

## Evaluation of the Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project - Final Report

### OIFN and IFDP Collaborative response - March 2017

It appears that the Evaluators hold a belief that Independent Facilitation is a confusing, complicated, and costly intervention that does not demonstrate greater benefit than Person Directed Planning done by a community agency (Recommendation 1, page 102).

Since IFDP is a "demonstration project," we must be open to the potential of such a conclusion. However, serious problems with the data and analysis reported from this evaluation leave too much doubt to justify this conclusion.

Below are our reflections on the IFDP Evaluation Report submitted by Power Analysis.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Remove Recommendation #1: The claim that Independent Facilitation produces outcomes that are not significantly different from Person Directed Planning at much greater cost cannot be supported for three reasons:
  - it is based on the mistaken notion that Independent Facilitation is equivalent to Person Directed Planning
  - a crude and misleading cost comparison grossly overestimates the cost of Independent Facilitation, and
  - Limits to the comparison study substantially reduce confidence in judgements about the significance of changes.
- Qualitative findings are under-reported and under-utilized. This discounts much of the work that Independent Facilitators do in response to situations that are often complex and challenging. Poor integration of material from case studies reinforces the mistaken idea that the contribution of Independent Facilitation is no more than the production of Person Directed plans.
- The Perceptions and Concerns of people with developmental disabilities and their families are reduced to the survey responses of less than 10% of participants. Oddly, the Report remains incurious about the very high level of satisfaction that a small sample reported on the survey, to say nothing of the positive life changes indicated but unexplored in Section 4.7.
- The Report fails in its appreciation of the life experiences and perspectives that shape SIPDDA and System Transformation. It ignores the hard, often uphill work that people with developmental disabilities and their family must do to live a good life. Its talk of clients and 'treatment group' and failure to discriminate action that leads to social inclusion show insensitivity to the substance of person-first,

person-directed reforms. This lack of understanding and empathy reaches its height in the characterization of a woman who has apparently suffered repeated rapes as a naked female client (p.62).

- Skepticism is a virtue in evaluation. Unfortunately, the Report moves past testing the confidence that insiders have in their work and conveys a tone of disrespect and antagonism. Perceptions of Independent Facilitation practitioners, which form the bulk of the information the Evaluator collected, are treated dismissively as expressions of self-interest. An admittedly flawed comparison study is held up as if it disclosed all that decision makers need to judge the merit and worth of Independent Facilitation.

**Confidence in Recommendation 1, the main conclusion of the Final Evaluation Report, is substantially decreased by these limits<sup>1</sup> which are acknowledged in the report:**

- Interviewing and surveying a truncated, non-random, self-selected sample of respondents (page 7)
- Comparing responses by groups who differ from one another in important and undocumented ways in addition to their participation in independent facilitation or the comparison group (page 9)
- A low rate of return for surveys (about a third of that called for in the proposed Evaluation Design)
- A survey, the baseline and follow-up participant questionnaire, not developed by the Evaluator, which makes statistical analysis a challenge (page 9)

The Report assures, “[s]tatistics will help control for the observable differences” (page 9). The Evaluator’s analytic skills apparently meet the challenge of a Questionnaire that was not designed for the Evaluator’s purpose and re-purposing interview data raised the response rate on some items to a bit less than half the number called for in the Evaluation design.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the gap between the usual criteria for a fair quasi-experimental study and this Evaluation’s comparison of a non-randomly selected group of project participants to a non-comparable comparison group is a big one.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Report these limits were imposed by the Ministry to respect choice and protect participants from excessive demands for data.

<sup>2</sup> Some conclusions are still based on very small numbers of responses. For example, 33 responses establish the conclusion that “over 90% of participants/families were satisfied or very satisfied with their plan to reach their personal goals (24)”. The Report is inconsistent in including the number of responses in its tables.

It is a matter for debate whether the statistical tools the Evaluator applied are powerful enough to build a bridge from substantial uncertainty that is sturdy enough to justify reducing the availability of supports that already offer benefits, including benefits demonstrated by the Evaluation to 1055 people. There are too many unaccounted differences to support the opinion that Person Directed Planning facilitated by agency staff is a cheaper alternative to Independent Facilitation.

There are confidence lowering concerns about the survey (the Participant Questionnaire) apart from the low response rate:

- While the Report says that many participant surveys were answered by family members, it is not clear how many comparison group surveys were answered by agency staff
- The survey does not seem to have been designed to accommodate people with cognitive impairments. Work with advisors with developmental disabilities would almost certainly have increased their direct participation
- Survey items don't discriminate outcomes that are more or less valued by Ministry policy. A person working in a sheltered workshop could accurately say that they have a paid job; so could a person working in an individual, integrated community job. The second response is more consistent with the Ministry's policy direction than the first is.

The comparison study does not seem to have been designed to compare the effects of two interventions and so cannot be read as if the relative effects of Independent Facilitation and agency based planning have been appropriately compared. Such a study would assure that those in either randomly selected and otherwise equivalent group received the same intervention as others in their group. Not only are the groups in this Evaluation not comparable, there is no report that the Evaluator assured fidelity to well defined approaches to the facilitation of Person Directed Plans and Independent Facilitation. Such uniformity of administration would of course be nonsense given that both approaches are by definition tailored to individual circumstances.

### **The Evaluation Ignores Critical Aspects of the Project and Its Context**

Evaluations often include a Theory of Change, a comprehensive description of how and why desired changes are expected to happen in a particular context. The Evaluation apparently draws its Theory of Change from a previously developed Logic Model that treats the project too narrowly. The Logic Model reads as if Independent Facilitation were simply a means of delivering, following up, and revising Person Directed Plans (OIFN raised concerns with the logic model early on); and, as if "the relational context for change" identified in the objectives were confined to planning and action on individual plans. This ignores the fact that Independent Facilitation practitioners have multiple ways of accompanying people and families to discover and move toward a desirable future. Person Directed Planning is only one mode of accompaniment.

The exploration of Independent Facilitation happens in the context of legislation (SIPDDA) and Developmental Services Transformation, which aims to realign the whole system to focus on increasing independence and full inclusion. These values focus inquiry and call for measures of quality that are sensitive to the extent to which people are individually supported to play valued roles in community life. Failure to take account of this value context has led to defects in the overall Report and the comparison study, in particular, which are described below.

There are multiple relational contexts which people and their facilitators have influenced in the project so far, though the Evaluation has not accounted for them adequately when it has noted them at all. A serious consequence of these omissions is the erroneous computation of the cost of Independent Facilitation in Recommendation 1:

- Independent Facilitation is committed to assisting participants to connect first to community resources, roles and relationships before looking to service settings. This means building effective local relationships.
- Some people and families are isolated when they first meet Independent Facilitators. This means finding effective ways to connect local people and families with others on similar journeys.
- A number of people are still waiting for sufficient funding or capable workers to provide the supports that will increase their independence and inclusion. This means building effective relationships with DSOs and service providers.

IFDP is also a demonstration of rapidly scaling an innovation. Five of the seven IFOs were re-created within the term of the project. Small local initiatives grew rapidly in numbers of participants, number of facilitators, and the extent of the territory they cover. The project also laid foundations to expand the number of places with access to Independent Facilitation. None of this work is reflected in the Logic Model, nor in the findings of the Evaluation.

**We notice a major inaccuracy in the statement of goals for the project (agreed upon by OIFN and MCSS at the start of the project) that in our opinion, effects the trajectory of the evaluation report, its methodology, analysis and conclusions.**

The goal of the IFDP is intended to expand the capacity of independent facilitation for people with developmental disabilities across the province, increase the number of people receiving independent facilitation and to study the benefits of independent facilitation. In addition, the IFDP intended to build the capacity of independent facilitation organizations (February 2, 2015, MCSS Letters of Commitment).

The Draft Evaluation report, alternatively, states:

“[t]he goal of the IFDP is to provide person-directed planning for adults with a developmental disability through independent facilitation” (Executive Summary, page iv).

Very importantly, this goal statement is different in both substance and understanding of independent facilitation and the purposes stated for the IFDP.

As a result, the Evaluation assumes that Independent Facilitation can be treated as if it were a well-defined intervention, which is false to its history. In Ontario, a variety of innovators have created a variety of ways to support people with developmental disabilities and their families to pursue their sense of a good community life. Some of these innovators work in the context of TPA organizations that also offer services; those involved in the demonstration project do not (though many have strong alliances with service providers). Both groups of innovators have shared a commitment to self-directed or family directed individualized support for community inclusion and an interest in person-centered planning that often pre-date SIPDDA. These commitments by no means imply uniformity of procedure or technique.

Exploration of practical differences has been an important part of OIFN Capacity Building activities. Differences in the ways Independent facilitation practitioners describe their work and its purpose appears to have fallen outside the scope of evaluation methodology used by the evaluator.

In essence, the demonstration project funds seven independent facilitation organizations and their distinctive approaches, which by definition further differentiate depending on each person's particular circumstances. This makes assessment of the project very different from those that focus on the effects of better defined or more cause-effect interventions, such as language learning.

### **Comparison Study Methodology**

The strength of a comparison group design rests in the appropriateness of the comparison group.

The Evaluation report admits to limitations of comparative study, noting: “there is a serious problem here as well: the comparison group was very different from treatment groups” (page 12). Despite this acknowledgement, the evaluator went on to compare the two groups throughout the report. In our understanding, a comparison group should be equal in all aspects except the intervention being received, to properly compare outcomes. This was clearly not the case here, putting into question any validity to comparative findings within the report.

Neither group and its characteristics was described in any great detail, besides noting a difference in age. People living in group homes and in congregated full-time services

are in very different contexts and circumstances from people transitioning in their lives, living at home with family, or homeless, and in complex circumstances (such as additional health issues, housing, economic stress, etc).

The Evaluation report bases a strong conclusion on a comparative study, which is noted in the Limitations section and footnotes by the evaluator to be a group that is **not** comparable.

“The main conclusion from the analysis is that although IFDP participants made progress during their time in the project in most of the areas measured, they seldom did significantly better than their older counterparts who were generally served by community living agencies” (page 101).

This conclusion stretches beyond what the Evaluation can support for reasons acknowledged in the Report and for other reasons. There are too many questions that the Evaluation can't answer to act confidently on the Report's main conclusion. As the Report says, “There is a serious lack of objective data in this evaluation” (page 12). This leaves a big and consequential decision balanced on a very narrow pillar of data.

*At best one might say the Evaluation results are inconclusive.* Without the groups being comparable, no evaluation recommendation such as Recommendation #1 in the report (page ix and 101) can stand. Neither the non-comparable comparison study nor flawed cost effectiveness support such a recommendation and it should be removed.

## **Evaluation methodology**

The Report promises, but does not deliver, a qualitative approach to evaluation. Compare the Report's Section 4.7. *Qualitative Measures of Success* (pp. 61-65) with these descriptors, taken from a guide to assessing evidence, *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation* (HM Treasury, London, 2012):

Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of people's experiences, perspectives and histories in the context of their personal circumstances or settings. Among many distinctive features, it is characterized by a concern with exploring phenomena from the perspective of those being studied ...[and] the capture of data which are detailed, rich and complex (page 5).

The catalog of “success stories” within the Evaluation Report reads more like a series of entries in a police blotter than detailed, rich and complex explorations of participants experiences and perspectives. Complex narratives that might have revealed much about the work of Independent Facilitation are dehydrated of meaning and disregarded by the Evaluator.

There is a greater concern than the thin texture of the accounts and the failure to incorporate their lessons into the rest of the Report. It is the disrespectful characterization of people with disabilities. Presenting a woman who was apparently a victim of multiple instances of sexual abuse as a naked female client shows a disrespectful failure of empathy.

### **Additional indicators of success**

The broader community and other stakeholder engagement is not acknowledged, though IFO interviews provided a rich cache of qualitative data to draw from that included addressing the following kinds of investments, such as:

- Work with local family networks and groups, hosting workshops for and with family groups
- Building capacity within IFOs so that they can be seen as viable, strong organizations within communities (smaller IFOs, for example, grew from zero to ten staff covering a large geographic area, and still met targets, with outcomes just being realized)
- Building or establishing new relationships with agencies and other community groups with IFO communities
- Shifts in working with the DSO - both relationship building and learning at both ends (IFO and DSO) to ensure better referral process
- The work of OIFN to bring the IFDP Collaborative together, community development efforts to communities not funded through the demonstration project, and numerous outreach and learning events, such as Common Threads, provincial forums, etc.

### **Need for Multi-level Evaluation Design**

Often, evaluations tend to be focused on end results and products, using quantitative analysis, assuming some reasonable measurement of human development and social change that can be quantified. As is the case with this evaluation, this reduces the full context of an intervention to focus only on the individual. An ecological approach, which the IFDP takes, would recognize that change in individuals is only one measure; there are other family, community and system level changes that are just as important.

The Evaluation focuses analysis and conclusions solely on changes within vulnerable individuals. Although the evaluator had rich qualitative data that could explore these other levels of change, this data was not used. For example, many of the Independent Facilitation Organization (IFO) communities have created extensive networks, expanded partnerships, and built relationships and contributed to shifting perspectives within their communities. Many of these significant changes can be linked to personal and family changes, and in the long-term (such changes take more than the 18 months allotted for the IFDP), would be seen to support the transformations people and families struggle through.

A multi-method design that **incorporated better use of the qualitative data** available would have been a more successful design, eliciting deeper learning than the current methodology of quasi-experimental design afforded.

### **Survey Sample Size**

The evaluation design specified that 169 survey responses from IFDP participants (about 16% of the total) would be necessary to assure confidence in conclusions from the study. In the event, 51 surveys (about 5%) were returned. Adding the results of 21 face-to-face interviews and surveys returned with partial responses brought the sample to about half what was specified.

Furthermore, there appears to be a bias on the part of the evaluators as to why participants and their families elected to not take part in the evaluation. Assumptions made are not backed by any evidence, and show a distinct lack of understanding of this participant group, compassion for families who may have been overwhelmed and therefore chose not to do more paper work or participate in another interview or meeting.

### **Data collection timeline**

The Evaluation report is inaccurate in stating that the IFDP was approved in November 2014. Final budget approval and discussions were not completed until February 2015. The project start-up phase was significant for many IFOs, as they had to establish their infrastructure and hire and train facilitators. Implementation approaches, including the referral process through DSOs were still be worked out by and with MCSS even after the February 2015 Letters of Commitment from MCSS were issued. Project launch was mid-May 2015. Referrals from DSOs began in the late spring of 2015.

The data collected for this project actually spans late June 2015 to July 2016, including Baseline on the DTT for people participating in the research, with some IFOs starting to take referrals only in August/September 2015. This is significant context information for the data being analyzed and should be stated clearly in the report: it is a very short timeline to gather source data on which to make definitive conclusions. In most cases, it appears that there was only a ten-month period between the baseline and follow-up data. At most, we are only able to discern early patterns that speak to potential long-term results as a result of independent facilitation.

### **Cost Analysis Inaccuracies**

The Evaluation report makes strong recommendations and conclusions based on a faulty calculation: the overall budget figure for the multi-year IFDP is measured against total number of people served. This is an oversimplified and not an accurate



representation of costs per person. An accurate assessment of cost per person would, as a start, need to take into account start-up costs, administration overhead, and independent facilitation activities that agencies are paid for over the cost of a plan and look at figures over a 12-month period, rather than the total 2.5 years of the project.

The Evaluator assumes that funding a PASSPORT Person Directed Plan is equivalent to funding Independent Facilitation. This dismisses, without argument, the many pages of the report in which independent facilitation practitioners describe how independent facilitation is different from PDP. If the Evaluator has a case for setting aside a significant proportion of the data the Evaluation collected from surveys, interviews and focus groups it would increase confidence in the Recommendation.

Lacking an actual cost benefit analysis/measure, and actual understanding of the difference between person directed planning (PDP), independent facilitation and Passport funding, a significant Evaluation report recommendation (Recommendation 1, page 101) is based on erroneous assumptions, that are not based in evidence or validated.

### **Evaluation of Cost Savings for the Government**

The Report also asserts (#16, page 85) that potential costs savings on government services are a relatively rare occurrence. These assertions by the IFO leads are expressed based on experience. The evaluator did not complete any type of social return on investment analysis to state Finding #16 with any confidence, and so cannot make an assertion to the contrary. This finding should be removed from the report.

### **Conclusions**

A third transitional year of the IFDP would offer an opportunity to learn from and build upon the initial 2-years, including learning how to better capture and evaluate the real changes that can occur through Independent Facilitation; and the ways that Independent Facilitation differs in approach and outcome from other interventions, such as Person Directed Planning.

We are committed to assisting the Ministry's efforts to transform Developmental Services in innovative ways that align with the Ministry's vision of citizenship and community, responds to the concerns raised in the Ombudsman Report, and embraces the challenge of reaching those people and families on waiting lists.

We believe a powerful strategy moving forward incorporates the knowledge that a valued life of citizenship and community will not be built with MCSS financial resources alone. A broader base of supportive resources will be necessary, and we are committed to discovering such resources as we walk with people over time.

Independent Facilitation diversifies the options available to people with developmental disabilities and their families as they pursue citizenship, home, work, relationships, and as contributing members of communities where they live. A transitional year provides the opportunity to highlight the distinctions, and establish meaningful ways to evaluate the strengths and limitations of this approach, thereby better informing and assisting DSO's in their recommendations to people and their families, in their pursuit of solutions to the challenges they face.

### **Errors for Correction**

- The *Probing the Edges* work is erroneously identified as a document produced by FSF. This document was created by the OIFN with extensive input from all IFOs and most IFDP facilitators.
- Page 13 table - Facilitation Wellington Dufferin supported 93 people, the stated 'service target'
- Page 64 - reference to Bridges to Belonging survey related to aspects of life improvement. The improvement cited should be 62% rather than 64% noted in the Report.

## **IFDP Draft Evaluation Report Feedback**

I am a retired Minister, a parent of a daughter with a developmental disability, and a new member of the OIFN Stewards. Since I have just joined the OIFN Stewards group, I have been on the outside of the IFDP throughout the course of the Project. I am now reading the Evaluation Report as an interested parent, and as such, I might qualify as an “outside observer”, as stated in the first line of Executive Summary.

I was very disturbed and dismayed in reading this document in totality. As a parent who has significant life experience of the benefit of independent facilitation in the life of my daughter, I am deeply saddened at the prospect that this report may stifle the provision of such a vital resource to families like mine in Ontario.

I was dismayed and angered as I read the report. The evaluators conceded that there was some significant improvement in the area of relationships, involvement in community and in community development, yet the report was not balanced. There was a distinct tone of negative bias throughout much of the report directed at Independent Facilitation, with many unsubstantiated assumptions made in the document.

The report stated in the executive summary, that both statistical (quantitative) and qualitative research methods were used in the evaluation, even though there was no evidence of a model of qualitative analysis used in making the findings or in the recommendations. There are very highly regarded models of qualitative analysis available for such a review, yet none were used in the evaluation, according to the report.

The comparison group did not equate with the participant group, a fact that was clearly stated twice in the report. However, the evaluators insisted on relying heavily on this group to produce their overwhelmingly negative findings in the statistical analysis of IFDP and in their recommendations.

The facts are missing as to who comprises the comparison group. It was not made clear what types of challenges are faced or how many there are in this group. We are only told in the notes that these folks were part of “Community Living agencies who operated group homes, which, in essence guaranteed a “captive audience” who were easy to find for follow up.” There is no factual evidence about how this group was selected beyond these remarks.

Judgements and assumptions run rampant throughout the report. One of many examples concerns the comparison group. There was no information given as to how they make their choices, what kind of employment they have, and most importantly, who filled out their survey.

The sample used in the analysis is only a fraction of the overall participants in the IFDP. This is never made clear in the report despite the fact that this small sample is used to make sweeping findings and negative recommendations. There seemed to be a bias on the part of the evaluators as to why participants and their families elected to not take

part in the evaluation. There was no factual evidence to back up their assumptions, or any compassion for families who may have been overwhelmed and therefore chose not to do more paper work!

It is also factually inaccurate to compare \$2500 given for Person Directed Planning and Independent Facilitation. Most often PDP's are done periodically with no advocacy or action to move the plan forward. Independent facilitation is designed to walk with the focus person through the whole process of creating the plan and putting it in place. As well, the focus person must have Passport in order to qualify for this funding. In my lived experience with both of these "products," the evaluators are making a false comparison and claim.

It is my understanding that the IFDP did not "cherry pick" participants as evidenced, "... the complexity of the individual's needs also impacts the ability of the program to meet the needs of the participants. Complex physical disability, undiagnosed mental health problems, and severe autism were some of the additional challenges faced by some participants and their families. In many of these cases the mothers were full-time caregivers; they were overwhelmed and the families were suffering as a result. These families were grasping at any opportunity that presented itself. Even if there were limited tangible gains deriving from independent facilitation in their cases thus far, they were appreciative of the support and were optimistic that the process will have dividends in the future." (pg. 102)

It is very clear in my reading that the evaluators portrayed the data and added negative comments throughout to deliberately discredit the concept of independent facilitation and played down any positive qualitative examples of success. This is a nasty and negatively biased piece of work.

Regards,

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