

## A Housing Task Force Update: April 5, 2018

This is an important moment for the Developmental Services Housing Task Force (HTF) – as it is for Ontarians with a developmental disability. The HTF is beginning its final months of work, with particular emphasis on preparing a report and recommendations that will reflect what we have learned over the past three and a half years. Our work will overlap with the road to the spring provincial elections – elections which will inevitably have an impact on developmental services as well as many other issues (including health care, education, and the economy). Given this coincidence of timing, the HTF wants to now share some of the thoughts that will likely find their way into its Report to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). We are aiming to deliver the Report this spring. Our hope is that these thoughts will prove relevant and useful as individuals, families, and organizations interact with candidates and government leaders during the intense pre-election period.

### *What has the HTF been doing and how has it had impact?*

Those of you who have been following Facebook postings or participating in varied meetings around the province will know that there are many things that might be mentioned in answering this question. We will save full details for the spring 2018 HTF Report being prepared – zeroing in here on only a few key efforts.

From its beginning, the HTF has used a multifaceted strategy to fulfill its goals, emphasizing advocacy, intensive two-way communication, research, and the launch of demonstration projects to grow system capacity that would have a positive impact on the housing crisis confronting Ontarians with developmental disabilities.<sup>1</sup> The eighteen demonstration projects have been particularly important in highlighting innovative approaches, showing how alternative approaches generating personalized, customized housing options can enrich lives and opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Other HTF efforts have complemented the demonstration projects:

- The development of **new communication tools**: The Developmental Services Housing Task Force Facebook page now has more than 1500 followers, for example, and has become a valuable resource for the sharing of ideas and experiences;
- **Sharing information about housing problems and HTF learnings with numerous local and provincial organizations and meetings** (e.g., People First Ontario, Community Living Ontario, Autism Ontario, the Ontario Municipal Social Service Managers Association [OMSSA], Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs [OASIS], among others);

---

<sup>1</sup> Further information about the creation of the Housing Task Force, its membership, and its mission, can be found at: [DS - Spotlight Issue 41](#)

<sup>2</sup> Fuller details on these projects are available via an online brochure posted on the Partners for Planning Website: [P4P Digital Guide: 18 Innovative Housing Projects](#)

- **Exploring opportunities for “whole of government” approaches:** connecting with the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Ministry of Finance within the provincial government, for instance, and reaching out to local and regional governments to encourage the development of partnerships of great potential importance to housing initiatives relevant to Ontarians with developmental disabilities.
- **Creating an online digital brochure describing the demonstration projects,** with regular updates produced by Partners for Planning and hosted on their resource hub.

### ***What are the HTF’s current priorities?***

Even as we enter our final six months of effort, the HTF’s original multifaceted strategy continues to guide our work. A few examples:

- We are learning from experience about **the relevance of the demonstration projects**. An intensive liaison process connecting HTF members with project leads and participants (including people and families supported through the projects) is giving us detailed information to use in recommending the replication of valuable approaches and practices across the province (e.g., the significance of partnerships between families, agencies, and local government – and the significance of person-directed planning). The process is also revealing systemic barriers as well as unintended, yet beneficial outcomes;
- We are routinely building on the utilization of the Facebook page for **fostering grassroots conversations** (posting regular topics and questions for focused discussion – and gathering up contributions in order to provide key messaging for the government). We have also been providing advice to MCSS concerning an intensification of efforts to develop **two-way consultative processes** in communities across the province. One set of recommendations already submitted envisions working with family groups and networks to offer basic “information sharing” sessions that will allow representatives from MCSS, the DSOs, and relevant agencies to present a clear and detailed picture of current options, processes, and funding approaches involving housing for adults with developmental disabilities (e.g., what’s possible? what’s not possible?) – to allow individuals, self-advocates, families, and organizations to have a full and transparent sense of the “system” they are trying to navigate and transform. Additional recommendations to MCSS for information sharing and consultation will include the organization of community-based sessions involving both provincial and local government officials who might play an expanded role in addressing the housing crisis confronting the developmental services sector (e.g., regional service managers and regional and municipal council representatives who have influence over affordable housing resources).

Further evidence of these concerns for grassroots consultation is found in continuing HTF advice regarding the strengthening of local Family Networks and People First of Ontario. The HTF sees such efforts as a valuable way of following up on the November 2016 Ministers’ Housing Forum and MCSS agrees that this important initiative should be a foundation for further action.

- We continue to see opportunities for **HTF contributions to policy deliberations relevant to housing**. We have been vigorously highlighting community concerns about a number of specific issues, for example: a recent submission to the Ministry of Labour has already detailed the serious problems for individuals and families created by Bill 148 (the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act) – and we will be expanding on our case for adjustments and supplementary funding in a submission to MCSS now being drafted.

The HTF is also crafting recommendations regarding language changes that will better represent the option for people to request Innovative –or Individualized – Housing Solutions or Individualized Living Options as part of the DSO application process. The HTF will also be recommending that these requests be tracked regionally and provincially, to better inform multi-year residential planning processes.

We will also be urging creation of a fund available locally/regionally for innovative housing solutions – as well as increasing the level of Passport funding and allowing its use for residential supports.

- **Advocacy** of varying kinds also remains a concern for the HTF. Our mandate to explore innovative housing options has required our attention to many inevitably related issues – including funding for needed supports and the ways in which creative approaches to solving the housing challenges confronting adults with developmental disabilities can be made sustainable. On one hand, for example, we have consistently urged the provincial government to increase funding for innovative individualized housing options. The current government has done admirable work with respect to developmental services in any number of ways (notable new budget commitments included) and the HTF is strongly appreciative of its support and intentions. At the same time, wait lists for residential services and affordable housing remain dismayingly long. To further address this, we have also strongly urged further development of a “whole of government” approach to housing needs. The HTF has benefitted greatly from engagement by the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. We have already recommended the creation of a new **special task force to make recommendations concerning concrete inter-ministerial initiatives to address the critical housing problems facing adults with developmental disabilities**. We are urging that the new task force include representatives from the ministries of Community & Social Services, Housing, Health & Long Term Care, Justice, and Education as well as representatives from relevant community agencies, local governments, self-advocates, and families.

In conclusion, the HTF hopes that you find the information in this “update” posting helpful. The weeks ahead will provide opportunities for serious conversations about many important political, economic, and social issues: we would strongly encourage you to start or participate in these conversations, with each other as well as with candidates and other leaders. There will be much more to tell you about in the formal HTF Report forthcoming later this spring, of course, but the special importance of this pre-election period made us anxious to reach out both sooner *and* later.