

Newsletter – March 2012

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In the City of Toronto, more than 2500 intellectually disabled adults are waiting for some kind of residential option. Some 800 of these adults are living with parents and primary caregivers who are over the age of 60.

Those numbers haven't changed in thirty years.

That is why LIGHTS is in business.

Since we last wrote to you, Laura Starret, LIGHTS' facilitator, has introduced dozens of families to the LIGHTS process, sharing stories of hope and hardship, and helping them set out on their search for potential housemates for their loved ones.

Currently, 41 families are engaged at various stages in the LIGHTS process.

Three families that LIGHTS was supporting were successful in securing permanent funding through the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). They are LIGHTS' first graduates, and exciting proof of the way the LIGHTS process is supposed to work. As the Ministry opens up funding, LIGHTS families are ready to be first in line to apply for those funds.

Recently our families were asked to participate in an initial evaluation of the LIGHTS program. The survey and questionnaire was enormously revealing. We learned that LIGHTS has:

- increased awareness of opportunities and resources for families
- increased families' knowledge of what is required to create independent living arrangements
- allowed families to think of novel strategies and ideas that help them plan independent living solutions
- increased families' readiness to move forward in creating independent living arrangements
- provided families with opportunities to meet other families in similar circumstances
- helped families apply for government funding
- introduced families to the concept of budgeting

In summary, LIGHTS has helped families move forward in their long search for independent housing for their intellectually disabled family member.

This isn't just what LIGHTS set out to do; it's the realization of many families' hopes and dreams, and the beginning of the end of the fear and discouragement that marks the lives of so many families of the disabled. Most of our families couldn't envision such a development before LIGHTS came into their lives.

LIGHTS, our parents say, allowed them to think about the unthinkable: to envision their child's life when they, the parents, were gone. "It was the greatest comfort", they told us, "to know that a good plan of care was finally in place".

"LIGHTS helped me envision how to plan for my daughter's future because I won't be around forever." One mother explained. "I learned how to help my daughter be more independent, and create a system, hopefully for the span of her life."



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Other parents told us LIGHTS lifted some of the financial pressure associated with living with a child who has an intellectual disability, not just by funding them, but by helping them plan a budget, and thus for the future.

All this information, recorded in an Initial Program Evaluation conducted by Olivia Lu and Deb Goodman at the Child Welfare Institute, CAS Toronto, has reassured the LIGHTS Advisory Board and our partners that:

1. There is a huge need for LIGHTS.
2. We are meeting that need.

“The help that LIGHTS is giving is something that is really needed,” another parent insisted. “I could not have done that on my own.”

We continue to seek funds from individuals, corporations and foundations. Since our last Newsletter, we would like especially to recognize BMO, the Catherine and Michael Meighen Foundation, Scotia Bank, the Harry E. Foster Foundation, and TD Canada Trust for their generous support. LIGHTS is an entrepreneurial solution to a social issue, and this appeals to donors. We thank you, our donors, for your belief in that ideal, for your commitment, and of course for your generosity.

But these are only the early successes; LIGHTS’ work is just beginning. We recently held a day-long retreat for the members of our board, re-examining and re-affirming our vision and mission, and setting new goals and strategies for the future.

As you saw from the numbers at the beginning of this newsletter, there are still many, many families, in the Toronto area alone, who need our help. Bringing our vision and goals to fruition, realizing the full potential of LIGHTS, to say nothing of expanding it beyond Toronto, will require even more support from individuals, corporations and foundations.

To those of you who are already supporting LIGHTS, thank you for your generosity and trust, and for believing in our vision.

To those of you contemplating the next step toward a firm commitment, join us--and share the sense we are beginning to have that we can not only make a difference to the lives of others, but expand ***the definition of what comprises a real and meaningful community.***

“Your donations,” to quote yet another parent, “gave my son the opportunity to live on his own, independently, in his own home, with support.” There is no price tag on that. The gift of a life of one’s own is priceless.

With LIGHTS, safe and appropriate housing for the disabled is within reach. Knowing this, every family we help gains peace of mind and a path to the future.

Thank you again for your crucial support.

Warm regards,

Mary Pat Armstrong and the team at LIGHTS