

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pleased to hear that in a recent by-law amendment, restrictions of distancing and the definition of a group home were repealed, further enabling people with disabilities to live where they want and with whom.

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 30,000 who have an intellectual disability in Toronto. Most of those people will require 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. As of this past September, if a person has a competitive job, they are able to keep their first \$200 earnings. For every dollar they earn above \$200, 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 provided 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, Windsor and Kingston all have reduced fare programs for people on government assistance – approximately a 50% reduction.

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. The proposed 2014 increase in TTC fares will further erode an individual's ability to make ends meet; a modest \$25 increase in a Metropass can mean the difference between buying one's own groceries and going to the food bank.

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.

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.

Early Childhood Services & Technology

Since the late 1970's, Community Living Toronto has partnered with Toronto Children's Services to facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs into their directly operated child care programs and a multitude of community programs. In the mid- 1990's the City of Toronto assumed funding for all programs providing special needs resourcing.

In 2005, when the *Every Child Belongs* model was created, it emphasized that every child, regardless of need has the right to attend their local childcare program. This was a progressive step forward for many families who now had better access to local programs and supports. However, it presented some new challenges for childcare staff that required additional training to better support a more diverse range of children, including those with developmental and social/emotional needs. Community Living Toronto was well positioned to support the implementation of the new model.

Our Association's participation as a partner in the Every Child Belongs model has enabled maximum utilization of the resources to better serve all children requiring extra support. Although the funding levels set in 2006 have remained consistent over the past seven years, the

number of children serve by Community Living Toronto has increased by 26%. Through special needs resourcing, occupational therapy and behavior therapy consultation, over 700 children in early childhood settings across Toronto by 27 of our Early Childhood Services (ECS) staff, in 2012. One of the reasons for this increase in the number of children supported relates to the onset of Full Day Kindergarten in the province of Ontario. We have noted an increase in the number of children requiring support, consistent with the newly-created infant and school age spaces. Support to the Kindergarten-aged children remains stable. The number of children with complex physical and behavioural needs has steadily increased as those families opt for neighbourhood programs.

ECS staff also support early childhood professionals and parents by providing resources and tools they can use to foster an inclusive environment and support the child's overall development. Through Connect**ABILITY**.ca, early childhood professionals and parents of young children have immediate access to online information and resources to support children in a variety of settings. Connect**ABILITY**.ca continues to receive funding from the City of Toronto which has enabled it to become a world class site used by thousands of people.

Supported childcare environments have a broader impact – they enable 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. With fully accessible and supported childcare models, parents have the opportunity to pursue their career goals. That is a key ingredient in making a healthy family.

Community Living Toronto receives just over \$2 million per year and is one of 19 agencies that receive funding from Toronto's Children's Services to provide this unique type of support. It is critical that it continue. With this support, all children have the opportunity to learn and grow together. Most importantly, children with special needs can reach their full potential.

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 partner with the corporate sector and government 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 30 individuals with intellectual disabilities into affordable units in the new build in the Fort York area. 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 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 2014 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 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.
- Toronto continue to fund Children's Services programs and partnerships 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.