

Investing in People

Periodic Updates from the Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario

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INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT AND FUNDING BUILD CAPACITY OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

There is a powerful and seldom recognized lesson from the stories of individuals and families who have experienced individualized support and funding. Although individualized approaches are designed to more effectively meet the personal needs of the individual, these approaches also help build capacity of individuals, families and communities. What do we mean by capacity? Let us start with a story.

Blair Franklin's story is typical. After his family supported him to leave an institution, Blair was helped to develop a support network. This circle of family and friends assisted Blair in developing a personal plan. Members of this group began to do things with Blair in the community. Blair also started to attend self-advocate meetings where he learned to express his views and increase his self-confidence. All of these elements were about building capacity of people to participate and contribute.

Individualized funding has assisted Blair in many ways. First, a facilitator was available to help Blair and his family develop a personal

network, a personalized plan, and connect Blair with community life. Second, the funding enabled Blair's disability supports to be personalized. A neighbour was hired to support Blair after his workday, and a university student assists Blair to attend recreational activities in the community.

Many communities and organizations are trying to figure out how to build the capacity of individuals, families, and communities. What kind of efforts are going on?

- In some regions, such as Windsor-Essex and Thunder Bay, community-wide initiatives have been developed to reform the entire service system. These reform efforts, while difficult, are gradually putting individualized support and facilitation at the centre of the reformed system.

- Independent projects that focus on individualized support and funding have also been developed. The OPTIONS Project in Toronto (formerly called Individualized Quality of Life Project) is an example of a successful project that uses facilitators to assist families and individuals to build

capacity by developing networks, personal plans, and community integration.

- There are a growing number of projects that build capacity of families, such as the Durham Region's Family Network. Family to family support provides important infrastructure support for individualized funding.

- Some Associations for Community Living, such as St. Marys, Ajax- Pickering-Whitby, and Algoma, have changed their structures to facilitate individualized support and funding.

Although all of these efforts are important, there are wide variations throughout Ontario and frustrations in terms of implementation. A provincial policy fashioned after the Ontario Round Table Report on Individualized Funding would expand disability supports that enhance citizenship and capacity.

The Round Table Report is entitled *Linking Individualized*

Supports and Direct Funding: Making Money Work for People. Supported by eight provincial organizations, the report presents principles, a policy framework, and implementation directions. The Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy released its *Review of Individualized Funding*, a summary of research on individualized approaches.

Both of these documents reflect the growing research and understanding that individualized support and funding help build the capacity of individuals and families.

Generally, the current service driven system only provides formal services, and often ignores individuals and families as a valued resource. Individualized support and funding, when implemented with wisdom, can provide an avenue for building on the gifts and strengths of individuals, families, and other community members. This is a good investment in people.

John Lord

THE COALITION - OUR ACCORD

The Individualized Funding Coalition 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 by family and/or significant others, has access to and control over the funds allocated for his/her supports.

***To become a member of the Coalition, contact Barbara at 416-447-4348 ext. 240 or visit the website at www.individualizedfunding.ca**

** changed from original publication to reflect current contact information*