

The background of the entire page is a photograph of lavender flowers in a clear glass vase. The flowers are in sharp focus in the foreground, while the background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a table with dishes and glasses. A semi-transparent white banner is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the organization's name and the event title.

 DURHAM ASSOCIATION FOR
FAMILY RESOURCES & SUPPORT

What's at our Table

**An opportunity to learn about the
unique work and abundance on offer**

While the information contained in this document was accurate at the date of publication, please be aware that changes may have occurred since publication. Any changes since publication, and the most current overview, may not be reflected at the time of reading this document. This document is reviewed and edited annually.

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Introduction

Relationship, contribution and being present in familiar and typical ways are at the heart of belonging and being a part of the good things in life. Durham Family Resources learns together with whole families how to bring this about, one person and one family at a time.

Durham Association for Family Resources and Support services is a Durham-based, family support and resource organization that partners with families to imagine, plan, and implement for good lives in community, one person at a time, for and with their family member with disability. Together, we consider the person in the context of their family (born or chosen) where their relationships most often ensure that this is where the voice of the person might best be heard, supported and augmented.

Durham Family Resources is largely but not solely funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). We also work at times with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Housing, Regional governments, and federal government departments. Our work is shaped by our relationship with a range of up to 300 families and more occasional users of our resources. Our steps together are formed by a mutual understanding of our potential and capacity, and of what supports, resources, and information families might welcome in order to pursue a positive vision of a good life for their family member within their neighbourhood and community.

We are anchored by a deep understanding and thoughtful application of the principle of Social Role Valorization (SRV) which is explained on the following page. This guides us to promote and value a good, ordinary life in everyday community for all through valued roles, relationships and places of belonging, and to design ways to make this the option of choice for people whenever possible.

What we offer, that is, what is on our table for families, is provided in partnership with families rather than offered to families. Our work is always offered with trust in the capacity of family and ordinary people to truly want to build a community where everyone belongs and is appreciated. Therefore, what is offered is done through a family lens - the intensity of participation, the selection of when and how to use the resources, and the ways in which families choose to take part in our resources and supports are, as much as possible, family-led and decided.

At our table you will find a rich variety of such supports. Selena Blake, Director of Family Support, heads up our Family Support department, with Linda White and Jennifer Singh, to balance support to the team. Family Support is all about timely, coherent planning, facilitation and information supports and resources that each family prioritizes for their journey to ensure a good life for and with their loved one. On our administrative side we have the innovative services of Collaborative Administrative Department (CAD), ably directed by Sue Talmey. CAD provides a range of financial management, accounting, and human resource supports both to our own organization and as supports to other non-profit organizations, Janet Klees currently leads the team as the Executive Director.

We are all steeped in common vision shared by families, staff and board members to live our lives and make our contributions, not in the separate world of Disability, but instead together where our communities are stronger because we all take part.

What is all this talk about SRV? And why should it matter to me?

Social Role Valorization (SRV) Basics

SRV is simply a very powerful way to ensure that your family member lives and fulfills a life of value and belonging within the heart of real community.

SRV does not tell you what to do or why to do it – it does not tell you which ethical choices to make.

SRV does not demand that this is your vision of a good life, but should it be, then SRV gives the most clear, unflinching analysis of why life is currently not like this for people with disabilities and what we might very effectively do to change that.

Once you decide that living a life of value and inclusion (welcome, appreciation, expectation of contribution) is important or essential or a worthwhile endeavour, SRV provides a framework to do so in the most powerful and effective of ways.

This means that IF you come to believe what you want is a life where your family member is full heartedly included and has value and worth in the eyes of family, neighbours, friends and community ...THEN SRV is for you.

At Durham Family Resources, this is the kind of community that we want to be a part of personally and as an organization. We have found the SRV framework to be the most effective framework to hold the ways that we can work together to bring this about. This framework allows us to understand better how our society works. It provides guidance for both decisions to be made and the steps that we take to implement various ways to invite and bring about greater belonging. These are ideas and strategies that we learn, share with families and deepen in understanding together.

SRV draws deeply from many other fields of study – it does not purport to be a single source of information. Even when there are very good examples of lives lived richly and fully within deep relationship without a single thought to SRV, it is possible to use the framework of SRV to understand the source and roots of that good life – and these will be in keeping with SRV principles. You do not need SRV to have a good life if you already have the means, resources, and people around who embrace the full capacity and potential of the person with a disability. But that is rarely so in our cultures around the world, and so SRV enables us to re-discover how to bring out what is missing and missed.

So, IF a life of value and inclusion is important for your family, SRV will become one of the key ways forward for you. For Durham Family Resources as an organization, we are filled with board members, staff members, and families who deeply believe that we are missing something essential in our families, neighbourhoods, communities and the whole of our society when we do not discover and gain the very real contributions of our citizens with disabilities among all others.

For more basic information on Durham Family Resources and its work through the SRV lens, see the Appendix at the end of this document Durham Family Resources and the Principles of Social Role Valorization.

Family Support - A Place of Welcome

Family Support at DFR is innovative, practical and anchored in principles and values rooted in Social Role Valorization (SRV). Family Support encompasses all aspects of family life as families are neither one dimensional nor homogenous. Family Support covers all life domains and recognizes and enhances innate family capacity. We walk alongside, one person at a time, together with families, in real neighbourhoods where valued social roles result in rich contributions to communities and mutually rewarding relationships. Over 260 diverse children and adults are on this principled path.

Definition of Family at Durham Family Resources

We use the word “family” to mean the person in the context for their chosen family and allies, where their voice is best able to be heard, understood, and amplified or augmented where necessary.

Projects and initiatives continue to be sparked by the voice of families. In partnership with families our reflexive response is to listen, imagine, plan and act on ideas that are cultivated from this partnership. Facilitation, Planning, Exploring Initiatives, and Evaluation are welded together to form a solid foundation for Durham Family Resources’ unique family-led approach which enables access to the good things in life. These are the key pillars of Family Support at Durham Family Resources.

The Family Support Team is dedicated to intentionally partnering with families, listening and amplifying the voice of the person in order to build good, full lives. Valued roles, relationships, ways of contribution, home, holistic health and tailored family-directed support remain at the forefront of where families want support. We explore interests and concentrate on places of belonging based on authentic valued social roles. Every pathway is unique and the Family Support Team sees the abundance of community that has opportunities for all to contribute. We fundamentally know that our communities are not whole when some are missing, held on the margins or segregated. Our interdependent nature and need for purpose calls us to ask, who is this person to their family, neighbours and the community at large? Who are they called to be? Together with families we embark on this journey of discovery and establishment. All the while bringing families together for learning, support and inspiration. Thus, family leadership grows and flourishes.

Families Coming Together

There are a number of different ways that families come together at Durham Family Resources. Some families make a commitment to regularly meet with a set group of families. Some might join other families who gather around a shared theme. Some family learning groups are time-limited, while others are on-going. Many families choose several of these ways to come together for inspiration, guidance, shared experiences, and moving along with like-minded others.

Several family groups are facilitated here at DFR. Family groups are a great and valuable resource to families. The fabric of family groups are the individuals that make it up. Connecting, networking, linking, bridging and bonding are the strong threads that bring families together.

Families can learn through conversations with each other, sharing their experiences and stories. Often times, family groups will delve into a relevant article or a particular topic, seeking out information that might be helpful. The strength of families coming together time and time again cultivates a dynamic that has a positive impact on their journey.

Eleven **family groups**, with limited membership, are committed to meeting with each other on a regular basis.

- Peterborough Family Group
- Open Arms
- Safe at Hospital
- Community Explorers
- Project 8
- Unnamed Family Group
- Recognizing Capacity
- Deohaeko
- JAMM
- Intentionally Built Community
- Housemate/Roommate Working Group

Throughout the year there are many groups, learning events and the ongoing offer of facilitation drop-ins. Interested and intrigued families are welcome to participate regardless of formal registration with the organization. This is our way of providing additional support and introducing families to the DFR way.

Some groups are open to the wider community, interest based and/or ad hoc to focus on an issue; others are closed groups with members committed to long standing relationship with support from a facilitator.

These **groups of families** are open to all interested families. They meet regularly around a specific topic.

- Imagining Home
- Next Gen Family Group
- Bio Medical Approaches Study Group
- Customized Employment Family Group
- Recruitment Renewal Working Group
- Thinking it Through for Young Families

We are into our fifth year of providing a guided family-to-family learning series, *Making the Most*, which is open to all interested families who want to begin to think and plan differently. After families have completed the learning series, they are given the opportunity to join the Making the Most study group. This supports families to continue their journey of discovery. The Coordinator works closely with these families to assist them in taking first steps towards role development and establishing circles of support.

Countless more people are invited to participate in a variety of learning events via our Family Focus newsletter, word of mouth and respiteservices.com, where they will discover support to dream big, and network with others in order to turn those dreams into reality. Now offering virtual learning opportunities, we have been joined by families near and far!

Families are most resilient and capable when they are not alone, but linked to other families. This is furthered when supported by an organisation which is anchored by a set of principles and which is able to offer commitment, support, and resources towards these pathways rather than any other.

Other resources and supports are available to families in many different ways:

Several initiatives are happening right now that are designed for their ability to further the work of DFR to strengthen families and build community. CAD revenue allows us to run other family support initiatives deepening our support to those longing for connection through their community involvement. These projects are described later on, but are all based firmly in the values and principles of the organization. These include innovative ventures such as the Bio Medical Approaches Study Group, Bio Medical Coach, Focused Recruitment, Housing, Assistant to Young Families, Customized Employment, Family Managed Care, Out of Region, Recognizing Capacity and more recently, Safe at Hospital and PPE Sourcing and Distribution.

Many families take advantage of our increasingly rich recruitment support. Families across Durham have access to respiteservices.com. Additional recruitment support is available to families connected to facilitation and planning when requiring very specific qualifications or addressing interest-based mentorship.

Our monthly publication the *DFR Family Focus* is broadly distributed to over 600 subscribers. This newsletter keeps subscribers informed of events, issues and emerging trends.

Additionally, many of our staff hold active roles with multi-agency committees, always keeping in view our particular focus on the importance of one person at a time within the context of family, extended personal/natural networks, community, and valued social roles.

Currently those committees include:

- Children's Champion Table
- Durham Region Aboriginal Advisory Circle
- Durham Systems Management
- Durham Coordinated Response Committee
- Durham Training Committee
- Durham Special Needs Allocation Committee
- Kerry's Place Training Committee
- Life on Campus
- Lakeridge Health Advisory Committee
- Respiteservices.com Provincial Network Committee
- Durham District School Board Transition Advisory Committee
- Durham Children and Youth Planning Network
- Integrated Planning Committee
- Durham Social Housing Advisory Group
- Supported Decision Making Pilot (part of a national project)
- Community Living Ontario's Resources and Capabilities
- Individualized Funding Coalition Ontario

A Range of Possible Facilitation Support

In partnership with the person, their family, and where possible their personal networks of support, Durham Family Resources offers facilitation support to families who support the principles that guide and shape the work of the organization. Our approach is one person at a time and always individualized, as this leads to building a full life, rich in roles and opportunities within community. Facilitation is always within the context of family, but also to deeply listen, and be guided by the will, preference, and voice of the person.

Facilitators work in the following ways:

Support with Planning

- Planning for the supports needed to make personal and unique contributions to one's family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates and within one's community. This includes all parts of life such as leisure pursuits, recreational activities, home life, employment and volunteer roles, roles within faith communities, neighbourhood, and country. Planning is not considered stagnant, it evolves over time to nurture growth and development of the person.
- To create a vision of; home, the pursuit of passions and interests, and more independence to have a life of one's own, that offers a way to make the vision a reality.
- Securing, creating, and maintaining a real home of one's own, whatever that may be, by focusing on the person planning to move out of the family home.
- Transition planning, getting from A to B with the big picture and the details. This could be from home to school, through school, to work and leisure, and contributions, within the whole life continuum.
- Legacy and Succession Planning; thinking through who the people will be, the plans, the transitions, and the information. It is usually but not always with aging families.
- Other areas of facilitation support could also include, but not limited to, employment opportunities, continuing education, high school and elementary school, post-secondary school, community, civic and work life, home and housing, home renovations to accommodate changing family needs and aspirations for independent living.
- Crisis planning; how to avoid it, getting through it, being prepared, learning from experience
- Available, for as long as it takes, and throughout the person's life.

Facilitate the Provision of Paid Direct Support

- All about Paid Supporters: In partnership with families, we design supports based on planning, that can range from assisting in developing job descriptions, screening candidates, and assisting families with interviews.
- We offer working groups that bring together a team of facilitators and a variety of families on the topic of recruitment. (More on these in the [Recruitment section of this document](#))
- Securing both private and public direct support funds to resource the plans, such as Life on Campus, DSNAP, Passport, Bascule Bursary, Urgent Response Crisis Funds, Individualized Funding, Residential and Family Managed Care, and ODSP
- Assist to design support budgets; including support to figure out ways to make the most of those funds, while also seek to secure other funds both temporary and long term.

Ease the way with a focus on

- Relationships: strengthening the person and their family's networks of support, formal/informal circles of support and networks, connecting to other families, and developing natural unpaid relationships.
- Finding Ways through Various Systems: making the way through systems easier, to get the most of what is needed, and avoid pitfalls and dead ends. This could include all types of systems such as education, Developmental Services Ontario, health, ODSP, and legal.
- Providing resources and information about a multitude of things, such as RDSP, estate planning, wills, trusts, guardianship, supported and substitute decision making, home renovation bi-laws, and introducing them to the people who have the information and expertise that is needed.
- Gaining information and access to other services such as, counselling, subsidized housing, child and youth services, community programs and services.
- Moving from activity driven planning to planning in terms of roles that shape purpose and meaning in the person's life. Supporting individualized involvements and supports that are non-disability focused environments, typical of their age and within their chosen communities.
- Continued learning; offering a variety of learning opportunities on the things that matter most for and with families and their supporters.

Facilitation is provided in the context of

- A holistic approach with the whole family, while also amplifying the disabled member's voice and self-determination.
- Typical community involvements and supports as a first resort.
- With a perspective of the whole family, including the person's support team, to find solutions, share knowledge and connections from the community, and facilitating families coming together with other families for this purpose.
- Community builds support, nurtures capacity, and empowers the person – one person at a time, not as part of a group.
- Sharing stories of others and how they have paved the way. We learn through sharing our experiences.
- By facilitating long-term, small scale family groups where families support one another over time through minor and major life changes and getting to know about each other's families more personally and walk with each other through common experiences, challenges and celebrate successes.

Families are provided with their own facilitator, which connects them to the Family Support Team. This team holds a wealth of experience and a diversity in backgrounds. Our approach is one of collaboration within our Family Support Team, but also reaching beyond ourselves with allies in community.

“One of the things I enjoy about facilitation is being able to deeply listen to a family and allow them the space to really be heard. Additionally, I enjoy being able to find that little bit of money they need using funding sources, to be able to make their challenges less insurmountable.”

Cara Coulson, Family Facilitator

“Being a facilitator at DFR provides with me the opportunity to stand beside families, one at a time and develop meaningful relationships with the person at the centre, and their family members. The facilitator role allows me to support the person, their family and support team in holding their vision for a good, typical life. Always striving to move towards a thriving future.”

Melissa Labelle, Family Facilitator

Facilitation Support for Young Families

Family Centered and Community Focused

Who do we serve

- Newborn - Children – 18 years old
- Children with disabilities - more broadly defined
- Young parents impacted by disability themselves
- Young parents needing short-term & longer-term assistance
- Grandparents raising grandchildren with disability
- Foster parents raising children with disabilities

Here at Durham Family Resources we currently do not have a waitlist for children. The Supervisor with a children's focus can personally connect with each young family in order to understand what support we can offer. We get calls from an average of three new families regarding children each month.

How do families find us

- Most call themselves (often after a web search)
- Many are advised by others (other parents, community members etc.) to call
- Respiteservices.com referrals
- School and agency referrals
- Hospital/Doctor/Social worker referrals
- CAS referrals

When a young parent calls DFR, a friendly staff person at the other end of the phone takes time to listen to them and offers some initial ideas/suggestions prior to a follow-up phone call and personal visit with the DFR Children's Facilitator.

Common requests include;

- Support to the whole family with a broad range of family issues often beginning with an ask for respite, which allows for a broadening conversation
- Support to understand the impact of a new diagnosis
- Support with applications – government funding – community funding
- Support to navigate other systems – health, education, child protection, family law, immigration
- Support & planning during major transitions and/or crisis situations
- Support families to recruit and hire supporters
- Support in finding events within the local community

Young parents make the first call to Durham Family Resources seeking assistance around several family issues. Respite is often a beginning topic of conversation because many families assume we provide traditional respite support. Initial conversations with families often involve offering a new conceptualization of the term 'respite'. Conversations over time facilitate a renewed vision for the child.

Resources Accessed by a Facilitator to Support Young Families

- Networking – Family Groups, Durham Family Network, Experienced Parents, Community Resources
- Family Learning – Parent to parent, workshops both in-house and outside Durham Family Resources, Mindfulness and Bio-medical approaches family learning, meetings through online platforms and monthly webinars, print, video and social media resources
- Funding, Investments, Planning – Children's Flex Funding Respite funding, Special Services at Home (SSAH), Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, Private/charitable, Bascule Bursary, Disability Tax Credit, Ontario Autism Program, Registered Disability Savings Plan, Insurance, Child Support, Wills & Trusts
- Summer Students - support a thoughtful summer plan anchored by a holistic community centred vision for the child and family

Ensuring an ordinary life in community

In partnership with families we access small amounts of funding and community resources that can assist and support a child to participate in typical community opportunities such as summer camp, clubs, vocal & piano lessons, Girl Guides & Boy scouts, art lessons, martial arts classes - the recreational and leisure based roles and related activities abound.

Assistant for Young Families

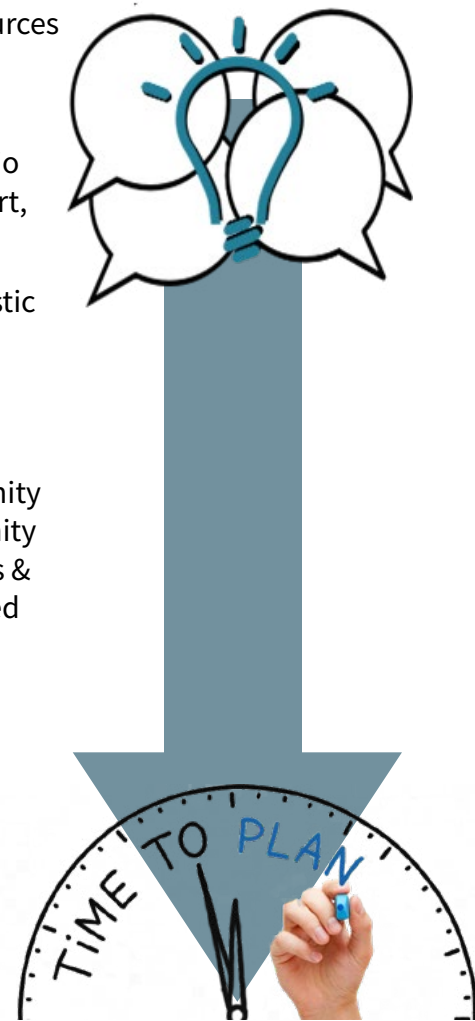
This position has created the capacity to more intensively and intentionally support a few young families who are ready to move a new idea for their son or daughter into reality. In partnership with families and with the support from the Facilitator for young families a six to twelve-month short-term plan is developed involving concentrated direct support to the whole family to realize a new vision.

Facilitation Support for Young Families with Children

Conversations over time ~ Supporting families where they are at ~ Planning for the child and family is incorporated into ordinary conversation ~ Creating & Sharing resources to support new ways of thinking ~ Shedding light on the multitude of potential and new possibilities for the child.

Supporting access to family learning opportunities ~ Building family/parent/child capacity ~ Connecting families to other families for support and learning ~ Planning & developing initiatives & opportunities to build family/parent/child resilience, that allow families to find and support each other ~ Developing networks of relationships so that families remain in the lead using agency support only as needed ~ Supporting the development of new Ideas ~ Sparking new vision for the child.

A New vision for the child with a disability ~ yet it is the typical vision all parents have except when disability is present parents can be directed/led down a different path ~ intentionally choosing to chart a path that leads to authentic social inclusion ~ Supporting the family to support the child to be an integral part of their family, church, school & neighborhood ~ New vision that puts the child at the center and leads a young parent away from choices that could result in exclusion towards choices and opportunities for meaningful participation and inclusion in typical community.



Initiatives in Response to Families

Durham Family Resources tries to be timely and responsive to the opportunities that arise from the voice of families. Listening closely and partnering with families culminates in the development new projects. Such projects are an excellent way to way to test innovative ideas and implement more focused actions and plans and explore new ways to communicate and work with family members.

Project staff are keen and full members of our staff team and we welcome their energy, approaches and insights. Sometimes project staff become more permanent members of our staff team, and sometimes projects are seen as so valuable that we have been able to make them a part of our core offering. For us, projects allow us to learn, to share our learning, to discover new and effective ways of offering support and to discover keen new staff to join and bolster our team.

Current initiatives include:

Assistant to Young Families	Supports for Decision Making and Recognizing Capacity
Biomedical Approaches Study Group	Out of Region
Biomedical and Holistic Approaches Coach	PPE Distribution
Recruitment and Retention	Customized Employment
Imagining Home	Housemate Working Group
Making the Most (of time, energy, and resources)	Safe at Hospital Approaches and Toolkit

At the foundation of each project, SRV principles are the corner stones upon which everything else is built. These guide our projects and safeguard good work. We hold strong to individualized options only, a mindset of doing *with* families and not *for* families, understanding that family-to-family conversations are key to learning, and always looking to a person's family/neighbourhood/community for ordinary and typical resources and places of belonging.

EVALUATION

At Durham Family Resources we are dedicated to offering resources and supports that make positive impact on families and community. Evaluative processes are rooted in our definition of a Good Life and Guiding Principles. In addition, because each initiative is a potential source of rich learning, we are taking the time to reflect our learning in written reports and summaries. For us, this means reflecting back to the original purpose behind each project to ask ourselves: Is this project achieving for people what we thought it might do? Does it make a positive difference in a person/family's life? Is this leading us to equally good but unintentional places? What could be better next time? What else do we need to know? In the understanding that busy family members vote with their presence we also ask who is interested and making the time to be a part of this project. We also are interested in knowing what was not helpful, and what the impact is over time for the person and their family. This learning will ultimately be for the benefit of all the families we connect with at Durham Family Resources.

Making the Most Family Learning Series

The Making the Most learning series is a dynamic six-week workshop inviting families to reimagine opportunities and explore creative ways to use their time, energy and money to achieve a good life for their family member. Guided by foundational principles, the heart of the series is to look beyond the traditional paths and programs and delve into alternatives that are individualized, authentic and purposeful.

Led by two mentoring parents and supported by a series facilitator, families engage in rich and thoughtful conversations, and hear about the mentoring parents' experiences from years of planning and creating opportunities for their loved ones. These conversations highlight the principled choices that families can make to discover ordinary, yet significant ways for their family members to be involved in their local community and have a good and full life.

Many families that have participated in the series have developed a greater understanding of their family member's interests. By listening deeply and following these interests, the series has provided a springboard for implementing ideas, focusing on valued roles and relationships.

Making the Most draws out the abundance of community as a place of welcome and belonging and supports families to mindfully cultivate possibilities, one person at a time.



Making the Most Study Group

Those who have completed the Making the Most family learning series are invited back to a MTM Study Group.

Graduates are welcome to drop into these monthly gatherings, where participants, mentoring families, and facilitators delve deeper and extend the topics presented throughout the series. Drawing on the support, energy and encouragement of other like-minded families.

Imagining Home

Durham Family Resources partners with families to imagine, plan and create only the most natural, typical and familiar home and housing possibilities. Rather than grouping and setting people with disabilities apart, we understand that it is in ordinary, diverse and vibrant communities where we find places of true belonging, mutual relationships and natural safeguards. Together, we focus on people's inherent value, uncover their contributions and how these weave together in creating and sustaining more resilient neighbourhoods. Home, housing and support although intermingled are thought of as separate pieces in a larger vision to be figured out one person at a time.

Fostered and connected through the Durham Family Resources housing project, *Housing is a Community Issue: Fostering Innovation Toward Vibrant Neighbourhoods* (2015-2017), Imagining Home is a vibrant family-led group whose initiatives are anchored in up to 40 families' visions of a 'home of one's own' for their family member with a disability. Guided by a set of foundational principles, this highly engaged group meet monthly to think about and discuss their individual housing plans, the importance of community, neighbourhood, connection, and what makes for *real* home. Families share their knowledge and experience and take a critical look at current housing issues within the Region of Durham. They explore new ideas, challenge perceptions of what is possible and support other families as they each take steps in their own journey. A full description of our Guiding Principles & Key Messages for Housing can be found below.

PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR ACTIONS... ...AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR HOUSING

1. Life happens best in familiar and typical ways in ordinary community – one person at a time, based on the interests of the person and following natural rhythms and values where home is the anchor, staying and ending one's day from home with other family or friends and where happiness is found.

2. It is important to always begin with the person and their interests – who they are, who they might be, their deep qualities, their needs and gifts – and then to learn deeply about and adapt as they reveal more and more and grow – that is, the person is the common ground with other citizens in their neighborhoods and communities and afford the opportunity for economic freedom that will be embraced and valued by all who live there.

3. Supports and plans are best arranged around individualized interests – arrangements are designed to bring out the best in our own art, imagination and what they have to offer neighbors and peers of all ages with all others with disabilities.

4. Typical and diverse settings in familiar community places will provide natural settings and other common activities that will be more modern, respectful, personal needs, and eventually appreciative recipients of the person's presence and contributions.

5. Relationships as a part of a full life and providing respectful settings where people are valued adds. We do focus on the diversity in the kinds of situations where a relationship will serve will be transcended into all situations – situations where a person is present serving others frequently and regularly, in places and ways where they share a common interest with others and where they have a role which offers their own contribution to others.

6. Our goal is to be helpful, not intrusive – just being there, and as close as authentic participation and full inclusion and these things are only possible when we help people to walk and build upon natural talents which include, social factors, life plans in community and involve other citizens.

7. Shared decision-making is an essential part of the listening and learning process. The voice of the individual is important and shared decisions will be made among the people who are in their life.

8. Simple everyday choices are a plan within the everyday limitations we all experience, but these are also when the larger context of figures out how each person can be truly included in being a part of governing the direction of their life.

9. This goal life is community for all everyone regardless of ability or support requirements. We must be especially powerful for and stand in solidarity with complex support requirements.

10. Because we believe that one can be an abundant community with wealth in building and relationships with wealth in groups and opportunities where there are not yet people with disabilities because they will be richer with more using in partnership with the greatest gifts and talents of everyone, we will continue to work hard to get the most beautiful, from coming to know this one person.

**DEARBORN ASSOCIATION FOR
FAMILY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**
One Person at a Time Together With Families

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**IN TERMS OF HOUSING, THESE IDEAS MEAN THAT
WE ARE LOOKING TO IMAGINE, PLAN AND MOVE INTO
HOME SITUATIONS WHICH ARE:**

1. Designed for and with one person at a time, realizing that no two people will have the same ideas, interests or preferences in home, housing or support.

2. Focused on each person so that they feel they are in a "home of my own" where they are in charge in typical and important ways.

3. Anchored in diverse neighborhoods where they are not grouped with others with disabilities and seen as "one of them", but rather where they live in homes with and among others so that they are seen as "one of the neighborhood".

4. Places of security and identity from which to base on roles where they contribute to their community and enter into new relationships with others in ordinary and typical ways and in ordinary places in their community.

Stay engaged through our housing
www.iamagivinghome.ca

Key Messages for Housing WHEN FAMILIES TAKE CHARGE OF HOUSING

It is important to families that together we understand the following:

1. That housing, home and support are different things and best conceived of and when everyone coming together in a timely fashion, the best need housing to be achieved in the same ways that housing is addressed for the rest of the population, be supported to be partially provided through individualized natural supports, and for home to be developed through family and events.

2. That the idea of housing and home is a lifelong process of family, with changes will never stop. Just like everyone else, the kinds of home and having their people design and create are defined by neighborhood, culture, preferences, availability, available options, or circumstances that each, very different and creative.

3. That every person has a right to a home and support, and that people with disabilities can be best supported naturally for the person with the help of family, friends and others who can act as a natural, no-cost, natural support.

4. That people with disabilities can contribute to their neighborhoods, families and communities. Families understand that people with disabilities are not just people with disabilities, but people with families, friends, and a role in their community. It is important that people with disabilities are not just people with disabilities, but people with families, friends, and a role in their community.

5. That every person has a right to a home and support, and that people with disabilities can be best supported naturally for the person with the help of family, friends and others who can act as a natural, no-cost, natural support.

6. That every person has a right to a home and support, and that people with disabilities can be best supported naturally for the person with the help of family, friends and others who can act as a natural, no-cost, natural support.

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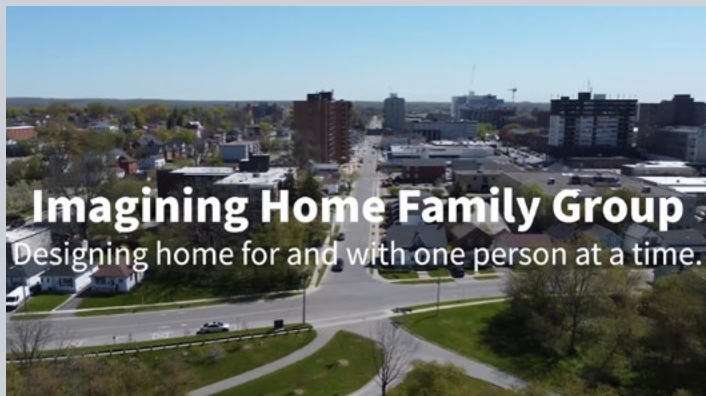
9. That every person has a right to a home and support, and that people with disabilities can be best supported naturally for the person with the help of family, friends and others who can act as a natural, no-cost, natural support.

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This family-to-family learning, grounded in a commitment to explore options for home where people live in natural and typical neighbourhood settings, has broadened the ways in which families consider home, housing and support. It has also inspired them to recognize and call on their own family and personal networks, as well as regional and other community resources for ideas and connections - allowing them to creatively explore and develop natural and local housing arrangements that work. More than just a monthly housing group, Imagining Home seeks to deepen and strengthen the fundamental ways that people with disabilities, their families, communities, and policy makers see housing. We understand that housing is an opportunity to build and make home. **Housing is, therefore, a community issue, not a disability issue.**

Families have created a group of action and are continuously moving towards their next steps in housing. These “next steps” come in many forms and timelines and will look different for everyone. Since the conclusion of the Housing Task Force project, thirty-two families have taken significant steps in their housing plans, and many others have taken smaller steps that will help lay the foundation for their longer-term visions.

Families engaged in our housing group are active, contributing leaders and partners in helping to create viable, local housing solutions. Many families involved are regular members of Municipal and Regional



housing committees and task forces, engage with various levels of government around housing and policy planning, and advocate for community-wide affordable housing options for *all* people. Families have also been instrumental in building awareness around the need for more portable housing benefits (PHBs), the results of which are evident in the recent increase in available PHBs. In just a few short years, over 25 Durham Family Resources families have received a portable housing benefit within the Region of Durham. We celebrated this achievement by putting together a short video in collaboration with families (see left).

Some members of Imagining Home are also part of a smaller incorporated group of eleven families who call themselves *Intentionally Built Communities*, better known as IBC. This is an incorporated autonomous family group who formed with intent and readiness to engage with developers, develop partnerships to advance sustainable and affordable housing options, and apply for grants such as seed funding or renovation dollars. Family members of IBC have many years of involvement in the group and are committed to advocating for and mentoring newer Imagining Home families, helping to build strength and clarity of vision around home, housing, support and community.

What does this all mean for families' hopes for the future and what are they asking for?

- Families want municipalities and the Region to consider only supporting or approving the most inclusive, diverse and vibrant housing developments - this means not supporting grouped, segregated or institutionalized models of housing.
- Families call for deeper portable rent subsidies for individuals with disabilities on fixed or limited incomes, so they may live in individualized homes of their choice.
- Families are asking for low-cost renovation dollars to be available to either pursue separate housing for their family member in their own home or a move where a renovation will be needed.

Customized Supports for Employment Focus

When families seek typical, ordinary life pathways for and with their loved ones with a disability, the goal of finding meaningful, purposeful employment can be a challenge. Many barriers exist to accessing real jobs, not least the perception that people have limited skills to offer. Yet families also know the many gifts and talents their family members possess and have been keen to engage in a process that seeks to match these with local employers in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

In March 2022, DFR recruited a new Employment Specialist to explore an approach called Customized Employment. Customized Employment differs from pursuing open-market job applications or traditional supported employment placement programs. One person at a time, it aims to craft a role that is carefully and intentionally matched to each job seeker's interests, skills, and work-related preferences, with a company who comes to see the value that this potential employee can add to their business.

As with all our work at DFR, we also look to incorporate strategies put forward by Social Role Valorization theory. This helps us stay mindful of things that need to be paid attention to if job seekers are to be seen and treated as real members of the workforce, with all the benefits and opportunities that this affords.

Customized Employment follows a stepped process:

1. Discovery - Gathering information from the job seeker, their family and others who know them well to determine their interests, skills, and preferences related to potential employment.
2. Job Search Planning - Using the information learned about a job seeker to develop a customized plan for employment and a list of potential employers.
3. Job Development/Negotiation - Working collaboratively with the individual and a prospective employer to negotiate a customized job and terms of employment that incorporate the conditions most likely to lead to success and fill the unmet needs of the employer.
4. Support - Agreeing the support needed, if any, for the employer to orientate and train their new employee and any on-going supports required to ensure satisfaction of both the individual and the employer.

At DFR we know the power in bringing families together around a particular topic, to share experiences and learn together. To this end we have started meeting monthly with a small group of families to discuss, brainstorm, and deepen our shared learning about Customized Employment. Currently this group comprises of families that the employment consultant is currently working with and a few others who are interested in exploring a Customized Employment approach in the future.

Recognizing Capacity Project

Five years ago, a group of families were invited to come together to talk about and describe Ways of Knowing – what are the many and varied ways that families observe, recognize, pay attention to and “hear” what their family member with a disability, who may not speak in words, wants to communicate about their preferences, their current circumstances and what’s most important to them, to direct major life decisions.

These families were then very disappointed to hear that the Law Reform Commission of Ontario recommended that more work needed to be done to explore if supported decision-making could legitimately be used as an alternative to Guardianship.

Guardianship, or substitute decision-making, is when someone else is given the authority to make all decisions in relation to a person, thus stripping them of their legal capacity and recognition as a full person in law. It can happen to anyone who is deemed to lack the cognitive skills to make decisions independently.

Yet everyday, most of us typically seek support and input from family, friends and/or professional advisors before making important decisions. These are the every day normalized supports for decision-making that we all rely on and do not invalidate decisions as reflecting our own will and preference.

Together with CLO, IRIS, and three other provincial regions, Durham Family Resources commenced a pilot project seeking to demonstrate how people at risk of having their legal capacity removed, can be supported to be central to all decisions in their life. Either through solid decision-making assistance or through the setting up of formal supported decision-making arrangements, whereby a group of people who know the person very well, come together to provide interpretation of their will and preferences and communicate this as the authentic and legal voice of the person. This year, the provincial pilot also received some additional federal funding to support this work and raise the profile further.

Our local project has been collaborating with a range of sectors within our community, particularly in places where people with cognitive impairments can face barriers to having their capacity recognized. By creating a community of well-informed citizens, and documenting examples of how legal capacity can be both recognized and enacted, with support as required, it is hoped that eventually provincial law will be reformed to reflect the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Canada ratified in 2010.

This new focus is also giving Durham Family Resources the opportunity to consider how recognizing capacity threads through so much of our work with families and community allies. While we are being led on this journey by a small group of families who agree to document and share their stories, we plan to continue to share our learning through public events, conversations and resources that we hope will help embed supports for decision-making as a preferable alternative to Guardianship or other forms of substitute decision making.

Safe at Hospital

The Safe at Hospital Working Group first came together in April 2020 in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, out of our shared concern to keep people safe during this time and work toward the very best health outcomes for everyone. While our focus has been on members of our community with disabilities, we have also received feedback on how this evolving learning has impacted other family members and connections, who found themselves needing to access healthcare services over the last few years.

We know that perceptions of someone's worthiness, whether it be due to disability, different modes of communication, related medical conditions, or simply how they are viewed by the rest of society, places them at greater risk in such times and settings.

When many hospitals began not allowing accompaniment, even to those who had no way of communicating otherwise, it was clear these actions could leave people with disabilities without a voice and extremely vulnerable to poor health outcomes, adverse incidents and, at the height of COVID waves, not having access to critical lifesaving care.

While we were building on the earlier work of individual facilitators, families, the Legacy Planning Project and utilizing our own planning documents, it became clear that our thinking and actions from the Recognizing Capacity project were also highly relevant to this conversation.

In a context of safeguarding the lives, voice and good health of vulnerable members of our community, many of whom have a disability, the Safe at Hospital Working Group continues to focus on helping families and allies to:

- Be prepared: Understand and organize the ways that families and their allies can be best prepared for all health emergencies and planned hospital visits.
- Support the voice of the person: Better understand and share how people communicate their will and preferences in many different ways so that they are at the centre and involved in all their health decisions.
- Collaborate for best health outcomes: Collaborate where possible with our local healthcare partners so that medical care and support challenges are resolved one person at a time, and so that the culmination of many individual strategies gives way to better sector-wide responses to people with disabilities who need access to good and equitable health care.
- Provide helpful sample document: Compile, edit, and share a range of helpful, practical sample documents that can be used at various stages of the healthcare journey – when preparing well in advance, at the doorway to a hospital admission, during hospital stays and in decision-making moments.
- Share with others: Continue to learn and share in various formats with other family and community members through group learning events and conversations, along with written documents available through our website, and access to staff and families who can work through this material and learning, one person at a time in the context of their own unique situation.

Bio Medical Approaches Study Group

The Bio Medical Approaches Study Group evolved from learning events held at Durham Family Resources and has been meeting for over six years. The group consists of family and community members who come together to make sense of and share their first-hand experiences with many bio-medical practices and alternatives. The group has been influenced by and often resourced by the work of Conscious Care and Support (Peter Marks) and others who have more to offer than diagnoses, traditional medical and behavioural approaches.

We begin with an interest to responding to the whole person and what they may be telling us about their diet, their nutrition deficits, their sensory imbalances, their ongoing feelings of deep anxiety, and more. By listening deeply with more and more understanding, we can often find less intrusive and more effective approaches to helping the person feel well and move on with their life. Since the most helpful information is dense and learning from each other is so effective, a small group of families meet together on the second Friday of each month to talk about our learning and personal experiences with all family members. Our conversation focuses on the whole person and how people may respond to their environment, including diet and nutrition, brain coherence, sensory integration issues, the calmness or agitation of those around them, and more.

We bring in guest speakers, other parents with something to share, new books, and our own thoughtful ability to listen and respond to one another.

Bio Medical and Holistic Approaches Coaching

The Bio Medical & Holistic Approaches Coach was originally implemented in order to extend the reach of the collaborative efforts, learning and recommendations from our relationship with Peter Marks (Conscious Care and Support). The coach is a Registered Nurse who primarily assists families to implement strategies and alternatives that assist the overall health and wellbeing of their loved ones. For this role, the particular focus is on dietary, sensory, environmental and mindfulness-based tactics that may optimize physiological and emotional wellness. The coach is responsible to assist families in their individual, person-centered approach to health and strive to support families while working within the mission and values of the organization. Work will be done directly with families in ways that are integrated with their Family Facilitator.

Recruitment

Family Support includes partnering with the person and their family to recruit supporters who will focus on implementing the vision and goals held for a full, contributing life in the community. The recruitment process is family-led. Facilitators may be enlisted to assist in areas such as posting job ads, and pre-screening interested candidates with interviewing and reference checks. Facilitators may also bridge families with other recruitment resources such as [respiteservices.com](https://www.respiteservices.com) or extra internal recruitment supports. Facilitators work alongside the family to find the right individuals who will be a bridge to community belonging.

Respiteservices.com

Durham Family Resources also hosts www.respiteservices.com, which is the Community Helpers for Active Participation (CHAP) program for the Durham Region. This provincially funded website is a valuable resource for families who need access to support workers.

The CHAP Program is an online database. It connects families registered on the site with supporters based on the family's needs and the supporters' availability and skills. The supporters complete a structured pre-screening process before being listed in the registry. In addition to online connecting, Durham Family Resources hosts "Meet and Greet" evenings, which provide the opportunity for families and supporters to get some face-to-face time to secure the right fit and to introduce themselves. We are continuing to conduct this event online as demand and interest warrants and look forward to the opportunity in the future to return to in-person events.

The registration process, uniquely crafted by the Durham Family Resources team, has contributed to the success and quality of this valued, community-based opportunity, open for both families and supporters in the Durham Region.

Having good quality supporters helps people to be meaningfully engaged and connected to their community.

Recruitment Renewal Workshop

We heard from families loud and clear that there was an overwhelming need for new or better ideas when it comes to recruitment. Tapping into our collective knowledge and experience, a workshop was created to assist families in reimagining what recruitment could look like in response to the changing landscape when it comes to finding and hiring support. This workshop brings a greater sense of clarity to the essential role of support to assist with the implementation of goals and making connections. It provides families with new ideas, and consciousness-raising regarding the impact of our language, along with tools and some out-of-the-box thinking to help make their recruitment process more robust.



Recruitment Renewal Working Group

The Recruitment Renewal Working Group which meets monthly was formed in June 2022 in response to the requests of families to come together to work through the ideas shared about recruitment after attending our Recruitment Renewal workshop. Facilitated by DFR staff, the aim of this working group is to consider new ways to approach recruitment, moving beyond filling gaps and looking towards investing in the kinds of support that leads to that bigger picture of what families are building towards. We use the principles that guide our work at Durham Family Resources to anchor our conversations, to describe what that good life looks like, what it will take to get there and describe how getting recruitment right is an essential step. Together, families are encouraged to think outside of the box, try something new and different, and share their knowledge and experience with one another. In turn, taking what has been learned back to share with their family and support network, using these new ideas to reshape the way they think and approach recruitment.

Housemate/Roommate Working Group

The Housemate/Roommate Working Group which meets monthly and is facilitated by DFR staff was formed in July 2022. This dedicated conversation was our response to the discussions and questions that are emerging as families think about and plan with their family members what a home of one's own would look like for them. The stories shared by others about housemates and how they can help anchor home through companionship, some assistance, and the rich reciprocity of these relationships sparked in families new ideas and questions about what this would look like for their family member. Through these conversations of discovery, families are able to discern what roommate/housemate models exist, clarify the role of a roommate in context to their family member, what these arrangements can offer all parties and what are the essential elements that would secure home and create the best living situation. Families walk away from these conversations with greater clarity and an expanded imagination about what is possible as they plan forward.

Family Learning Events

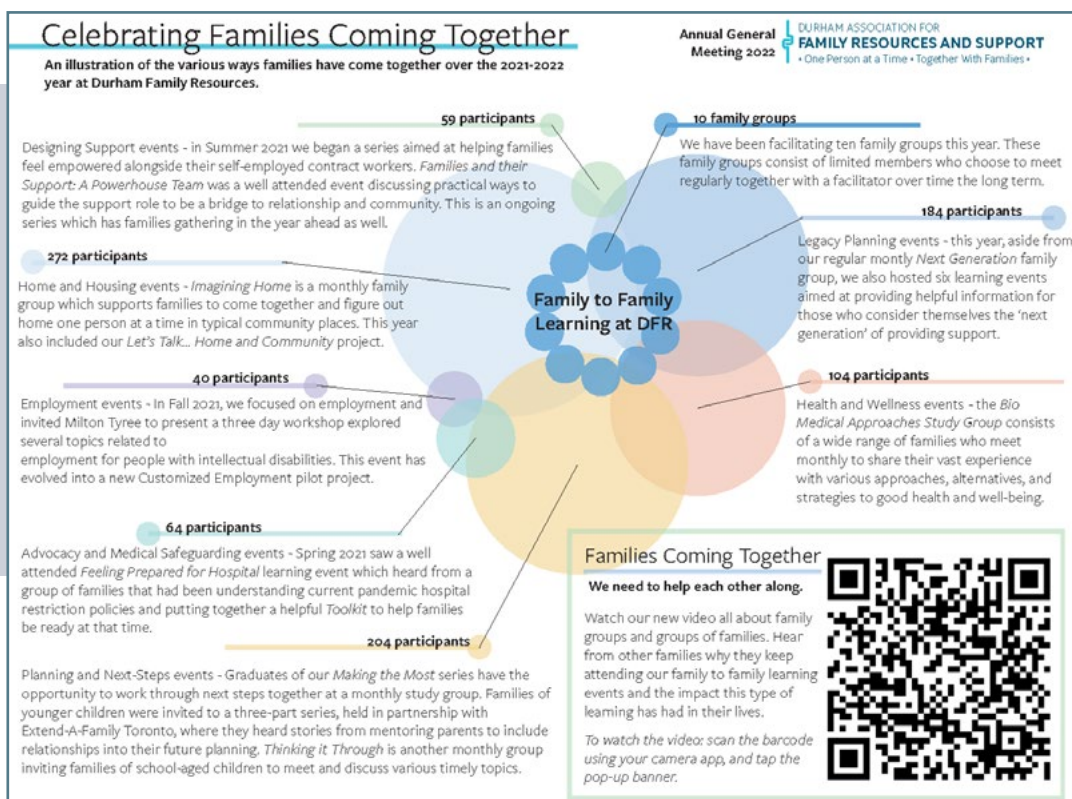
Durham Family Resources partners with families and community members to develop and present gatherings and workshops on various topics we think are relevant or of interest to families in Durham Region.

We network and invite families from Durham Region and beyond, along with other local agencies and community groups. We welcome and support the participation of all interested families.

We have DFR representation involved in training committees such as Kerry's Place Training Events and the Durham Region Staff Training Committee, lending our perspective and family-led input to learning opportunities that arise from these collaborations. We host and participate in workshops with the Southern Ontario Training Group which bases all of its training on Social Role Valorization and corresponding topics.

DFR also engages with independent trainers, some of whom are known internationally. DFR has a long history of supporting family and staff attendance at learning events in line with the values and principles of our agency. DFR brings families together for topic-specific learning opportunities that are ongoing and build on one another. We strive to push the family voice in all of our training and workshop planning.

Over the pandemic, DFR has been using interactive, virtual platforms like Zoom to continue to provide various learning events that are user friendly and relevant to families. While we continue to offer most learning events virtually, we are also hosting in-person and hybrid meetings as we move into safer periods of being together. The benefit of hosting events virtually has been the ability to welcome families from all over the world, and host follow-up conversations to continue the conversation and learning, no travel expenses or planning required!



In all of our learning events, we strive to promote family to family connection. See the infographic (left) to see how families came together alongside DFR this past year! We also produced a short video about the importance of family coming together which was presented to our membership at our Annual General meeting in 2022.

Communication and Information Supports

Our information and resources reach a diverse audience both within Durham region and its surrounding areas. A large portion of our audience does not have access to a facilitator or are not directly working with DFR. That being said, we offer fantastic learning opportunities, helpful information, and a strong SRV perspective which no one should be “wait-listed” for.

Our efforts are always striving for family-led, community-minded opportunities for people to meet and forge relationships amongst each other. We believe in capacity building and in the natural authority of families, and try to keep that front and center in both our dialogue and our offerings.

Currently we have a few ways in which we distribute information:

Newsletter – DFR Family Focus

We currently have over 650 subscriptions to our monthly *DFR Family Focus*. Facilitators find this a helpful resource and prompt for engagement with various learning opportunities. DFR Family Focus is our way to promote news from our organization and to present ideas and conversation in a manner that is consistent with our strong values and principles. We are mindful of the words we choose, the pictures we use, and the content we share. We focus on what everyone has in common (those with and without disabilities), the significance of valued social roles, and make a conscious effort to present ordinary and typical vs “special”. We use our newsletter as a way to promote family leadership, by presenting topics, policy, and information which require family advocacy.

Resource Library

Our larger board room contains a small library. Families and facilitators are free to browse the selection of books and DVDs and sign out materials to borrow. We have various topics of interest including: planning, health care, community, compassionate care practices, inclusive education, Social Role Valorization, family leadership, and more. We encourage the suggestion of new material and find the resource library a great tool to further bolster families with information along their journey.



Nature of Family Support

This document is important as a vision and set of principles for our organization, and much of it is a reflection of the current work that fits many families so well. The Nature of Family Support document helps guide how we should partner with families, what new directions we should take on, and what to avoid. It was created with lots of family input and much reflection by the staff team.

Technology Support

The Family Support team works in a myriad of different ways with families, using techniques as unique as each family we support. When opportunities arise that call for using technology creatively and well, the team gets creative in supporting these endeavors. We have used Google applications (such as Forms, Docs, and Drive), Adobe applications (Acrobat, Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign), and presentation software (Prezi, Powerpoint) to be successful with certain goals. We have used video editing and animation

software to help illustrate, in different ways, important information to different audiences. Building a good life means evolving and being flexible – supporting families and our own team with technology that is current and helpful is now a natural part of our work.

The Collaborative Administrative Department - CAD

This is a small independent group, providing a high level of service at a reduced price for organizations and individuals who may not otherwise have access to this level of service.

The Collaborative Administrative Department (CAD) which was established in April 2000 has proven to be a successful and thriving project. Start-up funding was provided by the Ministry of Community and Children's Services and the Trillium Foundation. The goal was to save not-for-profit organizations' administrative dollars while providing a higher quality of financial and administrative support. Four organizations were involved in the start-up, however only two carried through with the project.

The CAD provides organizations, which would not normally have funds available or the need for full time "qualified" staff, to benefit from the expertise of a collaborative group with varied professional backgrounds. In some cases, we provide ongoing support, in others we step in for short periods of time for specific projects.

In addition, the CAD provides direct support to families in the areas of financial guidance and management, income tax preparation, human resources issues, dealing with outside government agencies and payroll service.

The CAD has never actively solicited new business. All new clients have been through referral. We have some strong supporters across the province, including MCCSS and audit firms.

It was never the goal of the CAD to earn a profit. The goal was for all organizations to receive a high level of service while reducing administrative costs. As these costs are reduced within Durham Association for Family Resources and Support, there is more money available for family support. Over the past several years the CAD has generated significant net revenue which has helped to offset operating deficits.

In 2000 there were 4 full time staff supporting 2 organizations. The CAD currently has 9 full time staff supporting 18 organizations and many families. The ability to share established processes, systems and knowledge creates much efficiency. We continue to receive requests for support. These are carefully reviewed to determine if we have the capacity to assist the organization. The call typically comes when the organization is in crisis. We have to be careful that their crisis doesn't become ours.

We have assisted other organizations in setting up a similar model, although they have restricted their collaborative support to sharing between two agencies.

Although we are CAD to everyone externally, at home we are the Durham Family Resources finance and administration team, and we all work at Durham Family Resources because we embrace the opportunity to "give back". CAD staff understands the organization's values and works hard to incorporate those values in our day to day work.

Collaborative Administrative Department (CAD) - Supporting Organizations

The CAD is essentially responsible to ensure that all financial, administration and personnel functions of the organizations supported are conducted in a professional, accurate and timely manner in compliance with legal requirements and according to the policies and procedures of these organizations. The CAD will embrace the philosophy of the organizations supported. Service will be provided on a not-for-profit basis.

Finance & Administration:

- Development and preparation of annual budgets. Presentation of budget to Executive Directors and/or Boards of Directors.
- Document and evaluate financial performance monthly, annually or as requested.
- Prepare, review and present financial results to staff, Boards of Directors and funding Ministries or organizations.
- Develop and implement necessary plans for corrective and precautionary action as required.
- Prepare year-end audit files and work with auditors during their year-end review.
- Provide accounting systems and handle accounts payable/receivable, payroll, and human resources.
- Coordinate ongoing use of computer technology and required upgrades.
- Assist staff of supported organizations in administrative areas as requested. This may include rental agreements, leases, and funding proposals.
- Participation on management and board committees as requested.

Staff Relations:

- Development and maintenance of job descriptions, evaluations, pay equity plans.
- Develop, coordinate and administer staffing requirements and staff training plans.
- Where required interview, hire, dismiss staff and assist in union negotiations.
- Ensure the development and implementation of personnel policies and procedures.
- Respond to all staff inquiries regarding payroll and human resources issues.

Other Duties:

- Develop and administer ongoing maintenance systems for all properties and equipment.
- Plan, develop and monitor financial investment and borrowing strategies in consultation with Executive Director or Board of Directors.
- Development, coordination and maintenance of information systems including client database and service statistics, insuring confidentiality.

Collaborative Administrative Department (CAD) – Supporting Families

Accounting Services:

- Administer Individualized Funding Contracts (includes SSAH, Passports)– broker or hold funds in trust.
- Administer payroll for families – set up a payroll account with CRA, coordinate receipt of timesheets, process payroll, prepare government remittances and filings.
- Administer payment to self-employed support workers on behalf of families.
- Provide assistance to families with general accounting guidelines and basic requirements.
- Work individually with families to review their processes and set up of their accounting system.
- Work with families to meet with government agencies.
- Administer other agency funding contracts for families- such as Insurance, CCAC.

Human Resources:

- Provide information related to employee issues, Employment Standards Act and Labour Laws.

Income Tax:

- Income tax preparation service provided at a not-for-profit rate – this is provided for anyone interested in the service.

DURHAM ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILY RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

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Sue McLellan	Bio Medical and Holistic Approaches Strategist
Heather Minors	Data, Media, and Communications Coordinator
Erin O'Reilly	Housing Coordinator
Laura Powell	Coordinator – Family Learning Series
Rosanne Purnwasie	Internal Facilitation Support
Erin Rosemond	Recruitment Consultant
Angela Thomas	Customized Employment Consultant

Durham Family Resources and the Principle of Social Role Valorization (SRV)

The principle of social role valorization (SRV) is not immediately familiar to most people who come to Durham Family Resources as board members, families, or even as new staff members. However, the depth and truth of this anchoring principle and its implementation framework is often clear and recognizable to people once they hear it described in common language, and once they understand its effectiveness as it guides the implementation of strategies that make a positive difference in the lives of people who are vulnerable. Fairly quickly, most people can appreciate this framework as a way to safeguard and build lives of value and meaning within the hearts of our communities.

Simply put, SRV explains that human beings are hard-wired to judge one another and quickly decide whether the other is “like me and mine” or “unlike me and strange and different”. Those we recognize as like us and ours, we embrace and treat well. Those whom we judge to be essentially different, we push away and distance ourselves from. Much of this interaction is unconscious; however the impact on people and their lives and opportunities is very real.

Two things impact powerfully upon whether another person is seen to be “one of us” or “one of them “ and these are: a) the company we keep lets others know that we (a new person) are okay if we are seen together with people, singularly or in groups, that they already know, like, understand and value; b) the roles we are perceived to hold - everyday, familiar and valued roles (sister, employee, and teacher) help others to see a person as knowable and sharing common values, while weird, unfamiliar and negative roles (adult day program participant, special needs guy, and criminal) make others see the person as different and discomforting, causing them to withdraw or turn away. Some roles are chosen by us in our lives (teacher, swimmer, neighbour) and others are thrust upon us by circumstances (poor person, sister, disabled person). The roles we are seen to hold are powerful ways that influence how the other will judge us. Interestingly, building relationships (i.e., the company we keep) that are rich, rewarding and safeguarding most easily arise when a person holds a range of typical and familiar roles in their lives (uncle, neighbour, drummer, volunteer, church member).

As an organization, as staff and board members, and as families and community members we can use this principle to positively influence the perception of the people with disabilities we love in our community, so that other community members are able to perceive their interests, gifts, talents and the things they have in common with that community member.

When people with disabilities are included in everyday family and community life - among their non-disabled family members, peers and neighbours and holding typical, ordinary roles - the aspects of their lives and personalities that are familiar, knowable and in common with others are emphasized. The disability does not disappear, but it becomes less important, not the only thing known about the person.

This allows community members to share common spaces and experiences and to include each other as “like me and mine”. They come closer, ask questions, invite, offer opportunities and enter into relationships.

When this is not done, people with disabilities are almost always grouped together- to work, to live, to recreate - and set apart from others so that what is emphasized instead is their disability, the ways that they are different, and their strangeness from “the rest of us”. Other community members who come across people in such groups and settings turn away, feel uncomfortable, address the group rather than individuals, and save their best opportunities and genuine relationships for people who are more “like themselves”.

More specifically, as an organization, through board, staff and families, we can assist families to see and bring out the wonderful and positive and ordinary aspects of their family member’s personality and lives; we can help families to remember the value and benefit of just being one of the family or one of the crowd in ordinary ways;

we can offer strategies that assist people with disabilities to make their contributions in regular society in typical ways; we can promote ways in which people are seen and become known among their non-disabled peers so that their common interests and familiar roles shine through; and we can identify interests and build strong and new roles based on these. We can use all of this as a context for encouraging relationship – which will bring new opportunities of its own. We can gently bring awareness and teach about the impact of a life where the person is seen and treated as different, and how simple changes can more effectively bring about the Vision for a good life that almost every single family member has for their whole family.

Therefore, the resources, information, and supports offered to and with the families of Durham Family Resources are provided within an SRV mindset. This means that from board to staff to volunteers to mentoring families SRV is a lens through which we design, develop and offer ourselves. Durham Family Resources was started and developed many of its programs and services in the past without a conscious thought to the principle of SRV. However, when this principle and framework became known, it was thought to be a natural fit for providing guidance to the work of the organization.

Although the work within Durham Family Resources has long been steeped in the ideas of SRV, it is only in the past few years that this is being applied consciously and with some rigour. This work will continue into the future. This means that we continue to think about the parts of our supports and resources that seem to challenge the principle of SRV and keep on trying to figure out how to offer supports in a way more consistent with these guiding principles and therefore, likely more able to bring the people into a good life in their community.

For the time being, where we might offer a resource that is not fully true to the principle of SRV - and therefore less effective in bringing about good life opportunities for the person - we allow our deep caring and respect for the family to come first. We identify what is a compromised situation, we do not judge familiar and comfortable supports but focus on the family experiencing something different which they may possibly come to see as better. We encourage families to give the new and unfamiliar a try in small well-supported steps, and meanwhile we ensure that whatever supports and resources we do provide is of the highest possible calibre.

Over the course of the Board's year, we will spend more time understanding the principle of SRV and its practical implications and we will discuss the ways in which we are working in line with the principle and where we still have work to do.

In the meantime, the following is our current working definition of a good life in community:

The aim is to belong to a community where all people are valued, our differences are respected, our contributions drawn forth, and our needs are met in typical and valued ways so we can live in dignity among and in valued relationship with all others, and in typical life circumstances as enjoyed by all of us, as citizens.

A socially inclusive society is thereby evidenced by people –

- o being present regularly and frequently in ordinary places in their communities,
- o in typical and normative ways,
- o in demographically representative groupings,
- o holding valued social roles based on their interests and passions and choosing
- o wherein they make relevant and welcomed contributions
- o in and through their relationships with a range of valued and typical citizens

