

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that in a recent by-law amendment, the restrictions around the number of unrelated people who can live together was repealed and sent for further review. Limiting that number to three or less would have a devastating impact on the lives of people with an intellectual disability and the ability of our staff to support them effectively, and with dignity.

Early Childhood Services & Technology

Since the late 1970’s, Community Living Toronto worked with Toronto Children’s Services to facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs into identified city-run daycares and childhood centres. In the 1990’s, the City of Toronto began funding special needs resourcing.

In 2005, when the *Every Child Belongs* model was created, any child with special needs had the right to attend their local childcare. This was amazing for families who could now drop their child off at a childcare centre close to home; however it was a challenge for childcare staff who didn’t necessarily have the experience or training to support children with special needs. That’s where Community Living Toronto came in. Our Association supports over 480 children integrated in childcare programs across Toronto. Our early childhood staff also support early childhood professionals by providing resources and tools they can use to foster an inclusive environment and help that child with developing their early academic and social skills.

Community Living Toronto knows that not all children are easily supported by onsite visits by our staff and available resources. In 2009, twenty-seven CLToronto’s early childhood staff supported over 146 children who had complex needs and who would’ve had a difficult time

attending a regular childcare environment. They provided intensive support, and worked closely with the child, the family and childcare staff, making attendance in an early childcare environment possible.

Community Living Toronto receives just over \$2 million per year and is one of 25 agencies that receive funding from Toronto's Children's Services to provide this unique type of support. It is critical that it continue. Without it, children with special needs would not have the opportunity to learn, make friends and be a regular child at a regular childcare centre.

Supported childcare environments have a broader impact – it enables parents to work. Parents with special needs children are often locked into a perpetual cycle of poverty as one parent is often forced to stay home to support their child. However, with fully accessible and supported childcare models, parents have the opportunity to pursue their career goals. That's good for the family, and it's good for Toronto's economy.

Innovative Technology

In 1999 Community Living Toronto developed a website called **ConnectABILITY.ca**, which provided information, training and resources to parents, people with an intellectual disability and professionals. And in 2006 we partnered with the City of Toronto and Surrey Place Centre to develop a module for early childhood staff working at the city's daycares. This module, called *Supported Inclusion*, provided early childhood staff with learning tools, activities and tip sheets they could use to create an inclusive daycare environment from the moment the child enters that setting. It is still available for free, on any daycare computer. The City still provides \$41,000 per year to **ConnectABILITY.ca**, which receives over 10,000 visits per month. It is a critical service that builds on the skills of Toronto's childcare professionals.

Affordable Transit and Quality of Life

For adults with an intellectual disability who live semi-independently, quality of life is a struggle. Currently, there are thousands of people in Toronto who receive support from the Ontario Disability Support Program, or ODSP, including almost 90,000 who have an intellectual disability in Toronto.

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 \$1058.00 per month, or just over \$12,000 per year. If they have a competitive job, 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.

While we know that ODSP is administered by the Province, it's important that you know these figures because for people living in Toronto, transit costs are crippling. Affordable transit fares are something the Council and TTC can do now and it will have an immediate impact.

In fact, Toronto lags far behind in making public transit accessible and affordable. Other cities get that those on fixed government incomes need to use transit - Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal,

Oshawa, Vancouver and Kingston all have reduced fare programs for people on government assistance – approximately a 50% reduction. In Chicago, people with disabilities ride for free. We have attached a document that compares transit fares in different cities.

In Toronto, while seniors, high school and recently university 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 on Wheeltrans who pay the full transit fare. Toronto needs to catch up.

People on ODSP don't have any luxuries and after rent, food and basic needs, there's little left. What is left is usually absorbed by transit fares. High transit fees play a key role in keeping some of these individuals virtual prisoners in their own communities.

Public transportation is a critical part of the life of someone with an intellectual disability, and it is increasingly unaffordable – a 50% reduction is fair and in line with other leading cities. 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 on ODSP whose inclusion and participation in the city is dependent on public transit.

Summary

The City of Toronto has a wonderful opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of people with an intellectual disability. When finalizing this year's budget, please remember:

- Toronto Children's Services provide funding to agencies that facilitate learning and inclusion of all children in the city's childcare centres. Without this funding, children with an intellectual disability will miss out on key development opportunities that will provide the foundation for their future.
- Online learning and resources through Connect**ABILITY**.ca mean that the City's early childhood staff have all the tools they need to create an inclusive environment.
- People with an intellectual disability live on a limited income but are dependent on public transit. The City can join other world-class cities by providing reducing transit fares for people on ODSP by 50%. This reduction will have a profound effect on a person's ability to participate in their community and live a more dignified life.