



Submission to Ministry of Community & Social Services Draft Eligibility Regulation

For more than 60 years Community Living Toronto has been a source of support for thousands of individuals who have an intellectual or developmental disability and their families.

Community Living Toronto is comprised of over 6,000 individuals who have a developmental disability, their families, a membership of almost 1,000 individuals, more than 900 dedicated volunteers and over 1,300 full and part time staff. Our work is reflected in our mission that we change the lives of people with a developmental disability by giving them a voice, and supporting their choices where they live, learn, work and play.

Community Living Toronto has a great history of partnership with the Ontario government, and a reputation for creating innovative solutions to address urgent needs that increase our capacity and outreach to those without services. These include:

- partnering with private philanthropists and corporate partners to create LIGHTS, an innovative housing alternative with some fiscal funding support from the Ministry of Community and Social Services;
- providing person-directed plans to people on the community needs list;
- developing ConnectABILITY.ca, an online resource tool for parents and staff.

We also want to acknowledge investments government has made, including over 55 million in new funding for Toronto since 2006 and a plan for the transformation of services. The current reality however is that waitlists continue to be oppressively long especially for adult services. This is particularly acute for families with children transitioning from Children's Services where support is more readily available. The net effect is that young adults leaving school often do not experience the opportunity to be part of their community and maximize their participation.

The draft Regulation, *Transition: Deemed Eligibility for Adult Developmental Services under the Act*, is a good first step towards clarifying eligibility of adults under the new legislation. While the Regulation is helpful in that it does clearly state criteria for eligibility and extends the review process from 1 to 3 years – it does not address the reality that for those turning 18 after next April 1, the future is not clear. An extended review period will provide stability, however it may create new barriers for youth entering adulthood.

Pressures on Individuals and Families

Beginning next April, once a young person's eligibility is confirmed they must still apply for services through their local DSO under the Passport program, where their needs will be reassessed and prioritized. There is no guarantee of continuity of the support they previously received through SSAH even if they had received SSAH funding as a child. This could, and will likely, result in a disruption of support, and add lengthy additions to an already oppressive waiting list for services in the adult system. As of April, 2012, there were almost 3,000 families on the waitlist for Passport funding.

The transitional years, from high school to adult life, have long been a critical phase for youth with an intellectual disability. Young people with an intellectual disability have learned skills and have been prepared for when they are no longer at school and are eager to enter the next phase of their life – becoming an adult. It is important that the transition be supported so that these young people do not sit idle, losing the skills they have developed, the social skills and relationships that are important to them,

and make it that much more difficult to obtain employment or enjoy meaningful day activities. More importantly, it can negatively impact a person's self-esteem, confidence and feeling of being an accepted member of our community.

Parents who have come to rely on the modest funding provided through SSAH to create some stability in their family and help make this transitional phase easier, so that their family member remains engaged and involved in the community. Losing even a modest amount of funding can leave a family with added financial and functional burden, which can result in loss of employment, family breakdown and added pressures on parent health. Parents are desperate, particularly at this critical junction point; we are afraid more parents will go to the desperate lengths of abandoning their children.

What's Needed

It is important that parents and their children continue to receive support while this transition from the old legislation to new procedures is being streamlined. To do that, the Regulation must outline a seamless transition for young adults to the new Passport program. It is essential that parents, who have received SSAH funding for their child, not lose that funding while waiting for eligibility and funding under Passport.

We also recommend that if this draft Regulation is enacted, immediate investments in Passport be made so that family pressures are eased, and young people with an intellectual disability have every opportunity to be successful in community participation and inclusion. In addition, Passport funds need to be released regularly so that families move through the process at a steady pace. This will reduce the waitlist and added pressures on families.

Streamlining the eligibility process for families who have been receiving SSAH funding can ultimately save the government money, including the added costs for immediate assessments and reduced urgent pressures on the community waitlists.

Summary

We know that the government is committed to the full inclusion and participation of people with an intellectual disability and look forward to our continued partnership in providing service and support to people with an intellectual disability. However, to ensure that people have every opportunity to be full, contributing members of society, we need to be sure that our young adults do not get lost in the new processes intended to deliver fairness and equity. They need support to make the transition from childhood to adulthood successful and seamless, so that they continue to build their skills, goals, and have every opportunity to achieve their dreams. Not addressing this gap could result in:

- longer waitlists
- increased isolation from the community and loss of learned skills
- added financial and functional burden on the family home.

We hope that as you consider this Regulation you will keep in mind the vulnerability of young people with an intellectual disability at this critical life stage, and support their full development, inclusion and participation in our community.