



## Re-engaging in Community with Confidence

*A Reflective Practice Conversation*

November 16, 2022

### Our Conversation Story



OIFN believes ***“in reflective practice and shared learning through a Community of Practice*** that engages people with disabilities, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and other allies, in a collaborative approach, to co-create knowledge and reflect deeply on principles and practice.”

## What is the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN)?

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN) is a Community of Practice that includes people with developmental disabilities, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and other allies who are interested in supporting people to live meaningful, everyday lives in their chosen neighbourhoods and communities.

Our Community of Practice is dynamic in its commitment to expanding relationships, its action focus, and its reflective practice.

## Why Reflective Practice Conversations?

OIFN is a Community of Practice that includes people with developmental disabilities, family members and/or loved ones, independent facilitators, and other allies who are interested in supporting people to live meaningful, everyday lives in their chosen neighbourhoods and communities.

As a Community of Practice, OIFN is committed to expanding and strengthening relationships and bringing people together for shared learning, collaborative action, and mutual growth. Reflective practice is about exploring ideas and making meaning together. When the Community of Practice comes together, we remain open to change and reflect deeply on principles and practice.

Our Reflective Practice Conversations include a mix of large group and small “breakout” group discussions, so that space is created for meaningful connections to happen, for all people to have opportunities to share and have their voices be heard, and for shared learning and growth to be cultivated.

## Cultivating Our Principles & Beliefs

Our theme of Re-engaging in Community with Confidence was grounded in the following OIFN principle:

***We acknowledge the uniqueness of each person and strive for equity and fairness for all.***

*OIFN's Core Beliefs can be found in full on the OIFN website:*

<https://www.oifn.ca/what-we-believe/>

49 people expressed interest in this event, with ultimately 28 people participating in the conversation, representing a good mix of people and family members/loved ones, independent facilitators, and other supportive allies. We were excited to note participation from across Ontario and beyond, including some participants from Manitoba!

## Holding Space, Remaining Connected, and Staying Safe

Our belonging needs are a very important part of our overall well-being and livelihood. After almost 3 years of being cautious, feeling isolated, and feeling burnt out by worry, many people are still left questioning how we return to "normal" daily life, while remaining healthy and honouring what our bodies and minds need to feel safe and fulfilled.

Together, we made space to express the realities of our lives in today's world and explore different ways of being together.

We were thrilled to welcome Susannah Joyce, independent facilitator and owner of [Realizations Training and Resources](#), who offered a presentation on our current experiences and our competing desires to both connect to and distance from one another.

Click the link below to review some helpful resources that were kindly shared by Susannah:  
<http://www.oifn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/3-Realizations-Training-Resources-on-Re-engaging-in-Community-with-Confidence.pdf>

Rich discussions in breakouts and in the large group revealed the following themes and threads:

- **Acknowledging individual comfort levels.**
  - Must look after ourselves.
  - We all live in our own contexts. People are around us in different ways.
  - Having confidence to be where we are at.
  - Pay attention to your own unique needs and feel confident staying in your comfort zone.
  - Example: Wear a mask if that is your comfort level, even if others are not.
- **Recognizing difficulties, but celebrating the silver linings.**
  - More opportunities to spend time outside.
  - Finding more open spaces.
  - Meeting new people and connecting in new ways.
  - Example: Through Zoom, there are less geographic barriers to gathering.
- **There is power in considering safety and wellbeing.**
  - Safety does not always equate to fear.
  - There are precautions we take that are not related to conscious fear (Example: car maintenance).
  - We have choice and power to take action for our health and wellbeing.
- **Many people are accustomed to social isolation.**
  - Not necessarily a fear of getting sick that holds us back, but experiencing social anxiety. Not accustomed to as much interaction and involvement, now that we are used to being on our own.
  - Takes courage to get back out there again.
  - There is a stretch zone to being up for social engagement: takes energy to get ready, get dressed, clean, etc.

- **Exercising patience with ourselves and others.**
  - Find ways to self-soothe and prepare for the day.  
Example: using tactiles, listening to the birds, using a weighted blankets.
  - Set routines.
  - Remind ourselves to be together in our humanness.
  - Find comfortable ways to slowly re-engage in physical touch  
(Example: begin with one person who feels safe to hug.)
- **Next Steps:**
  - Not everyone has been isolated alone, but isolated with other people.
  - First step to get back out there may be to make space to be alone, take a break, and re-kindle energy.
  - Pay attention to new environments and visit new spaces in neighbourhood.
  - Accept the situation we are in. Know that we are each doing what we can to be safe and keep loved ones safe in community.
  - Seek out hugs without fear.

## Moving Forward

In closing, we drew inspiration from the film *Love, Actually*, viewing the scene from the opening and closing credits as a reminder that *Love is actually all around us*.



**YouTube Link:** <https://youtu.be/D-I0uF6prdo>

### Voices of the Community of Practice

What participants said they appreciated about this gathering:

*“Was affirming to know we're not alone in our feelings & share practical ways to keep moving forward in uncertain times.”*

*“Love these sessions & being with like minded people. Gives me a jolt of energy and I find them very inspiring.”*

We invite you to [stay connected](#) to OIFN for updates about upcoming opportunities for us to connect, continue our conversations, and share in our learning.