, Dave will achieve more!" Dave is a shining example for others to follow.

Dave's story is published as ***A PLACE CALLED HOME: for families of children with a disability and the professionals who serve them***, by Alison C. Ouellette, 2002. *Send cheque for \$12 CAN plus \$3 shipping/handling to A.C. Ouellette, 10810 Riverside Drive E, Windsor, ON, CANADA N8P 1A4.*

Exercise Therapy: Mind, Body and Spirit in Balance

Fitness professionals spend a great deal of time motivating, inspiring and assisting others in their pursuit of improved health. We educate individuals on the benefits of regular activity with hope to increase their current and future level of health.

Wellness is the search for enhanced quality of life, personal growth and potential through the behaviours and attitude of positive lifestyles. To achieve balance in our lives, we need to take care of our Mind, Body and Spirit. Our bodies gather physical strength through physical activity and exercise. If we continue to challenge ourselves physically, our bodies constantly change and evolve positively. These responses to physical activity keep us healthier and more easily able to meet the demands of each day.

Whether one has physical disabilities, mental health or cognitive and sensory impairments, exercise has a place in our everyday lives. Exercise stimulates the cardiorespiratory system and muscular and skeletal strength. It also improves balance, coordination, agility and flexibility for easier mobility and reducing depression and anxiety while assisting in stress management.

Minerva Gardiner of Guelph presented a display.(519) 822-9975

Families for a Secure Future

Families for a Secure Future is committed to reaching out to and supporting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families by establishing a network of local family groups across Ontario. These mutual support groups come together to learn and to support one another to take the next step toward imagining and creating a better future for their sons/daughters. Families for a Secure Future is based on the fundamental principle that individuals and their families can define and prioritize their own needs. It is believed that individuals can make choices and direct their lives with support. To this end, Families for a Secure Future is governed by families and individuals themselves.

Dedicated to serving vulnerable adults with developmental disabilities and assisting them to take up their full citizenship in the community. It is a family-governed, provincial, non-profit charitable organization that is based on building networks of support for both families and individuals so that there are people that care about them and will help them to make secure plans for the future. Our vision focuses on supporting individuals within the context of their family/friends to develop an individual plan for moving forward and creating a meaningful life for themselves. This plan evolves over time and looks at both the immediate and the long-term future. Through support to local family groups, families benefit directly by increasing their opportunities for learning and their network of support.

Visit the website at <http://www.familiesforasecurefuture.com/>

Active in the Wellington, Dufferin and Durham regions of Ontario. Display by Nancy and Marvin McDougall.

Family Alliance Ontario

www.family-alliance.com

Who we are:

Family Alliance Ontario is a support group of individuals, families and family networks dedicated to fostering the strength, stability, competence and knowledge that we can offer each other. Our membership comprises and welcomes all people who share our values and goals.

Our Mission:

We are an alliance of citizens that offer knowledge, tools and networking opportunities to individuals with disabilities and their families to assist them to realize a vision that includes having valued relationships, choice and control in their lives and enables inclusion through meaningful contribution and participation in their communities. There are 15 local family networks in Ontario directly affiliated with us and many more family groups who share our goals.

Current Goals:

- Create a strong family voice
- Support individuals and families in building their capacity
- Support the work of local family groups and networks
- Work for individualized supports to achieve inclusion

Copies of the Spring 2005 issue of The Compass were available for all participants. Display by Barbara Ostroff

Guelph Services for the Autistic

Incorporated as a charitable, not-for-profit corporation in 1980, and reorganized in 1997 as a housing trust for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. It is not an agency, has no paid staff, and depends on the voluntary efforts of members. Creative support mechanisms being pioneered by GSA are attracting interest and being followed as models.

Important elements of GSA's approach:

1. Focus on the individual person:
 - friends and family listening deeply to the person
 - person-centred planning and individualized funding
 - self-directed plans for good lives in home communities
 - choices of how and with whom to live
 - encouragement of self-expression by whatever communication modes work most reliably
 - adults with whom GSA has housing agreements are the corporation's "active members" (others are associate members)
2. Emphasis on natural social relationships among family, friends and neighbours. GSA recognizes and works with:
 - circles of friends/personal support networks
 - aroha or incorporated entities of personal empowerment and support (like microboards)
 - creative strategies for community inclusion

Current GSA roles and efforts:

1. Trusteeship role in owning and maintaining a home for each adult, with various legal agreements to protect the person. (So far funds are contributed by families, but other options are possible in future).
2. Developing more living support options, such as "anchor" and companion homesharers
3. Recruiting volunteer friends and host families for adults with autism and their families
4. Outreach through ASPIRE and ACES projects, to encourage and empower other families in Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin region to learn from the experience of pioneers
5. Information through OAARSN (Ontario Adult Autism Research & Support Network) and AAIWW newsletter (***Adult Autism Issues in Waterloo-Wellington***)
6. The Adult Autism Needs Survey is associated with ASPIRE, but also offered more widely to help adults and families measure quality of life. GSA and OAARSN treat data confidentially to generalize current situations and needs of adults with ASD. Long-form and short-form surveys may be completed on paper or online.
7. Sending representatives to workshops and conferences on relevant planning issues
8. Organizing workshops and conferences, and collaborating with organizations who work with and for vulnerable adults, notably in our region Waterloo-Wellington Autism Services.
9. Family-to-family counseling and support
10. Partnerships with groups and organizations who share our vision and values.

Ontario Adult Autism Research and Support Network website (OAARSN) offers information and communication tools, with opportunities for mutual support and encouragement.

Click <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca> to reach OAARSN main page, then use the buttons and Search to reach the site's features. You may join OAARSN List to receive weekly bulletins. Contact GSA about any of its roles, or to make a tax-creditable gift, or send news to OAARSN or *AAIWW*.

Homes for Life

We are a group of 23 families in Peterborough with teenagers and young adults who live with intellectual/physical disabilities. We came together to plan and advocate for appropriate, safe, affordable, accessible and inclusive living options for our sons and daughters.

We provide collective support for those facing transitional changes, brainstorming community resources and facilitating long-and short-term planning, both for the group and for individuals. As families begin to know one another, we hope for partnerships to develop, leading to resource sharing and creative living opportunities.

We want homes in communities where a spirit of mutual support and a respect for individuality and differences in others will lead to rewarding, interdependent relationships. We demand more individualized and flexible funding, consistent with a citizenship perspective. Person-centered, individualized support and personal support workers/facilitators for people who require assistance throughout their lives are priority issues. Our goal is to create meaningful lives for our daughters and sons, no matter where they live.

Information by Marilyn Atkins.

Read more at

http://www.communitylivingontario.ca/Daily_News/2005/July/July4a.htm

Independence Technologies

A program of Hamilton Health Sciences that specializes in Electronic Aids to Daily Living (EADL), also known as environmental controls. EADL enable people with physical and/or cognitive limitations to control a wide range of electronic devices in the home, school or workplace. Devices may include alarm calls, telephones, door openers, stereos, TVs, VCRs, electronic beds, lights, tracking systems and appliances. EADL range from simple, off-the-shelf solutions to more complex systems. The program offers a complete service:

- Professional assessment by an occupational therapist and a rehabilitation technologist.
- Sales of an extensive range of products ranging from simple to complex
- Service and installation
- Education

Independence Technologies:

Elizabeth Steggles, Manager

Hamilton Health Sciences

Osler Building, Suite 114/111

Box 2000, Hamilton, Ontario, L8N 3Z5

Telephone: (905) 521-2353

E-mail: steggles@hhsc.ca

Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario

A group of dedicated volunteers--persons, families, friends, organizations and agencies--all working together to make Individualized Funding a reality in Ontario. All members sign the following accord:

“The Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario supports the self-determination of persons with disabilities. We believe that all people should have control over decisions concerning where they live, with whom they live, with whom they associate, and how they spend their lives. In order to achieve this we recognize that Ontario must develop a system of funding whereby the person requiring assistance, supported as appropriate by family and/or significant others, has access to and control over the funds allocated for his/her supports.”

IFCO holds conferences and training workshops building capacity for individualized planning, funding and supports and the development of support networks or circles. IFCO has developed many valuable resources at: www.individualizedfunding.ca
Display by Joyce Balaz who maintains the IFCO website.

Ju-Lis Delights

A charitable organization which creates employment opportunities for physically or mentally challenged persons by recognizing their abilities. We produce Exquisite hand made Belgian chocolates, that are offered in the Guelph Market on Saturday mornings and also made to order. We hope to have a core group of employees, who will then be able to train new persons with disabilities. Ju-Lis Delights will employ as many individuals as the market demand will justify. The trained individuals will have learned skills to make them more readily employable in the community.

Contact: Elisabeth Niimi of Guelph, 519-821-4822.

Options in Mississauga

Options was founded in 1991 by a group of parents of developmentally handicapped, including autistic/PDD, adults who were concerned about the lack of opportunities for their children after age 21.

Options is a Registered Charitable Non-Profit organization. In 1994, a store was opened in Port Credit, Ontario, providing business services such as faxing and photocopying while giving valuable job experience and skills to D.C. adults. Trainees work on cash registers, computers, do faxing and photocopying, working at their own level. They also provide flyer delivery and yard work services.

Options also provides opportunities for Life Skills Training and Recreational Activities.

Thelma Wheatley, past-president, explained and illustrated Options in the session after lunch.

<http://peel.cioc.ca/details.asp?RSN=17248&Number=135>

Planned Lifetime Networks (Waterloo-Wellington-Oxford)

An incorporated not-for-profit charity in Ontario and affiliate of PLANtm of BC, which has pioneered the formation of personal support networks for people with disabilities since 1988. Visit PLAN's website at www.PLAN.ca

Members of Planned Lifetime Networks envision a future in which people with disabilities:

- Enjoy financial security
- Live in a home that is a sanctuary
- Participate in a caring and hospitable community
- Are supported by family and friends
- Have their wishes and choices respected
- Are protected from abuse and exploitation
- Make contributions to their communities
- Have families who enjoy peace of mind.

Planned Lifetime Networks will support families to develop quality of life and safe and secure futures for their relatives with disabilities. We will:

- Assist families to plan for the future
 - Connect families to others in similar circumstances
 - Support people with disabilities to understand their options and make choices
 - Facilitate the establishment of a loving and caring personal support network for each person with a disability
 - Provide advice and referral on developing wills and estate plans, creating discretionary trusts, and maintaining government benefits
 - Provide advice and referral on alternatives to the current government-administered social services
 - Monitor the quality of programs and services a person with a disability receives, particularly after their parents and family members are no longer able to do so.
 - Provide recommendations and advice on home ownership and legal guardianship options
 - Monitor trends in tax and trust legislation, and work for better tax breaks for families who care for disabled relatives
 - Create a greater community awareness of the contributions that can be made by people with disabilities.
- 5-240 Erb Street West, Suite 306, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 6K6, phone (519) 746-1188, email plnww@sympatico.ca

Rebecca's Dream

Rebecca is a 23 year old woman who has overcome typical cultural attitudes and has created, along with her family and support circle, an exciting life, working at meaningful jobs in the community, developing wonderful friendships, planning for her move into her own apartment with friends in 6 months and much more. Rebecca's story is very inspirational and is one that all can learn a lot from. The story of Rebecca's contribution to her community as artist, dancer, dreamer, teacher and friend is told in her new 13 minute video called "Revel in the Light." Her experience with circle building, tools for planning and the ins and outs of individualized support and community building is very helpful to others. Rebecca's new video will be shown in the session after lunch.

Rebecca and her support group are members of the Ubuntu Initiative.

Safe and Secure Futures Networks aim to empower families to develop and nurture a support circle with their family member who has a disability. Circles support the person to have choice and control, and to experience a variety of meaningful relationships. The Safe and Secure Futures Networks offer monthly opportunities to share and learn from each other, building our confidence to invite people to listen to hopes and dreams, consider possibilities, and plan with the individual we love. Meeting focus topics offer something to “suit“ everyone:

- ♥ Relationships-The heart of the matter
- ◆ Ensuring Financial Security and Estate Planning
- ♠ Creating the right place to live- and the right support
- ♣ Person-centred Planning-with a support circle

A Good Life by Al Etmanski, informs and guides these forums for mutual support and information sharing.

Individual support circle facilitation may be arranged.

Extend-A-Family receives funding for Safe and Secure Futures through a City of Toronto Community Services Grant. Christy Barber, Coordinator

Spark of Brilliance

A Guelph-based initiative launched in 1999 to promote mental health through creativity, conceived out of a belief that involvement in creative expression can play a pivotal role in the healing process. The program is intended to empower persons dealing with serious mental health issues, and the family allies who support them, in discovering an interest, a talent, or an untapped resource, and to foster creativity. They believe that within each person resides an untapped potential and creative spirit. The Spark of Brilliance initiative seeks to uncover and spark that creative spirit, and help make it manifest. Components include:

- * Educational Workshops
- * Creative Workshops
- * Creative Mentorship
- * Community Partners
- * Outreach Sharing

Judith Rosenberg, founder and co-ordinator, set up a display and presented a video about Spark of Brilliance in the session after lunch.

"Special Needs" Planning Group

An organization that is made up of parents of people with disabilities. Our focus is to assist families in preparing financial and estate plans that will ensure that their sons or daughters with a disability will enjoy a decent quality of life now and in the future. Our plans make use of Henson Trusts, Wills, Funding Mechanisms like family estates and life insurance programs and Life Plans which are designed to provide for our children after we are gone without affecting entitlement to ODSP benefits.

We do not charge any fees for our services, which means that everyone can take advantage of our knowledge and expertise no matter what their financial situation.

For further information, please visit our web based resource materials at

www.specialneedsplanning.ca or email Graeme Treeby at graemetreeby@sympatico.ca

Transition Initiatives and Resources

A transition is any event that results in changes to relationships, routines, assumptions or roles. Transitions are a normal part of life and occur throughout the life cycle. While any individual can have problems with transitions, those with special needs often have more difficulty managing transitions in their lives.

Current research shows that effective transitions are planned, collaborative efforts and are comprehensive in scope.

T Taking advice from the student, teachers, family, therapists and community.

R Re-assessing student academic, social, vocational, and interpersonal skills.

A Adapting to new students, authority figures and environments.

N Noting and evaluating the process.

S Starting long-range plans early to give students knowledge of available supports.

I Individualized Program Plans that meet individual needs.

T Taking responsibility for lifelong learning.

I Involves students in planning for their future.

O Open discussions with teachers or community members at the receiving end.

N Non-confrontational and effective models of advocacy.

Nancy Cherry, currently ASPIRE Advocate for GSA, researched and designed the Transitions display to apply mainly to vulnerable teens and young adults. She acknowledges the following sources for the first two paragraphs: Schlossberg's Transition Theory, 1995, which is also discussed in Transition Planning for Students with LD

http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/unlocking/unlock_7.pdf

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/page.php?p=93&fp=94&sp>

Aspects of effective TRANSITIONS are taken from *Effective Practices in Special Education Programs* No. 1 Fall 2001

http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/practices/transition.pdf

The Ubuntu Initiative

We started as a small group whose lives are intimately bound with highly vulnerable people. Some of us, for up to twenty years, have been accompanied by Peter Dill and engaged deeply with one another in our efforts to discern and build on all that is good in the lives of our sons and daughters. Together, our little group holds many lives. We "share the same truth", i.e. the experience of collaborating with particular individuals who have a developmental disability in ways that bring life to us all. We are friends. We are deeply committed to people who are vulnerable, to family life, to friendship and community. Although many of us have sought and received government resources through one agency or another who value the lives of our sons and daughters, fundamentally, we turn to one another, to neighbours and friends for life and sustenance. The Ubuntu Initiative consists of parents and friends of particular individuals who have a developmental disability. We come together to imagine and to create, with these individuals, a different

and more hopeful future, rooted in gentleness, interdependence, and deep friendship. All who share such imaginings and aspirations, particularly those who long for a more abundant and life enhancing future for their own son or daughter, are welcome to join us.

Our goal is to create a context, a community of friendships, that will endure overtime “where the sharing of the same truth binds us together” (i.e. the experience of collaborating with particular individuals who have a developmental disability) in ways that bring life to us all. Ubuntu is a South African Zulu word meaning: “My humanity is inextricably bound up in your humanity.”

Objectives

- I. **Engagement with families** who have sons and daughters who are labelled with a developmental disability.
- II. **Forming alliances** with individuals and groups and organizations of like-mind.
- III. Among all involved **increasing our capacity for gentleness, interdependence and deep friendship.**
- IV. **Creating opportunities for learning.**

I. The Central Work – Engagement with Families

The central work of The Ubuntu Initiative, the place where we focus our energies as families, is to collaborate with our sons and daughters and with each other as families in order to bring life to us all. This leads us to:

- a) listen deeply to our sons and daughters,
- b) reflect on what our hearts and minds are showing us to do,
- c) work with each other in strengthening our relationships with our sons and daughters,
- d) deepen the actions we take with and for them and with and for ourselves,
- e) expand the connections and opportunities for fostering relationship and promoting friendship within the wider community and among us all.

II. Creating the Context for the Central Work with Families and Individuals - Forming Alliances

We desire to be friends with one another. We desire to hold our sons and daughters within the realm of friendship. The concrete expression of this desire is to find a vessel or container (a context) within which people who share this truth are compelled to join together to seek this common purpose. We do envision some form of collaborative, alliance, association or consortium with individuals, groups and organizations who share our central truth. We have learned, that, before all else, faithful relationships of mutuality and love are essential to human thriving inclusive of and centred by our sons and daughters who have been labelled with a developmental disability.

III. Increase our capacity for gentleness, interdependence and deep friendship

We want for ourselves and for those involved with us to be clear on our desire to build a culture of gentleness, interdependence and deep friendship. This is primary in our work together. To be connected to the broader community is important but secondary to the fundamental need and desire to hold close and live these values to the utmost.

One of the specific expressions of this pursuit is through connection with Gentle Teaching International. Gentle Teaching is based on a psychology of human interdependence. It asks caregivers to look at themselves and their spirit of gentleness to find ways to express warmth and unconditional love toward those who are the most disenfranchised from family and community life.

IV. Creating the Opportunities for Learning.

We are committed to a process of on-going learning. We achieve this partially through:

- Regular core group meetings
- Involvement in other Family Group gatherings
- A mentoring process for those called to be facilitators
- Monthly Evenings of Reflection titled A Gathering
- Day long workshops geared to topics of interest for paid supporters, families, individuals who are disabled, ordinary community members.
- Creating and/or being part of study sessions with people who share our truth
- Participating in various conferences and workshops where themes are coherent with what we are about as a little group
- Co-sponsoring with other groups and organizations events in such areas as Gentle Teaching, community building, the L'Arche philosophy, the work of John Macmurray, etc.
- Engagement with faith communities particularly in the pursuit of social justice
- Encouraging each other to write and to share our writing
- Identifying books, articles, poems, audio visual resources
- Producing multi-media presentations via small videos – home grown or professionally done.

How to Contact Us If you are interested in being part of The Ubuntu Initiative, please contact Peter Dill at 416-910-0770 or via email peterdill@rogers.com