

# Annual Report from the Executive Director

## Who will we be to families and community?

This has been the year of our new Strategic Plan.

The work of this dynamic, value-based organization has always been that of encouraging positive change at the personal, family and community level. In our new Strategic Plan, this core focus on fulfilling a vision of a full and meaningful life in community FOR ALL does not change. However, in a busy world and limited resources, this Plan will help us to focus on what we do best, creatively explore new priorities, share and learn from innovative, like-minded others, and keep our eye on change that matters – change that makes a difference.

In our Strategic Plan **our first Strategic Direction** is saying that it is important to be clear on who we are, what values are important to us and to communicate this well to others. This will lead families with similar hopes and dreams (even when deeply hidden) to find their way to us and this tells other organizations who we are and where we are headed within our sector and beyond. This will also provide leadership and a sense of what is possible to other parts of our communities where the gifts and contributions of our family members with disabilities are most missing, and most needed.

Our **second Strategic Direction** says that we will need flexibility and a wider scope to keep learning about what best might support people and their families to achieve their authentic participation and full belonging in community. We want to be open to innovation, new strategies, and thinking – as long as our values and principles continue to act as our guide.

**Strategic Direction Three** will help us to be vigilant and careful in our learning, so that it is not only “gut instinct” or habit that has us doing the same things over again, but will ensure that our decisions are based on good evidence that shows us what is the impact on real lives of our various resources and strategies.

Our fourth Strategic Direction will help us share the best of our learning with others – families, other organizations, other sectors, in government policies and even in other countries. Because of this direction’s focus on good evaluation and research, our confidence in sharing our learning will grow much beyond telling a good story – though there is not much wrong with that!

**Strategic Directions Four and Five** are both enabling strategies. We understand that we will be at our best, strongest and most convincing when we have a strong, diverse, sustainable organization and if we use technology in thoughtful ways in order to ensure that the best of our energies goes to people.

Finally, this Strategic Plan clearly outlines that our aim to bring about a good life for people is rooted in two ways of working. First, we will spend time with a person and their family – not to fix, but with

our SRV lenses on to explore the joys and gifts of the person and discover and build their place among welcoming others. And next, we will directly and indirectly influence the community at many levels. We will aim to connect in ways so that we model the community we want to live within, and shore up our findings with stories that teach, situations that work, and many moments that highlight contribution. With this Strategic Plan we understand that our work builds and supports families, and also assists and builds new ways of thinking within community.

Over the past year, we have continued to do much of the work and support with families for which people have come to rely on us. Our one-to-one facilitation and planning built upon trusting relationships continues to assist families in planning and implementing their ideas on how to best build a good life as a part of community in ways that work for each family. We continue to offer recruitment and orientation support through [respiteservices.com](http://respiteservices.com), as well as a range of training events and discussion groups. Our learning events continue to be attended by other organizations as well as families and supporters. Families continue to have a range of financial management and human resource supports through our administration department. Our adult respite home continues its long relationship with a number of families. A summer project finds ways to engage up to 14 families in community pursuits every year. Our newsletter is increasingly well known and praised by many. Many families continue to appreciate us a place of drop in support, good information, effective crisis support, and ongoing good ideas. Our work through the Durham Family Network adds an advocacy voice for and with families. We continue to support a number of families in group formation because of the strength of that arrangement. Our Collaborative Administration Department continues to offer its services to other organizations and in doing so makes significant contributions to our financial strength. We've kept up with social issues that affect people's lives and signed onto the Vulnerable Person's Standard in order to protect people with disabilities in the face of assisted death legislation. And we've made time for social events that are enjoyed by all - a Christmas Social, a very successful Bascule Bursary Hippie Fest, ARH Yard Sale, and [respiteservices.com](http://respiteservices.com) Murder Mystery Dance.

At the same time, over this past year, we have begun to explore the areas that our strategic planning discussions showed us are increasingly of importance to families. This includes a Housing Project involving over 30 people, and great enthusiasm, launched with a visit from the Minister herself. We've wrapped up a successful year of our family series, *Making the Most of My Passport Funding*, with requests from many other organizations about partnering with us to do more. A new family group has arisen over the past few months. We've started a new position that will help us to explore alternatives to respite that are helpful to families and meaningful to the person. We've launched a very specific interest-based recruitment project in order to increase people's connection with a community of their interest and the initial outcomes are very exciting. We offered an Employment workshop with Milton Tyree and have started the beginnings of a small project for us to learn about customized employment. And at other levels, we've spoken at a number of conferences, and have been invited to give two sessions at the CLO conference in the Fall. We've signed onto the Vulnerable Person's Standard as a way of safeguarding the value and the lives of people with

disabilities in the face of legislation on assisted death. We're also involved in provincial policy development on individualized and direct funding which will have an impact on all families.

Throughout these lists of both continuing our work and looking into future directions, I hope you hear that what has not really changed in this organization is that we are family-led and person-centered in the context of an SRV mindset, which leads us to a "community first", one-person-at-a-time orientation.

All of what we have done this year, has been done with a balanced and healthy budget year end close for 2015-6, three new board members over the course of the year, and three new staff faces around our offices. The importance of a sound financial basis in which to operate, an engaged and supportive board, and a skilled and committed staff team cannot be underestimated. Much of our success lies here.

In my work with families, I have come to learn that one of the most powerful conversations I can have is to turn the question asked, What will she do with her time? into Who will she be to her family and community? This new question is about what roles will she take on, and how will she contribute to the good life of others? And so it is has been for us a year of clarifying for ourselves, not What will we have on offer or How we will fill our time? but "Who will we be to families? Who will we be in our community? What roles will we take on and how will we contribute to the good lives of others?

Today, I'd like to think that we might, individually and collectively, reflect on this as our answer: **We will be to families a gentle, consistent voice that families can depend on and join in to recognize the potential and possibility of each family member and take action on our shared yearning for a typical and ordinary life in a good community; and we will be to our communities a clear and insistent beacon that others can turn to in order to figure out how we can lives our good lives together - in the shelter of each other.**

This is not a change for us, as it is saying out loud and becoming more of the best of who we are already.

***Janet***