



*Reflections on*  
**Common Threads**

**CHANGING STORIES ... STORIES OF CHANGE**

A conference on Independent Facilitation sponsored by  
The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network  
16-17 November 2016

*Reflections on*  
**Common Threads**  
**CHANGING STORIES... STORIES OF CHANGE**

A conference on Independent Facilitation sponsored by  
The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network  
through the Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project  
funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services

16–17 November 2016

Reflections by **John O'Brien**

Web-links in the PDF  
version of this document  
are live.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. You can make and distribute copies for any non-commercial purpose as long as you attribute it and do not change it.

**Graphic Recorders**

Monica Dikkes

Tanya Gerber

Joshua Gray

Wendy Newbery

Aviva Samson

**Designated Listeners**

Mary Lou Emburgh

Carla Giddings

Susannah Joyce

John Lord

Connie Lyle O'Brien

Andrea Podruski

Jack Pearpoint

Patti Scott



ontario  
independent  
facilitation  
network  
oifn.ca



Ontario  
Ministry of Community and Social Service  
Community and Developmental Services Branch

This conference was presented by OIFN  
through the Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project  
funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services

[www.oifn.ca](http://www.oifn.ca)

For more than 20 years family groups in Ontario have created and benefited from a variety of effective approaches to Independent Facilitation.

In 2014 [The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network \(OIFN\)](#), with funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), initiated an Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project to discover how this grass roots social innovation can develop and contribute to the transformation initiative which implements the *Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, 2008 (SIPDDA)*.

As the initial demonstration project moves toward its end in March 2017, this conference drew people with disabilities and family members, Independent Facilitators and organization leaders together to reflect on stories of change supported by Independent Facilitators. This compound question framed their thinking together, *What difference do Independent Facilitators make and how do they do it?* Most of the exploration focused on change for people and families as they relate to their communities and supports.

These reflections are what one person learned about the practice of Independent Facilitation by participating in the conference. By design the conference offered large group presentations, dispersed the large group to hear and consider the meaning of stories of change, and brought people back together to share their thoughts in the large group. No two people had the same experience of the conference, so my reflections don't represent a consensus or a declaration of best practice in Independent Facilitation. This is just my way of making sense of what I heard and read. They do not represent the views of OIFN or any of its members, though I hope Independent Facilitators will recognize themselves here.

Though we were a large group in a crowded room, the conference I experienced expressed a positive spirit. Gerima Harvey's drumming drew physical attention to the common rhythm of our hearts and gifts of music and break dancing embodied the deep purpose of Independent facilitation: to weave opportunities for people's gifts to make a difference to community life. In this context, participants showed up as respectful, inquiring, thoughtful, passionate and resolved to remain on course.

I am grateful.

–John O'Brien

*To support people to live as independently as possible in the community and to support the full inclusion of Ontarians with disabilities in all aspects of society.*

–MCSS Vision

## Contents

Conference Schedule	4
Graphic Records	5
The Spirit of Facilitation	7
<i>Society will change when I am in it.</i>	8
Origins and Foundations of Independent Facilitation	9
It's Simple... Except When It's Not	11
What people want has depth	13
Getting what's desired may not be easy	14
Independent Facilitators Are Free to Co-Create Their Role	15
Social Innovation –Al Etmanskii	19
Looking to the Future	20
More Independent Facilitation Stories	21

## Conference Schedule



Four presentations to the large group gave people important resources for learning from their selection of two of the ten stories they heard.

- **Lucinda Hage and Paul Tiller** grounded Independent Facilitation in the life-long journey of a person and his mother creating new possibilities.
- Talented participants shared their gifts of music and break-dancing after dinner.
- **Al Etmanski** widened horizons with his discussion of social innovation and thinking like a movement.
- **Barbara Simmons** set Independent Facilitation in the context of MCSS policy.

### Ladybug's Quest for an Ordinary Life

Change takes time. Angela and her mother dreamed that one day she could live in her own home and receive good support for her complex needs, but resources are limited in small communities like Tilbury. For 12 years Angela and her mother have been supported to put the pieces of the dream together by Facilitators at Windsor Essex Brokerage.

*Windsor Essex Brokerage For Personal Supports*

### Critical Partnerships: Lessons Learned

Critical partnerships with people and their families are essential to shaping the practice of Independent Facilitation. In this conversation we will explore what we have come to understand in collaboration with people and families about the conference themes.

*Colleen Mitchell and Judith McGill*

### Towards Full Citizenship: The Futures We Want & the Support We Need

We can be and want to be full contributing citizens. We can't do it alone. We need supports to make these changes. Independent Facilitation helps. Ask us what we want and need. Plan with us, how to work with us to make these changes.

*People First: Richard Ruston (PF Ontario) and Kory Earle (PF Canada)*

### Citizenship Is More Than A Ballot

A P4P panel will share stories of Aidan's journey to exercise his citizenship; Grant's life expanding through work and making contributions in his community; and Dirriell's citizen journey through going to school and engaging in his community.

*Partners For Planning*

### From Isolation to Connection

After high school, Daymeann and Fatima found themselves feeling lost and alone. Both wanted to expand their relationships and horizons. Hear how they have been supported to go out of their comfort zone to explore new opportunities and broaden their imagination of what is possible.

*Families For A Secure Future*

### Embracing Possibility By Enriching Community

"Embracing Possibility - Enriching Community" are guiding principles for Bridges to belonging. Enriching our community, as individuals and as an organization, helps those we support to embrace possibilities. We will share the ways our focus on community creates positive spin-offs for the people we support.

*Bridges To Belonging*

### Building Trust: Collaborating With Service Providers

People often have a history of experiences that break trust. Pauline, a 58 year old woman living in supported housing in a small community, had lost trust. As a result she had significant health issues that were not addressed. Through the listening and education provided by her Facilitator, Pauline re-built trust, which enabled them to find ways that agencies can work together in supporting her life and her health.

*Facilitation Wellington Dufferin*

### Stuck between a rock and hard place

Marty felt trapped living in a nursing home, stuck on every possible waiting list. Waiting was killing him. A circle of support rallied to help Marty make his move out of the nursing home and into a place he could call home with the customized support he needs. Hear a story that shows how family, friends, and systems can work together.

*Facile Perth*

### Emerging Communities: Rising Out Of A History Of Start And Stop

Hear the perspectives of families, self advocates, Independent Facilitators and Service Agency allies as we share how past initiatives and relationships have laid fertile ground for our efforts to develop Independent Facilitation as a viable option in communities where it is not currently offered.

*Citizens of London and area, Near North Region, and Thunder Bay*

### Witnessing and Fostering Resilience

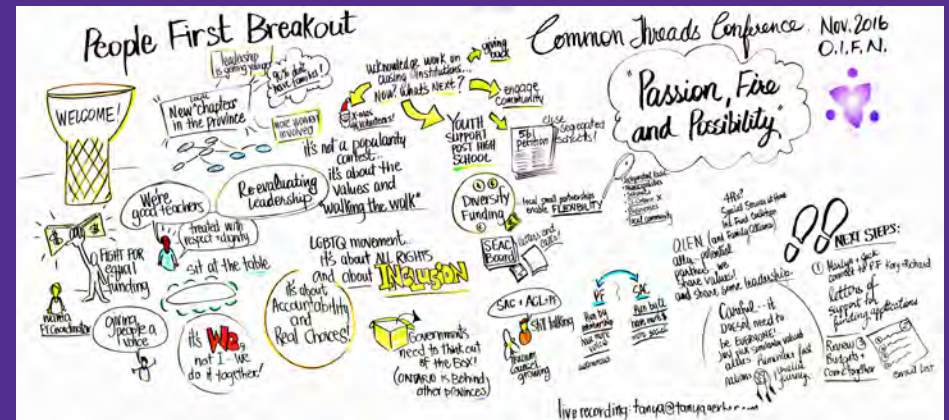
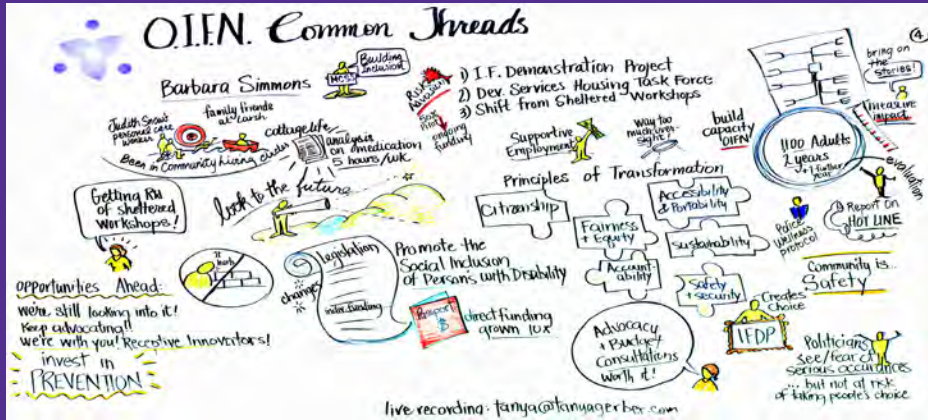
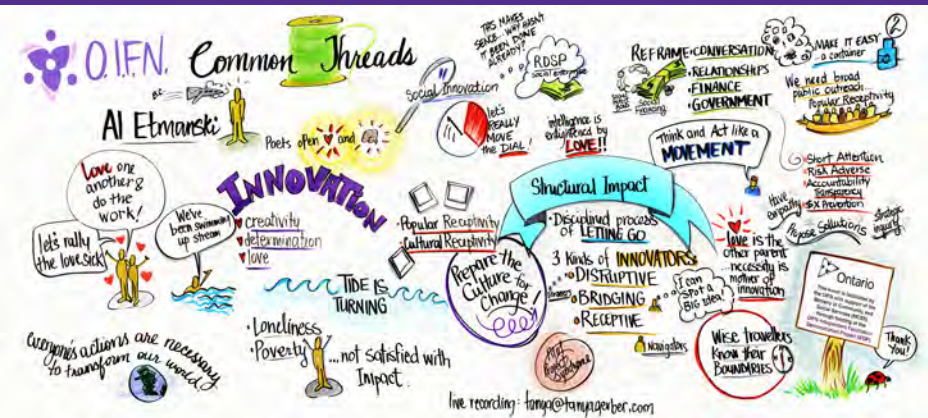
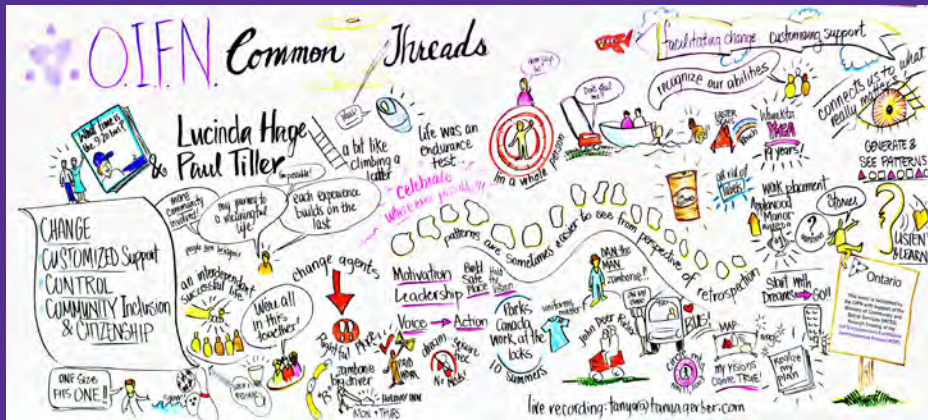
Independent Facilitators are called upon to work in partnership with others, across many systems, to support a person and their family to make sense of their options and make good decisions. We will share several stories, including Shurlan's, that remind us that in the end it is all about building trusting relationships with others that allows people to be truly seen.

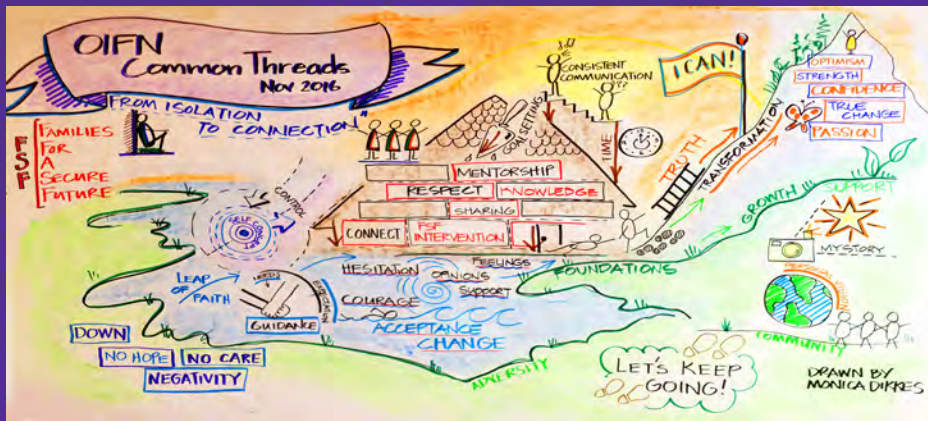
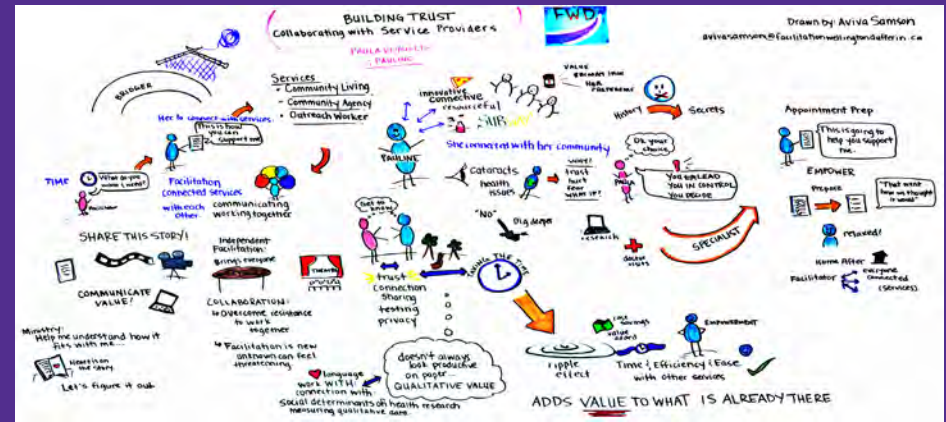
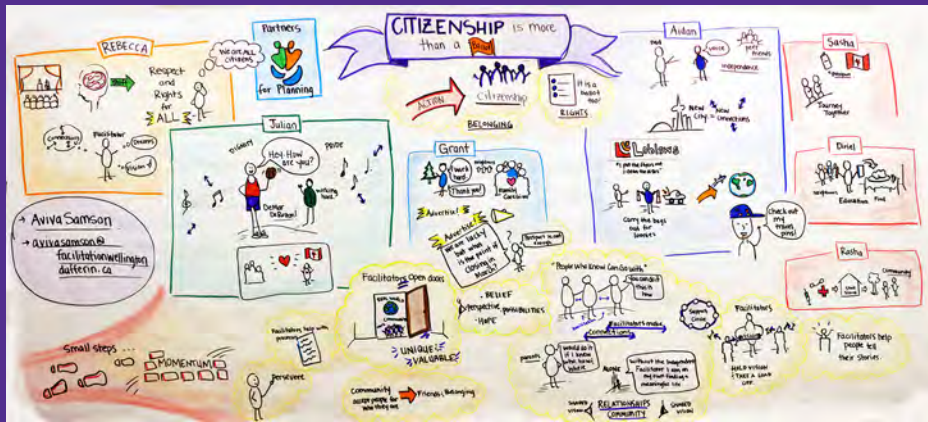
*Families For A Secure Future*

**Gerima Harvey** kept the Conference beat with his drum.

**John O'Brien, Lynda Kahn & Dave Hasbury** facilitated large group periods of meaning making.

Graphic records of the sessions follow. They are easiest to read when the PDF reader is set to 150-200%.





The spirit of facilitation showed up a moment after the first plenary talk. Paul Tiller had worked hard, doing his part in sharing the journey that he and his mother, Lucinda Hage, are making with support from Independent Facilitation.

Paul's interest in drumming came up briefly in the presentation. During the question period Gerima Harvey, the conference drummer, asked Paul if he wanted to drum for the group. Paul said an enthusiastic yes. Gerima brought up his drum, shared the drumming briefly and, when Paul was engaged, moved back to make room for Paul, enjoyed and celebrated his performance.

Gerima acted independently in the moment, asking no one's consent but Paul's. Led by his heart, he spontaneously assisted Paul to turn a few words about an interest into an enjoyable opportunity for Paul to contribute even more to the conference.

The pattern of Independent facilitation in a five minute gesture: listen, notice a gift, ask consent, co-create an opportunity for that gift to benefit others.

Independent facilitators put their knowledge and skills to work but this spirit, which is available to anyone with courage to listen and act, brings the relationship alive.



Gerima's youtube channel is at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCtEQSIA8Uj-f54uuhelwq7lg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtEQSIA8Uj-f54uuhelwq7lg)

*Society is very much ready for change.*

*We would be wise to find how to shift the conversation from funding to citizenship.*

*Judith Snow said it best. “Society will change when I am in it”.  
It starts with finding one’s strength to bring about change.”*

–Bill Hiltz



Arn Row

Bill Hiltz



## Origins and Foundations of Independent Facilitation

Independent Facilitation emerged in Ontario, at least 18 years before the Demonstration Project began, from a world-wide movement committed to change society by assuring that people with disabilities are in it as full, contributing citizens. Ontario has been a fertile field for this movement. Social innovators have worked for more than a generation from a commitment to inclusion, the belief that all people with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as any other person to compose a good life with the opportunities that a healthy community offers.\* This belief energizes action on an agenda that provides the essential context for understanding and practicing Independent Facilitation.

- Creating individualized supports for full participation in community life. Moving away from service settings that pull people together based on professional assessments of deficiency. Moving to supports for a life included in community that strengthens people's capacities and gifts. Re-directing attention and effort from *specialized services first* to *community first*.
- Promoting civic responsibility to make accommodations that open valued community roles to people who would otherwise be excluded because all people have the right to participate and because benefits flow to the whole community from the resulting relationships.
- Recognizing people's right to direct the course of their own lives, with the support of people who know and love them. One actualization of this right puts people, their families and chosen decision supporters in control of public funds available for assistance through sufficient and flexible individual budgets. Another creates ways for people to increase their wealth, such as RDSPs.

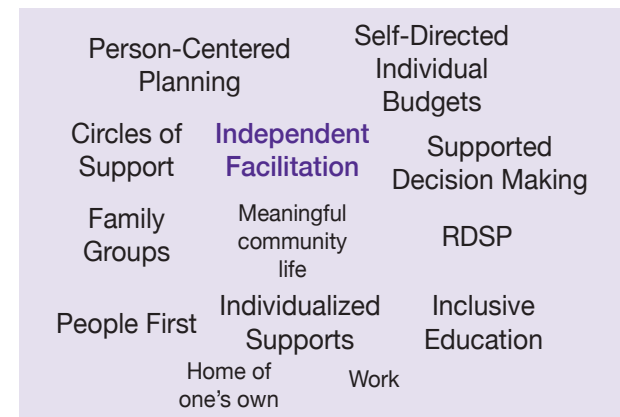
Independent Facilitation is one social innovation generated by a network of committed families, people with disabilities and their allies to make progress on this long term agenda. Not only do members of this network share common beliefs, many have had a hand in creating and promoting more than one of these innovations. The variety of approaches to Independent Facilitation grew up with, draws on and supports people to benefit from an ecology of mutually supportive practices, policy reforms and organizing efforts grown by this grass roots movement.

\* John Lord and his colleagues have helpfully described this as the emergence of a New Story. See John Lord & Peggy Hutchison (2017) [Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities, Third Edition](#). Concord, ON: Captus Press and John Lord, Barbara Leavitt and Charlotte Dingwall (2012) [Facilitating an Everyday Life Independent Facilitation and what really matters in a New Story](#). Inclusion Press. For another perspective on the social innovations created by this movement see John O'Brien & Beth Mount (2015). [Pathfinders: People with developmental disabilities and their allies building communities that work better for everybody](#). Inclusion Press.

*As a citizen your voice is respected and your contribution is encouraged.\**

Since its incorporation into MCSS policy, Independent Facilitation has become singular. It is also importantly plural. Different family led groups embraced, developed and organized the idea in their own environment. Members of OIFN represent different traditions that each serve their understanding of the values of inclusion and self-direction.

*Independent facilitation is part of an eco-system capable of creating new possibilities.*



\*All unattributed *quotes* in this document are from my notes. Unfortunately, listening to large group discussions made it impossible for me to identify speakers by name.

*Our job as facilitators is to help people build and protect good, connected lives.*

*Through facilitation he found his voice as an artist. He is a photographer and a painter. Being an artist led him to validation in community. Two local businesses sell his paintings and he has entered many art shows and hosted his own exhibit.*

While the movement that invented Independent Facilitation is united by common beliefs, its expressions are diverse. The differing gifts and experiences of innovators involved in creating Independent Facilitation, different local circumstances and different histories result in creative variations in practices and perspectives.\* The Conference gave participants the opportunity to learn from stories that reflect both shared values and distinctive ways to express and enact those values.

The movement for inclusion and self-direction has influenced policy. The Government of Ontario, motivated in part by the social forces that produced *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, made support for social inclusion the focus of the province's Developmental Disabilities policy. Influenced by Ontario movement leaders, MCSS has undertaken a multi-year program of Transformation, recognizing that the current system does not have and must develop the capacity necessary to support social inclusion for everyone.

The people, families and facilitators who are co-creating Independent Facilitation form one of the leading edges of this Transformation. They want roles and relationships that most service providers are not yet organized to support. What they want –jobs, homes of their own, further education– is found through participation in community life, not within the boundaries of the group living, day services and in home assistance that now account for the largest share of public expenditures. Responding to individual choices for meaningful lives in community calls for new capacities based on different stories and mindsets than those that shaped most existing services; labeling them person-directed isn't enough. This position at the growing edge of transformation explains one important dimension of Facilitator independence. Independent Facilitators act from a different story than those who offer typical services are expected to. (It's important to note that this difference does not confer moral superiority on Independent Facilitators. There are fine examples of agency staff respectfully facilitating plans and orchestrating actions that bring people into valued community roles; many people and families are currently satisfied to rely on typical services and some advocate for more group homes and day services.)

---

\* The first *Common Threads Conference* sponsored by OIFN explored how this variety of expressions of a common core has worked out for person-centered planning. See John O'Brien (2014). [\*Reflections on Common Threads: Approaches and Contexts for Planning Everyday Lives\*](#). OIFN

## It's Simple... Except When It's Not

Independent Facilitation can be defined as a two step process.

1. Find out what people want
2. Assist them to get it.

Service provider and DSO staff dance the same two steps, so the question arises, *What is different about Independent Facilitation?* This question has an over-simple answer that fails to make room for all of its potential contributions. That answer: *Independent Facilitation offers those people and families who chose it an alternative to agency staff to facilitate their Person-Directed Plan.* It's common to describe the advantage in Independent Facilitation as freedom from conflict of interest. Because Independent Facilitators are not affiliated with any agency that provides services they are free to encourage a wide search for the assistance that best suits a person's interests, even if what's discovered might disadvantage an agency.

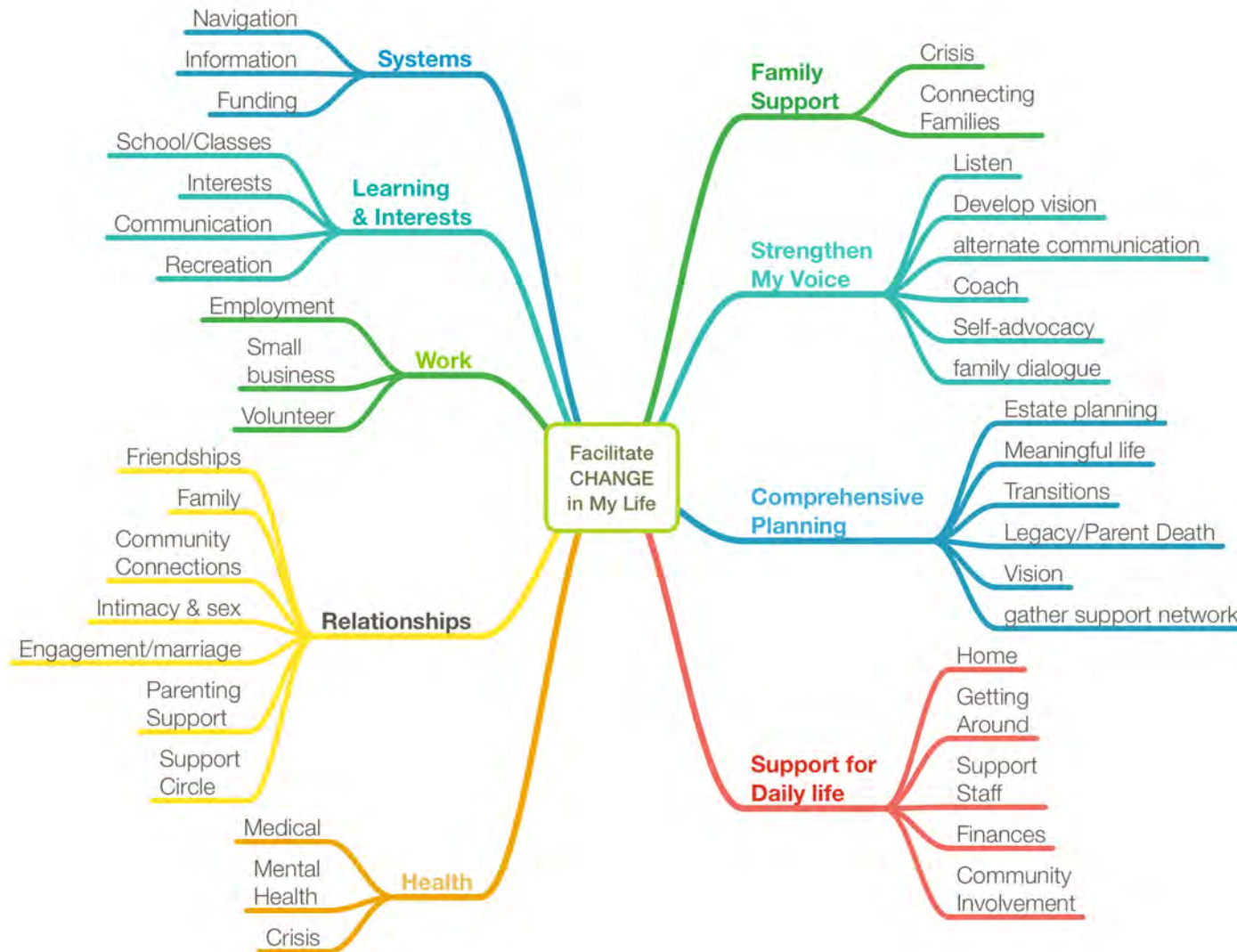
The experience of Independent Facilitation shared at the Conference shows that these understandings are accurate as far as they go, but they do not go far enough. Independent Facilitation is more than what is usually understood as planning (gathering information and producing a document) in both purpose and process. Independent Facilitator's aim in practice is not to make a plan but to support a person to be in control of a good life, resilient to difficulties. Services can support a good life and so can well organized Person-Directed Planning, but these are means to the end that focuses an Independent Facilitator's work: the opportunities and challenges of a good community life.

In practice, performing both steps –finding out what people want and assisting them to get it– are seldom as straightforward and technical a matter as policies imply. The process turns out better for a person when Facilitators welcome and work well in the complexity and uncertainty of real relationships among the diverse people who co-create opportunities for a person's gifts to make a difference. If person-directed planning were understood simply as holding a meeting and making a plan that links a person's dreams to available resources, what is possible would be dictated by easily available opportunities and assistance. On this understanding, people at the Conference who now live in their own homes would still be sitting in a nursing home or unsuitable group waiting for somebody to implement their plan. Their situation changed because Independent Facilitators walked with them on their journey, playing an active role in problem solving and negotiating new ways to use public funds and service resources.

### [From the DSO website](#)

*There are different ways to plan for your life. A community agency can help you with this, or families and people with developmental disabilities can use the funding they receive to pay someone to help them. You can now apply for this support through the application process at DSO!*

Many people and family members frame their goal as *independence*. This powerful word has multiple meanings in addition to *doing things on my own, for myself*. In the context of people's comments, independence also means *making more decisions for myself, not being told what to do (although it's ok for people I trust to talk decisions over with me)* and *moving away from my parent's home with whatever help I need to live in my own place*. Independent Facilitators can help with each of these related aspects of independence, focusing the network's attention on good opportunities to learn skills that matter, making room for the person to exercise more autonomy, helping the person recruit and authorize others they trust to talk things over, and coordinating the help they need to set up their own household, where they call the shots.



Independent Facilitators respond to concerns that touch every aspect of community life with disability in a complex system.  
 (From *Probing the Edges of the Work of Independent Facilitation*. OIFN)

The point of Independent Facilitation is not a plan; the point is co-creation of meaningful opportunities in community life. Independent Facilitators do far more than run occasional meetings, when it's necessary they actually walk with people as they cross the boundaries imposed by social exclusion.

In practice the big event approach to Person-Directed Planning is only one way to steer positive action. As *Probing the Edges of the Work of Independent Facilitation*, the record of a reflection meeting with OIFN members, reports:

*While the work of facilitating change can involve Person-Directed Planning... more often it involves smaller plans, followed by action, and then reflecting on learning in order to figure out the next thing to do that will build on the last action. It is this practice of "micro-planning" that makes it possible for people to try, experience success or failure, learn from the experience, and build capacity and confidence to actually direct their own lives. (p. 8)*

### What people want has depth

It's become common to ask people with developmental disabilities to share their stories, dreams and life goals in planning meetings. The fact that many people and families come up with answers, even in an hour's meeting with relative strangers, can hide how difficult these questions really are. Answers will be more guarded and shallow when people don't know, trust and choose the askers. They may have been let down by lack of action after previous planning exercises. Others may have promised to help and then disappeared. They may worry about being judged as foolish or unreasonable. They may be tired of fighting to get what they know is right for them. They may fear offending those they depend on. A history of stress or trauma may depress capacity to imagine better or inhibit voice. Answers will be narrower if people and families lack good images of possibility. Those who have not seen people with similar impairments successfully doing a real job or living in their own home may have trouble seeing themselves at work or at home. Answers will stay close to what they currently have when people feel alone. Answers will fall within the boundaries of family and services if community looks like an alien place haunted by risk of rejection and danger of exploitation.

The joy of Independent Facilitation is to orchestrate a network of relationships that allow deeper understanding of peoples identities and gifts and more hopeful, courageous and expansive action to make life even better. Overcoming limits often takes time and many small cycles of trying and reflecting. There are techniques that can help. But vivid representation of gifts and dreams

Some people can't count on words to express their thoughts and choices. They rely on others to listen to their bodies and actions and interpret what they see. Sometimes Independent Facilitators can assist people to find more ways to make themselves understood through specialist intervention and technology. Always they look for better ways to read the person's identity, gifts and preferences. As they get to know a person, members of a circle of support can bring additional perspectives and avoid a situation in which the person has only one other to interpret for them.

*We want to know what the world can offer her, and what she can offer the world.*

*So many people have come, made promises and then disappeared, I thought she would go away too. But she has stuck with me.*

*When it comes to changing services, things that seem like they should take a day can take months.*

*As a facilitator, I help introduce people to themselves.*

*It's a privilege to share people's stories and their journeys.*

*Together we discover the resources that allow people to make choices for themselves.*

*The way the system is set up makes it a struggle to do things that most people wouldn't think were hard.*

on paper matters most when images launch action that extends relationships through a stretch into new situations. People's voices grows stronger when other's heed and join in doing what the person prefers. People discover richer answers to questions about their desired future by taking real steps into community life. Until they risk inviting diverse people to join an intentional circle of support, they may feel alone and unsupported. Until they feel the support of a self-advocacy group or a family group they may feel helpless. Until they try something new, they may not know that they want more or less of it. Until they have tested themselves against their fears, they may not know that they are strong. Until they have experienced resilience to failure, they may not know that others can be trusted to help. Making and revising plans can help with navigation, but it's people acting together over time that builds roles and relationships that reveal more of a person's gifts and dreams.

### **Getting what's desired may not be easy**

Some people are clear about their desires. It's lining up opportunities and resources that pose difficulties. Personal networks and communities have a wealth of resources to offer, but personal networks are seldom organized and many community settings are not yet accustomed to making accommodations that welcome and actively support people's contributions. "Natural support" can amount to little more than what family members, especially mothers, are able to do. Support from other people and groups is not like fuel that an Independent Facilitator can pump into a person's tank on demand. Community resources are not stocked on shelves. What personal networks and community resources can offer has to be cultivated in relationship. A person joining a workplace or community association often has to invest in shared learning with other participants to work out their contribution and what they need to make it. Independent Facilitators play a variety of roles in assisting the person to build community.

Community first doesn't mean community only. Most people involved with Independent Facilitators need some publicly funded supports. MCSS funded services are committed by policy to offer support for inclusion as a person directs. But service system Transformation is a work in progress. Many services have yet to develop capacity to offer individualized, person-directed supports for employment and life in a home of a person's own or offer good assistance to people and families who choose to self-manage their supports. And, despite a substantial increase in the Developmental Services budget, people may face considerable waits for funding, even if they are currently placed in nursing homes or other unsuitable settings. Independent facilitators can help people find other ways to get the assistance they need or identify other good possibilities that they can pursue while they wait.

## Independent Facilitators Are Free to Co-Create Their Role

Independent Facilitators are not magicians. They have to be careful with their time. They have no authority to compel service providers and DSOs, much less community members. They have no money to disburse. Their power is generated from the internal place they listen and act from and their capacity to turn what they learn into invitations that extend relationships and increase opportunities. Their influence is greatest when they free themselves from fear and listen deeply, with an open heart and mind. This listening comes from conviction that every person has gifts that their community needs –whatever it may take to reveal them– and that it is right for every person to live as a full and equal citizen –whatever it may take to open valued roles and relationships to them. Their influence increases when they invest trust in the potential of people, families and community members to act wisely for personal and common good. Their influence grows when they think and act with their feet on the ground, recognizing and resisting real threats to the person from the forces of social exclusion, the distance between the vision of person-directed supports and current reality, and human fallibility without retreating into the safety of more of the same.

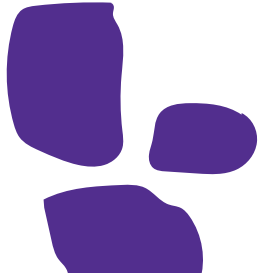
Independent facilitators have considerable freedom to shape their role to fit each person.

Free from...	Free to...
Responsibility to represent the interests of an agency or DSO or ration MCSS funds	Encourage a wide ranging search for necessary supports, unpaid and paid. Begin by facilitating expansion & organization of social relationships outside paid services. Represent the person with uncommon persistence or as a wild card in service system negotiations.
Assignment of people & families as agency clients on a caseload	Strengthen a chosen relationship with people who want change
Role defined by externally prescribed schedules, tasks, activities and procedures	Direct time & attention according to best judgment on how to best serve each person's intention.
Provision of day-to-day assistance	Encourage people & families to develop a longer-term perspective on the person's future

*All the way through the crisis I had to keep explaining who I am to him. Some –especially professionals– were really upset that they couldn't find a pigeon hole to put me in.*

*The facilitator is committed to us. We take time to listen to each other and figure things out. It's not like so many times with other workers who are in a hurry. "Tell it to me quickly. I'll give you the solution in a few minutes."*

DSOs play an important role in connecting people to Independent Facilitators. This calls for relationship building between DSO staff and Independent Facilitators. Sharing stories of success has proven the best way to communicate the possibilities in Independent Facilitation to DSO colleagues.



People often speak of Circles of Support. These icons of a personal network are irregular to suggest the lumpiness of real live networks. Even those closest and most committed only rarely form a geometric circle. People come and go, get angry with one another, let one another down, forgive each other, get more and less involved: depending on changing circumstances and the relevance of their contribution. Fallible as they are, nothing has proven stronger than people committing to journey together through time.

In making good use of their freedom, Independent Facilitators are thoughtful about how they can increase a person's long-term power to determine their path to a good life. Offering advice, providing information, researching available resources on a person's behalf and accompanying people as they make initial contacts can be helpful moves. However long-term impact is greater when Independent Facilitators can support people to organize and extend their relationship networks. This involves gathering those who know the person and care about them and facilitating their commitment to action that will invite more people into the person's journey. Invitations to join a person's journey to a better life can activate those who have known the person at a distance. Active connection to autonomous self-advocacy groups and Family Groups offers a much wider bandwidth for learning and a stronger platform for action than the single strand of connection to an Independent Facilitator can. Reaching past the boundaries of family and services to negotiate meaningful roles in the community work and civic life can, with thoughtful cultivation, extend a person's network. An extending network, linked by intention and coordinated by regular updating, increases the number of people who can share the work and rewards of change.

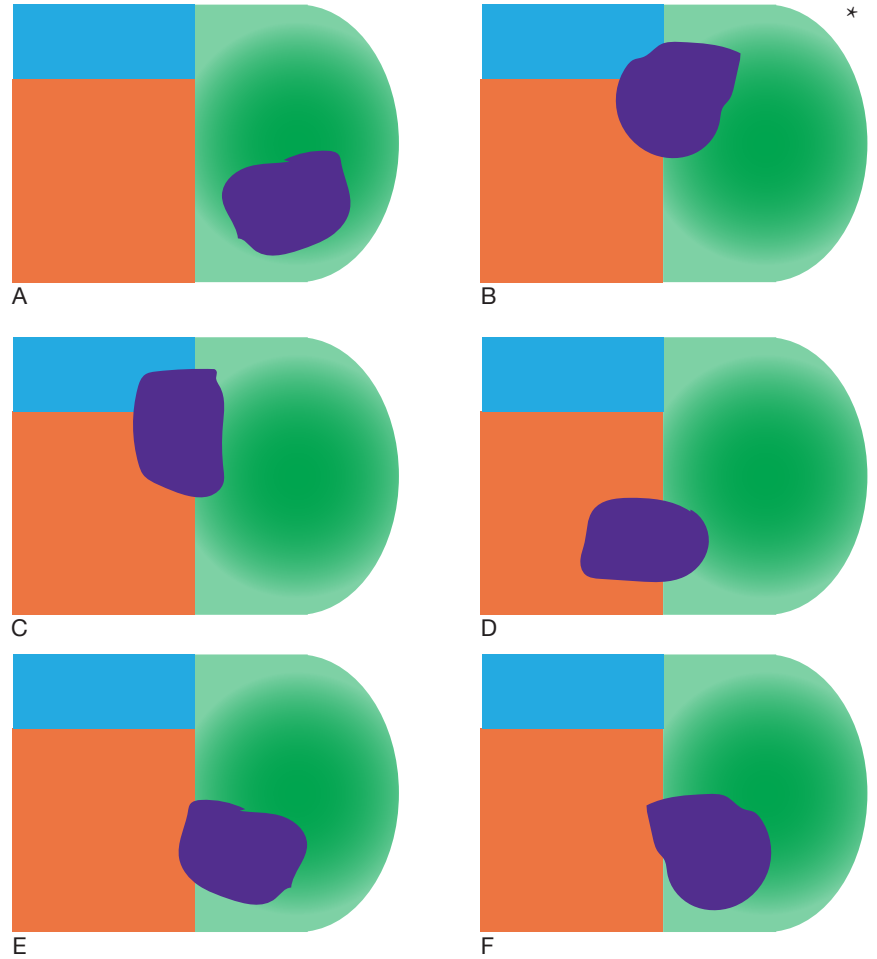
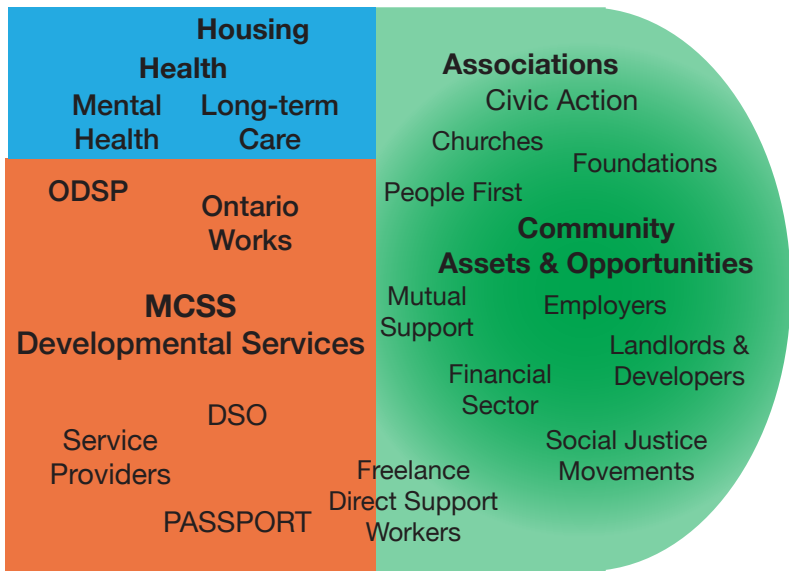
Independent Facilitators support extending personal networks when they...

- ...facilitate meetings that bring people together to identify what matters to them enough to act and ask, *Who else can we reach out and involve?*
- ...find respectful ways to encourage people to revise their assumptions about who might care and stretch past their reticence to invite people into their networks or reach out to mobilize new resources.
- ...help people discover and use means of coordination that work for them, from regular face-to-face check-ins to Skype calls and closed facebook pages.
- ...hold back to make room for people and families to recruit others to do necessary work.

Opportunities, resources and potential allies are widely distributed in communities and multiple programs manage the supports and services people require to make use of them. Independent Facilitators freedom allows them to be thoughtful about where they direct attention in the social space pictured on the facing page.

- Some people need an immediate change in their paid supports (B, C & D on the facing page) in order to get on with their life in community. They are placed in or at risk of being placed in a nursing home or restrictive living arrangement. Long term care funded services or mental





\* These are my impressions where the people in stories I heard or read at the conference focus their efforts. I hope they are roughly right, there is no attempt at precision.

health services play a necessary part. This pulls attention into negotiation with the service system.

- Other people (E & F) have some business with the system such as a wait for the funds for the supports they require to move into their own home. Most of their network's attention is focused on developing and sustaining community roles and relationships that reflect personal interests and capacities.
- Some people (A) don't have a current need to change the service system's place in their life. They are free to explore what their community can offer them and what they can offer their community.

In any of these circumstances Independent Facilitators help people to organize the person's network in a way that suits the work that needs to be done. Families might choose to deal with the need for reliable and capable support workers by throwing in together and setting up a co-op. A network member who is a colleague of a potential employer or landlord might reach out to smooth the way. A veteran parent or two might join to support negotiations with the DSO. The facilitator's primary role is to orchestrate relationships that serve long-term intentions through day-to-day efforts.

*[The facilitator] slows down to my pace. We work in stages to get where I want to go.*

Independent Facilitators often enter people's lives at familiar times of transition: leaving school, moving away from the family home, adjusting to loss. Familiar patterns outline the many steps involved in making the transition. Arrange further education or find a job that offers a good start. Find a safe and affordable place to live and move in. Allow room for grief and make new arrangements. Historically, services have packaged answers. Get a seat in a day program or on a community experience van. Wait for a bed in a group home. Some people and families are comfortable with, even grateful for, these service offerings. Others want to do more of the work themselves because they prefer to be more in charge of more individualized ways to a good life. Some people and families do what it takes with the resources within close family boundaries. Independent Facilitators can support doing any of this work in ways that leave the person with a wider and more diverse network of people in their lives, greater capability and more confidence in taking charge of their life.

## Social Innovation –Al Etmanski

Drawing on his long experience as a parent, an advocate and a social innovator, Al expanded the Conference horizon by framing Independent Facilitation as a social innovation and the movement for people with disabilities as a generator of social innovations.

Without a significant increase in public receptivity, our movement will stall. We must discover and strengthen the connections between progress for people with disabilities and issues of wide social concern, such as loneliness, and resilience to cultural, social and economic change. The way to do this is to think like a movement and search out allies among those concerned about the widest possible range of related issues, align efforts and contribute to strengthening the movement.

Three types of innovators contribute to sustaining a social innovation and widening its availability:

- **Disruptive Innovators** create a new way that works better for them than the established one does and challenges the status quo.
- **Bridging Innovators** see benefit in an innovation and use their credibility and connections to move it across boundaries.
- **Receptive Innovators** are insiders with resources who invest in expanding the scale of the innovation's impact.

Social Innovation is an opportunity to...

- Change the conversation by reframing the work as creating opportunities for new relationships and contributions and making it easier for more people to get involved.
- Change ways of working together through shared work that directly engages the capacities of people who have been left out. Disruptive innovators find themselves in conversation with people who don't know their issues and working with people they don't (initially) like or trust.
- Change relationship with money by shifting from a sole focus on grants of tax money to a variety of strategies to leverage all available assets (e.g. social bonds; basic income; RDSP).
- Change relationship with government. The expectation that government is solely responsible to deliver the answer when people make a need known leads to frustration, anger and cynicism. People with disabilities, family members, community associations and institutions as well as fellow citizens hold a shared responsibility to create conditions that support everyone to thrive.

Social Innovation is a challenge to government. It's easy to get trapped in perpetual pilot project syndrome, hard to receive, establish and sustain even the most effective innova-

tions over time on a large scale. Regardless of party, government is limited by...

- ... Short attention span, determined by terms of office
- ... Risk aversion.
- ... Requirements for accountability & transparency that create a burden of complicated and restrictive procedures.
- ... No real investment in prevention.

These system limits have effects similar to spinal cord injuries: mobility is impaired. To promote social innovation we need to find the political equivalent of accommodation to this impairment. Advocacy with empathy creates more progress than antagonism can. Solution based advocacy –especially when it mobilizes assets to complement government investment– has more leverage than simply naming a problem does.

**Social innovation is love enlightening intelligence and mobilizing creativity and determination.**



## Looking to the Future

*We have to soften our hearts and invite inconvenient conversations.*

As the numbers of people who benefit from Independent Facilitation grows so should the contribution that Independent Facilitators make to the movement for self determination and inclusion. Without conscious and creative attention to design challenges like these, Independent Facilitation could become little more than another delivery mechanism for doing the service system's business.

How might we...

- ...establish a stable and sufficient means of funding Independent Facilitation that is adequate and sufficiently flexible to support those aspects of the work that make a real difference?
- ...make Independent Facilitation a viable option for all the Ontario people with developmental disabilities and families who want to benefit from it?
- ...develop the necessary number of capable Independent Facilitators, well grounded in the values of inclusion and self-direction and skillful in building relationships?
- ...support the on-going communities of practice necessary to keep learning from reflection and sharing our diverse practices and perspectives on Independent Facilitation?
- ...intentionally create opportunities for people to renew themselves by touching the heart and spirit that gives life to the work?
- ...avoid losing fluency in the language of commitment and community as the work increasingly requires speaking the language of transaction and bureaucracy?
- ...continually improve our capacity to encourage people to expand and diversify their circles by inviting and welcoming the active participation of ordinary citizens?
- ...continually improve our capacity to safeguard focus on the person with a disability, especially in situations where other's voices are stronger?
- ...make mutually beneficial alliances with People First?
- ...strengthen alliances with family networks and support their emergence and development?
- ...extend our alliances with service providers who share our commitment to inclusion and self-direction?

With the support of the Ministry funded Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project, the Independent Facilitation Community of Practice has matured and grown strong enough to generate good answers to these questions.

## Read and See Independent Facilitation Stories

Ontario Independent Facilitation Network [www.oifn.ca/category/stories/](http://www.oifn.ca/category/stories/)

Families for a Secure Future YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/c/familiesforasecurefutureca>

**Abby's story** proves how important it is to have help leaving behind the past and trying something new. He inspires all of us with his ability to “dream big” and his determination to get what he wants. <http://bit.ly/2eU00Cq>

**Daymeann's story** tells of his struggle to “put himself out there as a friend to others” after feeling isolated and lost without any reason to get up in the morning. In rebuilding relationships in his life, Daymeann finds work and gets clear about what he truly wants in his life. <http://bit.ly/2eFhbCJ>

**Fatima's story** inspires all of us to step outside our comfort zone to explore new opportunities and broaden our imagination of what is possible. Her love of photography shines through as she takes steps to embrace her new found confidence. <http://bit.ly/2ebzocV>

**Phillip's story** shows us that there is always somewhere in the community where your gifts are welcomed and truly received. Phillip begins to believe more in himself and his abilities and take up work in the community. <http://bit.ly/2evBrZT>

**Shurlan's story** is one of courage and resilience and reminds us that in the end it is all about building a trusting relationship with others and being truly seen. He teaches all of us to rely on our inner strength. <http://bit.ly/2f3WdBE>

**Standing Alongside People as They Change** – Judith McGill <http://bit.ly/2dKDn0N>

**Windsor-Essex Brokerage for Personal Supports**

People and families gathered to reflect on their experiences in the Independent Facilitation Demonstration Project. This event invited people and families to explore storytelling through various forms of artistic expression. [goo.gl/nRSU6z](http://goo.gl/nRSU6z)

p4p: Partners for Panning

Independent Facilitation: A powerful tool for change. <https://goo.gl/IP4hmj>

Facile Perth

Stories [facileperth.ca/stories/](https://facileperth.ca/stories/)

*Families who want something different are the true inventors and innovators. And they don't fear failure. They keep experimenting when they haven't found the right solution yet, till they find what they're looking for.*

*–Independent Facilitator*

*A good life can be derailed easily at any time.  
What will keep things safe over time?*

*–Family member*

*Independent facilitation and networking are the keys that allow people to remain strong against a powerful system.*

*–Family Member*

*Often we haven't found the right question yet to ask someone who's planning their life. But when we do, then things really start to happen.*

*–Independent Facilitator*

*The power of Independent Facilitation is in getting to know people in meaningful ways over time ...and service systems aren't designed to do that.*

*–E.D. of an ally ACL*

*A good Independent Facilitator isn't afraid to ask families the hard questions... the ones we've been avoiding for years!*

*–Family member*

*There has usually been a whole string of professionals in our family's life over the years. You might be the 100th ! So don't be surprised if sometimes families push back at first till they see if you're staying around.*

*–Family member*

*People always tell me, 'Oh, you're so brave!' And that is such a politically incorrect thing to say. But people with disabilities and their families are brave. It has been my family mostly who has pushed for things to be better in my life.*

*–Person with a disability*

*Independent Facilitation is the best form of Quality Assurance that the Ministry could have. It offers examples of people who truly are directing their own lives.*

*–E.D. of ally ACL*

*Will we ever see an end to the vulnerability of Independent Facilitation as a choice in the system?*

*–E.D. of an ally ACL*

---

Thanks to Suzannah Joyce for collecting these quotes.