

- Westgate High School
- School of Health and Community Services
- Autism Thunder Bay
- self employed Independent Facilitator

What Is Inspiring Independent Facilitation Now?

Thunder Bay has a progressive history of involvement in the Independent Funding Coalition of Ontario and in developing support models such as “brokerage” and others that are in line with the principles and values of Independent Facilitation, long before the idea was more widely understood. One parent shared experiences of the development of the “Choices” Program that her son was involved with during the 1990’s. The “Choices” Program enabled her son to live in his own home with help from support staff. In the 20 years since that time, his health circumstances have changed, and living alone is no longer a good choice for him. He now lives in a “shared living” arrangement with two other people who also require support. The original Choices Program supported approximately 25 people. The program dissolved but this parent indicated that some “Brokers” remained involved in continuing to support people. There are brokers from the Choices program who have also been absorbed into the developmental disability service system, so they are no longer independent.

In the mid 2000’s Thunder Bay Family Network became involved with PLAN (Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network) of B.C. Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) is a family-led organization founded to secure the future for people with disabilities. PLAN offered an online workshop for people interested in becoming “facilitators” of support networks for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Thunder Bay Family Network engaged in this training, and recently hired a Co-ordinator who has completed PLAN’s training and is now training other people in this set of values and practice. Thunder Bay Family Network sees itself as being positioned to be an organization that can offer “Independent Facilitation” as it sees that the PLAN training aligns directly with the values, principles and practice of Independent Facilitation as articulated by OIFN.

One parent attending the gathering has actively been involved with the OIFN Community of Practice, and has been developing her own knowledge and skills to provide Independent Facilitation for people in Thunder Bay. Currently she has been hired on a fee for service basis with people and their families utilizing Passport’s Person Directed Planning funding.

During the opening introductions of the gathering, one person articulated that the system as it exists now is far too complicated and overwhelming. People are disconnected, and confused by the design as it exists. She indicated that there is a need for new kind of relationships that connect between people and their families, the Ministry and its resources, and agencies providing services. It is within this context that there is a sense that Independent Facilitation has a role to play in assisting people to get the support they need through navigating the system, connecting with resources, services, and community.

Understanding What Independent Facilitation Is In Practice: The Ongoing Journey Across The Gap Between Current Reality And A Desired Future

Since many participants attending the gathering had very little knowledge about the practice of Independent Facilitation, the focus for the first part of the day was on deepening understanding.

PETER ZICHY'S STORY

The story of Peter Zichy in Windsor was shown using the video, "My Life, My Choice" (www.inclusion.com/dvdmylife). Peter's story captures:

- the experience of being sent to live in an institution during his adolescent years
- returning to live in his family home for most of his adult life where he had little responsibility for his life and decisions
- his mother passing away at the age of 74
- his brothers and sister living far away
- Peter's decision that he wanted to stay living in his family home
- the need to mobilize support to enable Peter to live in "my home":
 - funding
 - staffing
 - community connections
 - developing Peter's capacity to take responsibility for taking care of his own life and decisions



In a situation such as Peter's, there are many parts that need to be able to be moved and connected to one another so that Peter's life can work. Before deciding what services are necessary, and where the location of his home will be, someone needs to connect with Peter, to listen free from the constraints of service delivery models and his family's limited understandings of what is possible. The "independent" aspect of Independent Facilitation relates to this, someone who is not confined or "encumbered" by the limits of

what services are offered in agencies; or the reality that families often don't listen to their ideas because of the time and effort it will take for them to act on these ideas without support from the system. The Independent Facilitator is the person's listening post, the one who hears their story, circumstance, desires, and needs, and assists in mobilizing the supports necessary.

The need for connecting the parts of Peter's life story:

1. Peter is the starting place...his vision for his own life and his belief in himself
2. His family's desire and ability to be supportive of Peter and his choices.
3. Someone to listen (independent from, and unencumbered by, the limits of existing services and family relationships):
 - i. what is happening now?
 - ii. who is Peter?
 - iii. what does he want?
 - iv. what does he need?
4. His home:
 - i. as a place for him to live and be safe
 - ii. as a valuable asset that needs to be managed and maintained.
5. His community and his people, those people and places who he knows and trusts.
6. Peter's need for some support, and his decision that he wanted to recruit and choose people he can "trust":
 - I. to help him learn skills to take care of his own life
 - II. stay connected to what is happening in his daily life making sure he is OK.
7. Accessing and utilizing funding and other resources that can enable Peter to live the life he chooses in his own home.

An Independent Facilitator: is a person who can pay attention to Peter, and all of the parts that need to work together in his life; someone who is resourceful in identifying resources and making connections, some available through government programs, others

We then asked the group to state what current reality is like in relation to these desired future ideas. A narrative summary of the of the composite picture is captured in the table below:

Desired Future	Current Reality
<p>Relationships with people I choose...people want to be in relationship with friends, family, boyfriends/girlfriends/husbands/wives. They want to be able to choose the people they relate with including the staff who work to support them. They want and need to feel that they have choices about who they relate with so they can surround themselves with people they feel safe with and trust.</p>	<p>Rules and policies that block people...many rules and policies within the Ministry, service programs, and agencies, actually block people from having choices, being forced to live with what exists, to fit into spaces in programs that are not designed to support people as individuals. Many of these rules and policies actually block people from connecting and establishing relationships with people, thereby preventing people from developing a trusted network of support.</p>
<p>People who accept me as I am...a very simple idea, people do not want to be seen as a problem or someone who needs to be fixed, they simply want to be accepted and supported for who they are.</p>	<p>Lack of resources...people are prevented from even imagining a life like other people because there is a feeling that there are no resources available to support them.</p>
<p>Believe in my worth...people simply want to have people believe in their value, instead of being seen as a burden or a problem.</p>	<p>Inadequate and unhelpful resources...some people experience that the resources that are available for the limited number of people who can get them, don't work or are not helpful. People feel that they are not listened to.</p>
<p>My Home...people want to be able to have a place that they can call "my home", one that they choose, that they have control over where it is, and who can enter and be welcomed there. A place where they feel safe.</p>	<p>Crisis/emergency mode...people experience that the system as it exists is only capable of listening to and paying attention to crisis and emergency situations. If you are not in a dire emergency, the system does not listen or hear, and cannot help you.</p>

Desired Future	Current Reality
<p>Choices and opportunities...people simply want to be able to have opportunities and choices in many things that are simply taken for granted by other citizens: where to live; where to go; what to do; work and employment; who to relate with. They want the chance to develop a life, to grow, to learn.</p>	<p>Safety as the default mode...for anyone who can get through to the system, decision making is built around “safety” as the default mode, protecting people, placing them in settings that are restrictive and limit choices and opportunities under the guise of keeping people safe.</p>
<p>A sense of purpose...people want to gain a sense of purpose and direction, aspiring to become more responsible, for their own lives, but also to be responsible for things beyond themselves, to be needed and counted on by others; to be recognized for the value they bring to other people; to have meaningful work, and if it is paid employment that brings value to employers, to be paid appropriately, to be able to earn a living, and if it is volunteer work, to be recognized and valued as a contributor.</p>	<p>Silos...the system is divided and operates in silos: children vs adults; health vs social services vs housing vs education; residential vs day programs vs employment vs recreation; and so on. It is complicated, confusing, and difficult to navigate, requiring vast amounts of knowledge and connections to get even the simplest of supports.</p>
<p>Contributions to the lives of others...people want to be recognized for more than their disabilities and vulnerabilities. They want to be seen as people who can and do make a contribution to other people, and the community as a whole.</p>	<p>Disconnect from school integration...the unintended consequence of school inclusion is that many families and students become disconnected from other people and families who may be facing similar systemic resource issues. Due to privacy policies, schools make no active effort to connect people.</p>
	<p>MCSS does not know who we are...as a result of getting by on their own when sons and daughters are in school, families find that by the time people reach graduation, the Ministry is not aware of who they are and what they need. This comes at a time when many supports for children drop off, and families and their loved ones now have to figure out what they will do with all of the time they used to spend in school.</p>

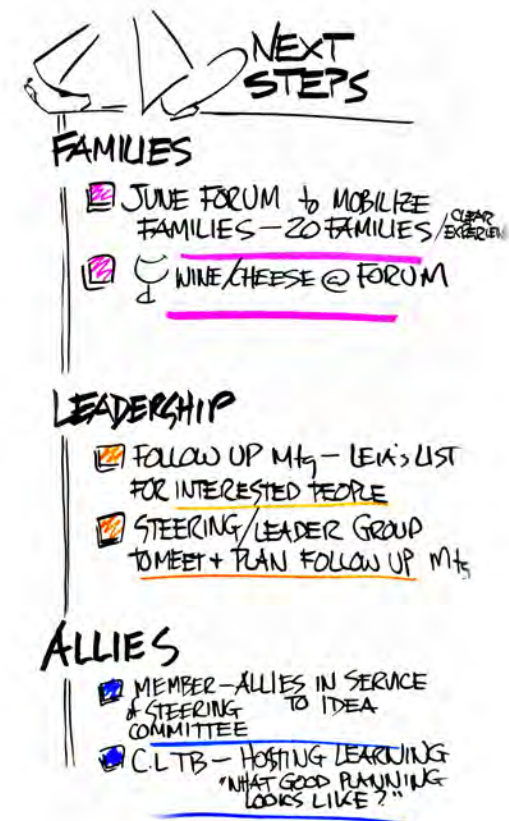
Desired Future	Current Reality
	<p>Waitlist...when people finally reach the adult service system they are faced with being put on the bottom of the waiting list unless they are in a crisis or emergency.</p>
	<p>Planning is not a priority...there are often “person centre plans” but they are not a priority and they are not meaningful because the lack of individualized resources available means there is no capacity to follow through.</p>
	<p>Weight of responsibility rests on family...any effort to positively impact the life of a person with a disability, and create a desired future places the weight of responsibility on the shoulders of the family. Systems and services have little to offer the life desired by many people with developmental disabilities and their families.</p>
	<p>Poverty...the fact is that to be “disabled” is to be poor, and to be limited in choices, options, and opportunities.</p>
	<p>Rural isolation...for people who live outside of the urban centre of Thunder Bay there is an additional isolation that exists due to a lack of transportation, and distance between people.</p>

Desired Future	Current Reality
	<p>First Nations communities...many people living on First Nations reserves or remote communities face an even greater lack of resources, isolation, and disconnection. Families of children with disabilities have little or no access to support for medical, educational, or social needs for their children when they are young. It is not uncommon for parents to have to move to Thunder Bay to find resources, leaving their community and natural support system, to arrive as a stranger in a new community, only to face the same waiting lists that other families face. In addition, the process of having to leave their community resonates with the deep wounds of children being forced to leave their communities to attend/ live in residential schools, a process that fragmented and deeply harmed individuals, families, communities, tribes, and nations.</p>
	<p>Fear of exposure...people fear being exposed by reaching out to the service system. They feel that the system is very invasive, investigating their circumstances in order to prove that they are in “crisis/emergency”. If people are not “poor”, or in crisis, they fear that they may lose whatever support they have. For people who are poor, or facing emergencies, they fear they will be judged for their life and lifestyle.</p>

Independent Facilitation is the work of supporting people over time as they move across the gap between current reality, and a desired future where people can be happy, safe, engaged and recognized as valued contributing citizens. It is “Independent”, meaning that it is not attached to or limited by the constraints of the existing service system programs. It involves:

- meeting a person where they are at
- listening to the person - this involves discovering the way that they communicate, and paying action to things like:
 - what is important to them

- who is important to them
- what would they imagine for their future
- what are their gifts, capacities, and contributions
- what brings them joy and happiness
- what kind of support do they need
- getting to know their family, and helping the family listen to the person
- learning about their current reality
- facilitating planning for action to move toward a desired future
- support in finding and accessing resources that make it possible to move forward, including:
 - funding programs:
 - disability specific
 - other focused (eg. housing, employability)
 - community resources available to all citizens
 - people, places, and groups that can offer participation and/or support
- supporting the person and their family in exploring decisions and the potential consequences and responsibilities that are involved.



Steps to Move Forward...

Participants viewed a video created by OIFN, with leadership voices sharing experiences of what it takes to get this service offering up and running in their community. The video highlights 6 key elements of getting started:

1. Parents as the driving force for something different being offered that can be useful in customizing support. Family stories provide the inspiration and ideas for innovation.
2. It takes committed leadership, people who are willing and able to take on the work of creating something new in their community.
3. Family groups and networks empower families through sharing stories, experiences, resources, and connections.
4. Allies, in the form of individuals and organizations can support the development of Independent Facilitation, without controlling it.
5. There is a need to build the capacity to deliver Independent Facilitation, through education, training, and mentorship with experienced Facilitators.
6. It is critical to be clear about what is important, the values and aspirations of Independent Facilitation.

The groups self-organized into 3 groups and had planning conversations to identify some next steps that can be taken.

● **Mobilizing Families As The Driving Force And To Empower Each Other**

- The Family Network Will Work To Mobilize Families To Get Involved In Events And Learning That Will Move The Possibility Of Independent Facilitation As A New Service Offering In Thunder Bay And The Northwest Region:
 - first efforts will be to make sure that at least 20 families will participate in the upcoming OIFN Northern Forum in June
 - conversation with the OIFN Forum Planning Group about wine and cheese evening before the forum
 - making sure that families are included and participate in any other learning events that may be hosted by allies such as Community Living Thunder Bay, such as *“What does good planning look like?”*
 - *PATH and MAPS with Jack Pearpoint and Lynda Kahn;*
 - *Building A New Story - Facilitation Leadership Group Training with John Lord*

- **Committed Leadership To Actively Work On Developing Independent Facilitation In Thunder Bay And The Northwest Region**

- a small group of people will meet to plan a follow-up meeting to this gathering
- an email list has been created and an invitation will be sent to all involved
- small group will consider becoming a Steering Committee that can begin to think about planning for what it will take to make Independent Facilitation a viable option in Thunder Bay and the Northwest
- the emerging Steering Committee will keep in touch with OIFN to share their thinking, movement forward, and how OIFN can best support this planning.

- **Allies Who Can Support The Work Of The Development Of Independent Facilitation**

- allies, such as the Executive Director of Community Living Thunder Bay expressed willing interest in sitting as member of the Steering Committee to:
 - help identify ways that allies can be supportive of the initiative, and
 - contribute space for meetings, hosting learning events, connections, proposals, etc.
- Community Living Thunder Bay plans to develop a learning series: “What Does Good Planning Look Like?” They will reach out to participants from this gathering and the Thunder Bay Family Network as a whole.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

The group was encouraged to:

- sign up for updates and news about Independent Facilitation on the oifn.ca website (at the bottom of the Home page)
- OIFN Northern Forum to be held in Thunder Bay June 15-16
- Save the Date for the upcoming OIFN “Common Threads” Conference to be held Nov. 16-17, 2016
- bursaries may be available for families and people with disabilities



Ontario

Ministry of Community and Social Services
Community and Developmental Services Branch

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