



## OPEN LETTTER TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Karen Casey,  
Minister of Finance and Treasury Board,  
Department of Finance and Treasury Board,  
P.O. Box 187, Halifax, Nova Scotia

January 14, 2021

Dear Ms. Casey,

I write to you on behalf of Community Homes Action Group, a group of concerned citizens, health care, social services and legal professionals, parents and advocates formed to draw attention to the crisis in residential and community home options for persons with developmental disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder and to work with government to find solutions.

As you prepare your first post pandemic budget, it's important you keep our community in mind. The strains over the last year have further deepened the problems existing and attention is needed now.

Some recent history: In 2013, I had the honour to be the Community Co-chair for the joint government/community task force formed to tackle this problem head on. In 2014 the current government adopted our **Roadmap Report: Choice Equality and Good Lives in Inclusive Communities** – a ten-year time frame for significantly increasing community-based supported living options and moving beyond the institutional model to a person-centred approach, community-based approach.

The eight years that have followed since then have been a learning process for everyone. What we laid out in 2013 wasn't and isn't an easy task to achieve. In this regard, we were glad to see a small step in that direction with the recent announcement the government will discontinue the operation of Harbourside Adult Residential facility in Yarmouth and support the 27 residents to move to more appropriate settings in the community over the next 12 to 18 months. However, the glacial pace of change continues to demoralize us and even destabilize the situation further. Although there has undoubtedly been some progress on some fronts, the allocation of resources and leadership from government needed to move the dial forward on community capacity has been inadequate.

The waitlists for services, instead of diminishing since 2013 have continued to grow. From 1100 in 2015 to 1300 in 2017 to over 1500 in 2020. There are hundreds of young adults on waitlists, living with aging parents but wanting to start their own lives in community. And they are no closer today than they were 8 years ago.

The very slow pace of action has taken a great toll on service deliverers as well. Despite their expertise and keen commitment to partner with DCS on transformation initiatives, the community-based non-profit service providers are under-resourced as they try to manage the challenges they are currently facing. Management and administrative ratios are inadequate. There is also a chronic and growing problem with staff recruitment, training and retention all made much worse by COVID 19.

We also hear that the needs of individuals seeking community placements are growing more complex. Service providers have limited funding to hire in-house professionals. As well, there is a critical lack of health professionals within the community with the scope of experience needed to work with persons with complex needs. Couple all these factors with a lack of housing stock generally, new challenging building codes and a pandemic and we have the perfect storm we find ourselves in today.

Clearly it is time for some good news.

In the 2020 budget, the government announced the creation of 50 new community placements in 2020 and plans to create more over the next several years. We are all hopeful that 50 people will finally be able to move out of institutions and take their rightful place in their communities. But our experience thus far makes us skeptical. In 2017, the government announced their commitment to open 8 small option homes to support 32 individuals and to date, only 4 of the 8 are fully operational. How long will these 50 individuals have to wait? At this pace, how long will over 1500 people on waitlists have to wait?

We have watched this glacial pace of change for many years and see the human and systems costs it is taking. We know there will be no real progress on diminishing the waitlist and improving the health of this demoralized vulnerable population and this struggling sector without a new concerted effort by the provincial government. It will not happen without significant financial and leadership investment by this provincial government to address this crisis.

We need good news in this budget.

To begin with, we need to see a significant commitment in tackling this growing waitlist. For several years, CHAG has called for an annual investment in at least 25 new small option homes over the next three years. We reiterate that request. This would mean an increase of 75 new supportive living homes across the province within three years, thereby meeting the needs of up to 300 people with disabilities currently on waitlists and living in inappropriate settings.

We also call for the financial and leadership resources needed for a **new expedited action plan** to deal specifically with the task of increasing the capacity and quality of supported community homes for our community.

This will include;

- Significant financial investment to strengthen the existing sector, including a robust recruitment campaign with financial incentives to tackle human resources challenges,
- A comprehensive transition plan that looks at the needs and transition timelines for individuals as well as a cost breakdown,
- A Navigator Program to help families and service providers build community capacity and assure good quality of life for people transitioning to new homes,
- Increased transparency and data collection and an ongoing reporting/tracking mechanism to gauge progress, movement and reductions within waitlists. (this would include an accounting of the 50 placements promised for this year and subsequent years).

We believe these commitments will move us in the right direction and may finally bring some Good News to our community. It would send a clear message that government is serious about their promises made in the 2013 Roadmap to Nova Scotians with disabilities and their families.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the equal rights of all persons with disabilities to live good lives in inclusive communities. It is time for Nova Scotia to also commit fully to meeting that goal.

Sincerest regards,

Wendy Lill,  
Chair, Community Homes Action Group

Cc: Kelly Regan, Minister of Community Services  
cc. Maria Medioli, Executive Director, DSP  
cc. Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister, DCS  
cc. Inclusion Nova Scotia  
cc. Disability Rights Coalition  
cc. ILNS  
cc. Autism Nova Scotia  
cc. Club Inclusion  
cc. Nova Scotia MLAs  
cc. NSRAA

# PRESENTATION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

PHASING OUT ADULT RESIDENTIAL CENTRES  
AND REGIONAL REHABILITATION CENTRES

PRESENTED ON FEBRUARY 2, 2021

# WHAT IS DIVERSE ABILITIES NS?



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A voluntary, non-profit, member-based association of organizations who work together to support people with varying abilities to reach their greatest potential and to live as independently as possible.

Collectively, we support about 525 individuals with complex challenges associated with their diagnosis, including persons with moderate to severe intellectual and physical disabilities (including developmental disorders, i.e. autism), chronic mental illness, acquired brain injury and dual diagnosis.

We are proponents of the UNCRPD and want to help the overall sector move forward in a positive way to enrich the lives of persons with disabilities.

# OUR MEMBERSHIP





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The membership of Diverse Abilities NS is made up of all the ARC/RRCs across the province of Nova Scotia including:

The Meadows Adult Residential Centre, Bridgetown

Breton Ability Centre, Sydney

Harbourside Lodge, Yarmouth

Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre, Waterville

Riverview Enhanced Living Society, Dayspring

Quest – A Society for Adult Support and Rehabilitation, Halifax

Riverview Home Corporation, Stellarton

Sunset Community, Pugwash



# WHAT WE DO



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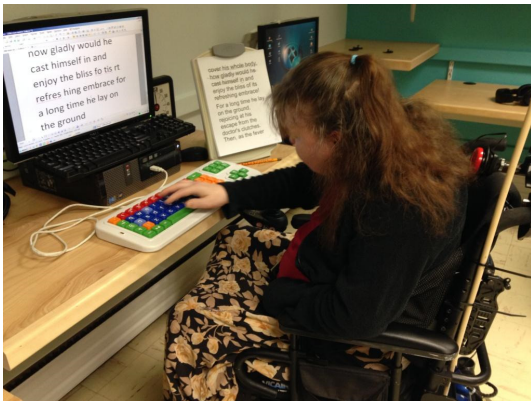
Provide a continuum of progressive services and supports that are designed to empower people with diverse abilities to make their own choices, participate in decision-making, and to be contributors to and participate in their local community.

- Independent living services (community and facility-based)
- Access to employment opportunities
- Vocational training and skills development
- Social enterprise
- Access to a range of medical, health-related and other specialty services



# WHAT WE DO

Overall, these range of services are in alignment with government's stated vision for the DSP program – they focus on ensuring persons with disabilities receive the services they need to achieve their greatest potential to enable their inclusion and contributions within their community.



# STRATEGIC FOCUS





# STRATEGIC PILLARS

- Three key themes frame the strategic focus of our core activities as an association:
  - Support DSP Transformation (Ongoing planning and implementation)
    - Ensure participants have a voice on where they live, with whom, and the supports they need to reach their individual goals and improve their quality of life
  - Human Resources
    - Current and future state
  - Public Awareness
    - Advocate rights of our residents/support them to live a more independent life



# DSP TRANSFORMATION: PHASING OUT ARCS/RRCS



# DSP TRANSFORMATION

- DANS supports DSP Transformation
  - Choice, social inclusion, and the best supports based on individual need
- Phasing Out Harbourside Lodge in Yarmouth (next 12 to 18 months)
  - Right supports must be in place
    - Honour the unique strengths, needs and capacities of each participant
  - Build template/lessons learned (support future planning)
  - Support staff through transition





THANK YOU!







# Closure of ARCs and RRCs in the Disability Support Program

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2, 2021

# Disability Support Program

- ▶ The Disability Support Program (DSP) serves adults with intellectual disabilities, long-term mental illness, and physical disabilities through a range of community-based, residential, and vocational/day programs.
- ▶ DSP also provides supports to families to support their children with intellectual or physical disabilities at home through the Direct Family Support for Children program.

## Key Facts and Figures

- ▶ As of January 12, 2021, DSP serves 4,979 adult participants.
- ▶ Approximately 80% of DSP participants live in the community, with the remainder living in larger residential homes.
- ▶ As of January 12, 2021, there are 1,698 participants on the service request list, which tracks how many people want a new or different type of service within the next two years.
  - ▶ Over 1,100 individuals on the service request list are currently in receipt of supports from DSP
- ▶ DSP's budget has increased year-over-year for the past five years.
  - ▶ The approved budget for 2020/21 is \$389.5 million, with \$75.5 million supporting Adult Residential Centres (ARCs) and Regional Rehabilitation Centres (RRCs).

# Determining Eligibility for DSP

Adult applicants must:

- ▶ Be 19+ years of age or over.
- ▶ Have a diagnosis of Intellectual Disability, Long-term Mental Illness, and/or Physical Disability.
- ▶ Eligibility for the program is confirmed via an assessment process that includes a functional and financial assessment.

# DSP Participant Profile

**Person Profile:** Person can live an active life as a participating member of the community with intermittent support for some daily activities.



**Person Profile:** Person can develop skills and increase adaptive behaviours and community access with intense levels of support and structure.

Benefits from a multi-disciplinary approach for responding to frequent unpredictable behaviour/safety issues.

Level 1  
Support:  
Minimal

Level 2  
Support:  
Moderate

Level 3  
Support:  
High

Level 4  
Support:  
Enriched

Level 5  
Support:  
Intensive



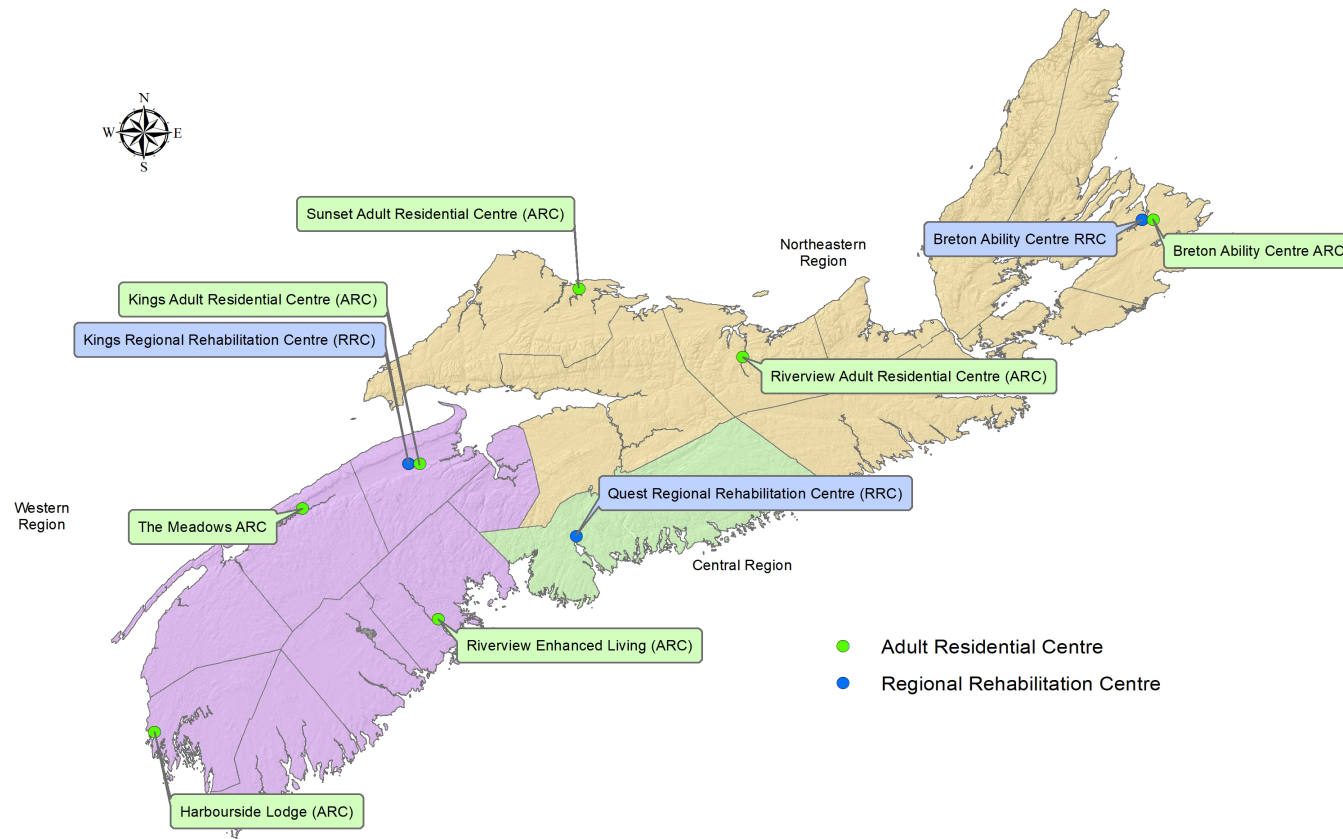
**Person Profile:** Person can maintain/enhance their skills, broaden social and community networks and optimize stability of multiple/chronic health issues with high need for assistance, support and structure.



# ARC/RRC Program Background

- ▶ There are eight Adult Residential Centre (ARC) and Regional Rehabilitation Centre (RRC) programs
  - ▶ An Adult Residential Centre (ARC) provides support to participants who need high levels of supervision and support in their activities of daily living, routine home and community activities
  - ▶ A Regional Rehabilitation Centre (RRC) provides support to participants who need a range of support in activities of daily living, routine home and community activities, and may need high levels of support with severe/multiple behavior challenges
- ▶ Support approximately 525 high needs participants and with 24/7 staffing
- ▶ Institutional/congregate based living for persons with disabilities is recognized as an outdated model
  - ▶ Significantly limits participant choice, independence, community inclusion, privacy, and quality of life
  - ▶ All provinces and territories in Canada have moved, or are moving away, from this type of care with Nova Scotia having the highest rates of institutionalization in Canada

# ARCs and RRCs in Nova Scotia



\*Harbourside Lodge (ARC) closing 2021

## ARC/RRC Program Closure - Background

- ▶ The DSP Roadmap for Transformation, endorsed by government, recommended phasing out these facilities
- ▶ DSP conducted extensive consultation, research and collaborative design with the sector, including participants and families, to determine the best way to phase out facility-based placements in Nova Scotia
- ▶ 2020-21 Provincial Budget provided funding to create 50 new placements to transition participants out of ARC/RRC and address Service Request List demand and committed to: *“increasing numbers and investments in each of the following three years and beyond”*.

## Progress Update

- ▶ DSP has begun making offers for placement to participants within residential facilities
- ▶ DSP is actively working with facilities across the Province to ensure a smooth transition
- ▶ Offers for new placements have been made to those leaving facilities and those on the service request list
- ▶ Announcement of the closure of Harbourside Lodge ARC in Yarmouth was made in fall 2020. This facility will close first, because the facility would require significant renovation and infrastructure investments to remain open longer term.



## Conclusion

- ▶ DCS remains fully committed to phasing out ARCs and RRCs and the goals of the *Roadmap* which include:
  - Greater self-direction, choice and control by people with disabilities and their families
  - Modernized delivery system for supports and services to advance social and economic inclusion
  - Increased capacity and involvement of generic community systems in enabling inclusion. DSP has begun making offers for placement to participants within residential facilities
- ▶ DCS remains committed to the intent of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Thank you.