

NOVA SCOTIA ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY LIVING
Presentation to
The Standing Committee on Community Services,
A Legislative Committee to the House of Assembly, Nova Scotia
April 5th, 2016

Introduction

Good afternoon. It's a great pleasure to be here. I am Jean Coleman and I am here with Dr. Carmel French, President of Nova Scotia Association for Community Living. I'm the Executive Director of Nova Scotia Association of Community Living and have worked for the Association in various capacities for over 35 years. Dr. French is a Professor at Mount Saint Vincent University and has been involved with the Association on the Provincial level as well as at the National level and she'll be sharing some of her insights today.

For the purpose of this presentation Nova Scotia Association for Community Living is referred to as NSACL. I know acronyms are not liked by many but as we only have 15 minutes it seems appropriate to use ours.

NSACL is a province-wide, not-for-profit association of people with intellectual disabilities, families and others leading the way to build a just and inclusive society. We do this by empowering and supporting individuals and families, promoting rights and values in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and encouraging reform and collaborating with other organizations for social justice.

NSACL was formed in 1954 by parents of children who have an intellectual disability. Initially, the Association provided schooling opportunities for children who were, at the time, not permitted to attend public school. Currently, we work to promote inclusive opportunities in pre-school, public school, post-secondary education, employment, recreation, as well as in other systems that affect the lives of people with disabilities. We work closely with other provincial disability organizations to pursue common goals.

The organization of the Canadian Association for Community Living is not unlike government with federal, provincial, and municipal levels. NSACL is part of the Canadian Association for Community Living which includes over 40,000 individual members, 400 local associations, and 13 Provincial/Territorial Associations for Community Living. As well as the provincial NSACL, there are 6 local branches around the province. These branches with NSACL attempt to address the concerns of the approximately 30,000 individuals in Nova Scotia with an intellectual disability.

NSACL receives 100s of requests each month from individuals with intellectual disabilities, family members, service providers and community stakeholders and especially families with sons or daughters with an intellectual disabilities. All are seeking financial and emotional support and/or information.

We strive to ensure that appropriate supports are in place for people with an intellectual disability to live, learn, work and participate in their communities, alongside non-disabled persons, as respected, valued and contributing citizens.

Funding

Through funding from the Federal government we have an Employment Development Director working on our Ready, Willing & Able initiative. Ready, Willing & Able is an initiative of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), in partnership with the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA). It is designed to build on and increase employer capacity and demand to hire people with intellectual disabilities and people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and create the effective responsive linkages necessary between employers and employment agencies supporting people with intellectual disabilities and on the Autism Spectrum. Since October 2014, 50 people with an intellectual disability or on the Autism Spectrum have been hired; real work for real pay. This funding is until March 31, 2017.

In 2015 NSACL started an initiative called Connecting Community. The purpose is to engage people in the work that NSACL does. Twice a month we host information sessions in our office or with church groups or at company offices where we share stories in a one hour time frame of NSACL's work. The benefit of this is that over 200 more people are aware of some joys and challenges in the lives of persons with an intellectual disability. People attend from all walks of life and could be potential employers, volunteers, donors or Board members.

Prior to the last fiscal budget, NSACL received \$79,000 in discretionary funding from the Department of Community Services. Last year, this amount was reduced and we receive \$55,000. The thirty percent cut in funding has resulted in many hardships for the Association, the most serious being that we are unable to hire a part time family support facilitator in the valley region.

Family Support

The Nova Scotia association is a family-based association, assisting people with intellectual disabilities and their families to lead the way in advancing inclusion in their own lives and in their communities. Education, deinstitutionalization and communication are key components of the work NSACL does in Nova Scotia. Families come to us for information on their rights, the education system, justice and health. The kind of support that NSACL provides to families is based on the specific needs of the family. This can include, but is not limited to, providing information on local inclusive opportunities and options; supporting families to connect with local resources and support; assisting

families to have access to the services provided through the Department of Community Services (provincial social services); facilitating people to seek justice when exclusion and abuse have happened; facilitating elder parents and individuals to think about planning for the future attending school meetings with parents and supporting inclusive education.

We respond to their requests directly as well as share information and facilitate workshops for our families, fellow professionals, and the general public. For example, we have provided sessions on issues such as Sexuality, Individual Education Plans, Relationship Building, Inclusive Recreational Opportunities, and RDSP's. We also offered sessions for older parents who are planning for the future when they are no longer here to support their adult children. NSACL have been the leader in offering PATH training in the province where staff from Yarmouth Association for Community Residential Options, Breton Ability Centre and staff from the Department of Community Services have attended to become facilitators of person directed planning.

Families started NSACL and are the backbone of our organization. However, our work continues as there are still many families who do not know what they are able to access in supports and don't know their rights. Many families are exhausted in caring for their loved one and often when we hear from folks they are in or near crisis. When they call NSACL we respond immediately, helping people navigate the system, access what they need in plain language and walk the walk with them until they are back on their feet and out of crisis. We do whatever we need to do for as long as it takes.

Much of our work is travelling to communities throughout Nova Scotia and interacting with families. Our presentations are welcomed and well-attended in all communities. We believe that parents, family members and individuals with an intellectual disability are keen for knowledge and the outcome is that people are better informed and therefore can make better choices for their family member to have a fuller inclusive and meaningful life.

We give presentations on a variety of topics that individuals and families ask for on a variety of topics such as the:

Roadmap

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Registered Disability Savings Plan

Parent Support Groups

Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope

Nova Scotia Community College

Mount Saint Vincent University

Soaring Forward We produce a newsletter, Soaring Forward 4 times a year keeping families up to date on current issues such as assisted suicide.

Individual Program Plans

New Initiatives

Real Homes Real Choices

The overall purpose of this project is to increase the capacity of community based residential service providers to assist adults with intellectual disabilities and more complex needs to move from group home arrangements to supported living in the community. This is an initiative through CACL and partners. The two community organizations that are part of this project are Regional Residential Support Services in Dartmouth and Breton Ability Centre in Cape Breton.

To date RRSS has moved three people and Breton Ability Centre has moved nine people to community.

It has been three years since the Roadmap for transforming services was implemented and families had hope. Many family members are now disheartened that there seems to be a lack of progress in moving forward in the direction that was framed in the original Roadmap. The key recommendations have not begun and they are once again losing hope that their sons and daughters will have a full and meaningful life with choices, person directed planning, living where and with whom they choose.

Committees

Coalition /Partnership Building:

The committees that NSACL participate in are as follows; Community Advocates Network, Disability Rights Coalition, Partnership for Disability Strategy, Special Educations Programs Services, Nova Scotia Partnership on Respite, Family Health and Well Being, Employability Table, Living in Community and the Employment Support and Income Assistance. Through these committees we are able to work collaboratively with our allies and make sure that issues facing people with intellectual disabilities are included and represented in the work that is done.

Outcomes from Committee work:

Documents have been developed and distributed:

A Respite Guide for families of Children and Youth with Chronically High needs in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Respite Guide A Guide for Caregivers of youth and Adults with Developmental, Physical, and /or Mental Disabilities

A Resource Tool Kit for Families

A Blue print for Action to Achieve Equitable Access to Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Nova Scotia

CHOICE, EQUALITY AND GOOD LIVES IN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES – A Roadmap for Transforming Nova Scotia Services to Persons with Disabilities

The Way Forward

NSACL provides a valuable service to Nova Scotians with intellectual disabilities and their families. We are service providers and so much more. We have always supported, counselled, shared information, educated, initiated projects, and offered training to families and others, all to ensure individuals with intellectual disabilities receive fair and equitable treatment. Last years' funding cut has presented many challenges to NSACL as

it continues to support families. Sustaining NSACL if we receive another funding cut would be difficult.

In order to turn this around, we'll need government, community service providers, mainstream community systems and disability organizations all working together to create the fundamental changes needed if we are going to move the quality of lives of people with disabilities closer to that enjoyed by the rest of society.

We urge the Department of Community Services to reinstate the \$23,700 that was cut from our core funding in 2015 so that together we can create better lives for our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for your time and we welcome questions.

***Respectfully submitted by Nova Scotia Association for Community Living.
April 2016***