

## Advisory Board

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Laura Starret  
Senior Facilitator  
LIGHTS

## Newsletter – February 2011

2010 was a bold and magical year for LIGHTS. It was a year of creating infrastructure, goals and strategies, a year of opening the door to possibilities for families who have a son or daughter with an intellectual disability.

### ***But the year was much more eventful than even we anticipated!***

- The Advisory Board set an initial goal of raising \$ 3 million in LIGHTS' first two years: within the first six months, we have already raised \$900,000. LIGHTS is a cause that speaks to people.
- The Ministry of Community and Social Services generously agreed to fund two years salary to hire a Facilitator to manage LIGHTS' many components.
- In the four months since LIGHTS opened its doors, twelve families have been assessed. This is a cause that speaks to a great need.
- We partnered with Community Living Toronto (an organization that has been providing services to children and adults with an intellectual disability for more than sixty years), set up an Advisory Board, established a framework within which to operate, and began creating the pieces of LIGHTS--the case for support, logo, brochure, website, funding applications, eligibility criteria and risk management plan. No small feat in just 12 months.

The LIGHTS Facilitator and a team from Community Living Toronto work with families to explore residential options, review their individual needs, and assist them in networking with other families. When families come to LIGHTS, they are led through *person-directed planning sessions* (a vital process designed to identify a candidate's goals and dreams), financial planning, and the myriad details involved in the complex process of setting up a home.

Our partnership with Community Living Toronto, combined with the government's funding, means every penny of every dollar donated to LIGHTS goes right to the families – not to salaries, administration or overhead.

Fundraising is an important part of the LIGHTS journey: our aim is to provide families with interim funding to create long-term independent housing for their son or daughter who is intellectually disabled. Two supporters we would like to thank specifically are the McLean Foundation, our very first donor, and the Ballard Foundation, which graciously gave us \$250,000.

And for every dollar donated to LIGHTS, another 50 cents goes to the Fund thanks to founding patrons Mary Pat and Bob Armstrong's matching grant.

Every LIGHTS donor is a pioneer who understands the importance and originality of what we are doing. Our early supporters are laying not just a financial foundation, but an intellectual one that inspires others to join this unique cause.

But in the end LIGHTS is about individuals with intellectual disabilities--still (to even our astonishment) one of the most overlooked communities in North American society. It is about helping their families find sustainable, supported, and desperately needed long-term housing solutions. Those families have begun a deeply personal journey towards a sustainable living arrangement that will fundamentally empower their sons and daughters. The support each family requires is as unique as their story. And so the individual, personalized attention LIGHTS shines on every family guarantees that their journey is the one that's right, *just for them*.

LIGHTS started as a shared dream: to help individuals with an intellectual disability live not just in a place of their own, but to live lives they can call their own. While we are thrilled with how far we have come to date (and how quickly we are moving), it is the hands-on experience of building a future for these young men and women that inspires us and everyone who donates. We will strive for many years to come to help them find respect, security and--most of all--a welcoming place in the larger community. A home of one's own is the first step toward a community of one's own, toward real inclusion and authentic belonging, not just for the intellectually disabled, but for the rest of us as well.

Thank you to those of you who have joined us thus far on our journey. Your decision to support LIGHTS is a reflection not only of your philanthropic commitment and your genuine desire to help, but also of the solidity of the LIGHTS case for support.

As Goethe once said, "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." Twelve months ago we began it: already you can feel the power and magic. We look forward to sharing our journey with you as we make dreams real.

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