

## Policy Forum on Supporting and Strengthening Families

Co-sponsored by

Family Alliance Ontario, Member Agencies Representatives' Council and the Ministry of Community and Social Services

March 31, 2005

### Speakers:

*Al Etmanski, Co-founder of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network and former Executive Director of the BC Association for Community Living*

Individuals never ask for programs or services, but they have the same needs and desires as other people:

- Caring and loving relationships;
- Living in a place of one's own;
- Contributing;
- Making one's own decisions;
- Basic financial security

We must first focus on meeting these needs and desires.

### Key points:

Issues	Actions
Families bear an invisible burden including the ignorant comments, stares, and sorrow on behalf of our children, as well as self-hatred and disillusionment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove this burden by creating truly inclusive, supportive communities</li></ul>
Families yearn for sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Embed full citizenship in structures and institutions</li><li>• Change cultural consciousness from needs and inability to contribution and participation</li></ul>
Families need healthy systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nurture resilience</li><li>• Insist on adaptability</li><li>• Create conditions for innovation through research and development</li></ul>
Family resilience must be nurtured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Change role from advocates to peacemakers</li><li>• Fund mechanisms that strengthen problem solving, creativity and adaptive capacity of families</li><li>• Fund to ensure supplement rather than supplant families</li></ul>

These articles by Al Etmanski expand upon the key points he covered in his message:

- *Neighbourliness and Common Sense*  
<http://www.philia.ca/about/commonsense.htm>
- *For Everything There is a Season*  
<http://www.plan.ca/law-reform/For%20Everything%20There%20is%20a%20Season.doc>

*Michelle Friesen, Windsor-Essex Family Network Coordinator*

Michelle has been extremely active with the Windsor Essex Family Network and has been very involved in the transformation of how services are delivered in Windsor-Essex Counties. She is also co-chair of the Individualized Funding Coalition.

Michelle and her family have worked together to creatively support Lisa for 24 years. Lisa is a daughter, sister, neighbour, friend and member of her community. Michelle's beliefs in citizenship and inclusion lead her to challenge traditional supports for her daughter. Michelle discussed the many advantages of including Lisa in her family home despite having complex developmental and physical needs.

*Karen Cloer Program, Manager for Adult and Children Respite Program and the Community Support Team*

*Robin Siennas, Coordinator, Pilot Parents Toronto*

Both these initiatives are through Community Living Toronto:

<http://www.communitylivingtoronto.ca>

- **Pilot Parents**

This is a program where knowledgeable parents volunteer to team up with a parent who has a newly born or newly diagnosed child with a developmental disability. Parents find this approach particularly helpful in navigating the system. The program is expanding to include support to families moving from pre-school to the school system and parents from other cultures. The United Way supports the program. This funding has made it possible to hire Robin as coordinator.

- **ConnectABILITY**

Over the past three years the Association has been creating an accessible virtual community on the Internet called ConnectABILITY. While still in the project development phase, it has demonstrated immense potential in providing a learning and support environment for people with a developmental disability, their families and their support networks. ConnectABILITY is a three phase project: the first phase, Preschool, focused on preparing young children and their parents for school and community life through innovative software, expert consulting, and caregiver training and shared support. ConnectABILITY is now in its second phase, Transitional Youth.

### **Small Group Sessions:**

In addition to a keynote speaker and panel presentations on experiences in family-to-family support, the day-long forum offered "solution sessions" to allow participants to select from a number of discussion topics facing families, including:

- Unbundling resources
- Working together as a community to better support families
- Securing the future with financial planning
- Creative solutions that remove barriers to participation
- Youth transitioning from school
- Challenges for senior parents

I chose to attend the following two sessions:

- Youth Transitioning from School
- Parent-Driven Residential Options

Please note: There will eventually be notes written by the facilitator from all the forums I attended. I will forward these notes as soon as I receive them. These documents will include information about the sessions that I was not able to attend.

### Youth Transitioning from School

Examples of innovative models:

- Future Directions Workshop (Hamilton Family Network)

- Community Work Experience Program (Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board)
- Community Living Campbellford/Brighton (accreditation with distinction, see <http://www.accreditationontario.com/congratcamp.htm>)

There was discussion around the 25 Personal Outcome Measures developed by Accreditation Ontario. These are attached in the document *Personal Outcome Measures*.

Our discussion identified these needs:

- Consistent mechanism for interministerial collaboration
- Elimination of earning barriers for ODSP
- Availability of concrete information to act as a guide to families
- Transportation requirements – to and from work, social events, etc.
- Adequate funding of flexible transition supports
- Greater use of person-centred planning

The group made three recommendations to MCSS:

1. More information, easier to access by families
2. Greater support for individualized planning
3. Equitable, standard access across the province – single access points must not be gatekeepers to the system

#### Parent-Driven Residential Options

Two programs were presented:

- Residential Alternatives (Toronto)
- Opportunities Mississauga for 21 Plus

#### *Residential Alternatives*

Two-bedroom apartments are used to teach independent living skills under parental supervision. The average length of stay is six months. Best outcomes are achieved when transition occurs at a typical. Parents pay the rent on the apartment.

#### *Opportunities Mississauga for 21 Plus*

<http://www.om21.ca/>

Ron Pruessen

Email: [pruessen@chass.utoronto.ca](mailto:pruessen@chass.utoronto.ca)

This program focuses on community capacity and community endowments matched by the government. There are budgetary concerns in setting up suitable homes. OM21 is attempting to form a cohesive unit, which will have the ability to relate concerns to government bodies with the hopeful result of providing more homes.

OM21 is interested in forming alliances with similar groups across Ontario (and beyond?). They are currently working with Christian Horizons.

The discussion group made six recommendations to MCSS:

1. Increase the number of individualized transition options
2. Secure various sources of funds
3. Leverage money to have an impact on the housing industry and other financial institutions (The disability community is an undiscovered pot of gold!)
4. Establish registered special needs plan / investment
5. Create government incentives to use assets for housing purchases
6. Address the lack of available support services, even if suitable housing is found

With thanks for allowing me this tremendous learning opportunity,

Nancy Cherry