

For more than 60 years Community Living Toronto has been a source of support for thousands of individuals who have an intellectual or developmental disability and their families. Our Association was formed in 1948 when a group of parents came together to find alternatives to placing their children in an institution. They formed “the Parents Council for Retarded Children” and created the first community-based programs for children with an intellectual disability. Community Living Toronto has grown into one of the largest organizations of its kind in North America, supporting over 6,000 individuals and families each year. It has a membership of almost 1,000 individuals, more than 900 dedicated volunteers and over 1,300 full and part time staff.

Our ever-changing and adapting range of supports and services focus on each individual’s needs, goals and aptitudes, and is reflected in our vision that we change the lives of people with an intellectual disability by giving them a voice, and supporting their choices where they live, learn, work and play. People who have an intellectual disability require some level of support throughout their entire life. At Community Living Toronto we support individuals of all ages, from birth through their senior years.

Community Living Toronto has worked closely with the City of Toronto for over 60 years in various capacities. In the 1970’s we worked diligently with the City and its boroughs to amend zoning by-laws so that people with an intellectual disability could live together with support in regular homes in their desired neighbourhoods. In fact, we were very pleased to hear that in a final amalgamation of Toronto’s zoning by-laws, no distancing requirement was imposed on group homes, enabling people with disabilities who require supported housing to live where they want and with whom.

Toronto’s logo, ‘Diversity, Our Strength’ is a vision of inclusion and acceptance that needs to ensure that everyone has a place, and has every opportunity to succeed. People with disabilities need to be part of that vision.

Transit and Quality of Life

Currently, there are thousands of people with disabilities in Toronto who receive support from the Ontario Disability Support Program, or ODSP, including almost 30,000 who have an intellectual disability in Toronto. Most people with an intellectual disability will require some level of social assistance for most of their lives.

People receiving ODSP find competitive employment difficult, limited or unavailable due to physical or developmental disabilities. A single adult living on ODSP receives a maximum of \$1089.00 per month, or just over \$13,000 per year. If a person has a competitive job, they are able to keep their first \$200 earnings; for every dollar they earn above that, 50% of their wage is clawed back by government. Clearly, the majority of individuals are living well below Ontario’s generally accepted poverty line of \$19,000 per year. In fact, most earn about \$13,000 per year. A recent \$100 supplement for those who had competitive jobs was added to their basic ODSP amount to cover expenses like transportation. However, the Provincial Government is

eliminating that supplement. ODSP is administered by the Province; it is well known that in Toronto, \$13,000 does not go far when an individual must pay rent, buy food and other amenities, and afford transit to get to work.

The recent budget announcement of a 10 cent increase in transit fares will have a huge impact on people with disabilities who rely on transit to get to work or as their primary means of transportation. To buy a monthly Metropass, a person with a disability relying on ODSP will lose another \$100 per year from their income to accommodate the fare increase. For many, that will have a devastating impact, while children under 12 will ride the system for free; some of the City's most vulnerable individuals will supplement this free transit.

People with an intellectual disability on ODSP don't have any luxuries and after rent, food and basic needs, there's little left. As mentioned above, high transit fees play a key role in keeping some of these individuals virtual prisoners in their own communities.

Access to affordable transit means an individual can participate in their community and can contribute to the city's economy. It also means a sense of independence, confidence and added financial security.

Reduced Fare Is Necessary

Toronto lags far behind other cities in making public transit accessible and affordable: Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal, Oshawa, Vancouver, Windsor and Kingston all have reduced fare programs for people on government assistance – approximately a 50% reduction for most.

In Toronto, while seniors, high school and full-time post-secondary students receive reduced fare rates, people with disabilities are expected to pay full transit fares. In fact, we have heard of seniors, who pay a reduced fare, riding side by side with people with disabilities, who pay full transit fare, on Wheeltrans. Both are on fixed incomes; Toronto needs to catch up.

Public transportation is a critical part of the life of someone with an intellectual disability, and it is increasingly unaffordable – a reduction equivalent to seniors and students is fair and in line with other leading cities. A fare reduction for those with permanent disabilities receiving ODSP could also be revenue neutral as it would mean more people could access transit regularly. It is imperative that the City and the Toronto Transit Committee find a way to reduce fares for people with an intellectual disability and for all those permanently receiving ODSP whose inclusion and participation in the city is dependent on public transit.

Accessible Transit

Of 69 Toronto subway stations, more than half of them are still not acceptable. Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the TTC is required to make the entire system accessible by 2025. However, the timeline for this is unclear and this past summer, the TTC indicated it will not make the 2025 deadline.

Accessible transit will decrease users' reliability on Wheeltrans, an over-booked and over-regulated service that has generated unreliable, frustrating and limiting service. Better access to streetcars, buses and subway trains will reduce reliance on Wheeltrans, and increase a person's ability to get around the city on their own terms and timelines. Access to employment, friends and a better quality of life for everyone is a City that is fully inclusive.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing continues to be one of the most pressing issues in Toronto, which has seen little new affordable housing built in the past ten years, and no private sector affordable or rental housing built. With a waitlist of approximately 90,000 it is critical for the City to build new affordable units that help those living in poverty access safe, clean housing and get ahead financially.

Community Living Toronto is a proud new partner with Toronto Community Housing and has successfully moved over 45 individuals with intellectual disabilities into affordable units in the new builds in the Fort York area at Dan Leckie Way, and in West Donlands on King St. East. Affordable housing has enabled these individuals to live more independently, access their community and participate in activities and events they were not able to before. Going forward it is important that the city not only build more affordable housing, but encourage the private sector to build more accessible rental units to make living in the city more affordable for everyone.

Summary

The City of Toronto has a wonderful opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of people with an intellectual disability. The 2015 budget needs to consider the needs of those who are the most vulnerable and most profoundly impacted socially and economically. To do that, the City should consider:

- A fare reduction for people with disabilities receiving ODSP. The City can join other world-class cities by providing a reduced fare that is equivalent to what seniors and students receive. This reduction will have a profound effect on a person's ability to participate in their community, contribute to the economy and live a more dignified life.
- A strategy to address AODA requirements so that Toronto's transit system is fully accessible by the required deadline of 2025.
- A long-term strategy be developed to address the long waitlist for affordable housing, and partner with government and the private sector to build more affordable units.