

Report on the Direction of Independent Facilitation and Person Directed Planning in Ontario

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Submitted by:
The Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO)

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Introduction

With changes occurring rapidly in developmental services as a result of new legislation, and the policy and implementation work now being undertaken by MCSS, the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) brought together a group of families, individuals who have a developmental disability and Independent Facilitators from across the province on two separate occasions to document and reflect upon their lived experience around Independent Facilitation and Planning. All of these people had extensive, and for the most part long-term, experience with Independent Unencumbered Facilitation and Person Directed Planning (referred to in this document herein as Independent Facilitation), related to individualized funding and working toward a purposeful life in community.

The two days were aimed at:

- gaining clarity among individuals and families on how Independent Facilitation acts as a safeguard;
- gaining a deeper appreciation of where the accountability lies and how to ensure accountability;
- beginning a constructive dialogue between and with families, individuals and Facilitators about how they believe Independent Facilitation could evolve successfully across the province;
- developing key principles for moving forward.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of key stakeholders already engaged in charting a course for Independent Facilitation across Ontario including and not limited to:

- individuals who have a developmental disability;
- families who have a loved one with a developmental disability;
- existing and emerging Independent Facilitation steering groups, committees, regional networks, organizations, programs;
- the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network;
- Facilitators working within established 'Independent Facilitation' organizations;
- Facilitators working Independently within an existing Community of Practice;
- the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), Developmental Services Branch;
- Regional MCSS offices.

Participants at these two, full day events made a concerted effort to express clearly what has been so vitally important to them with respect to Independent Facilitation. Participants also laid out some of the key issues that need further exploration regarding Independent Facilitation. There was consensus by the end of the two days among participants that while there had been a worthwhile exploration of these issues there was continued interest in working together.

The Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) sees this report as a beginning for continued dialogue with each other and with MCSS. As Independent Facilitation continues to unfold in Ontario, IFCO looks forward to both the challenge and opportunity to participate with other committed stakeholders in the province.

This report focuses mainly on the role of Independent Facilitation as a crucial safeguard for individuals and families and overall issues facing Independent Facilitation in Ontario.

For the purpose of this report, family is defined as those that love and care for the individual, those that are prepared to stand by the individual and show evidence of a personal, committed relationship over time.

It is also important to note that the Independent Facilitators who attended the day are active members of the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network within the current leadership/organizing group and/or as active participants at the Independent Facilitation Forums/Events held over the last five years.

Finally, IFCO extends deepest appreciation to the forty people (individuals, families and Independent Facilitators) who gave generously of their time to participate and contribute toward this endeavour - without them IFCO would not be submitting this report.

Part One

Independent Facilitation: A Crucial Safeguard

The Role of Independent Unencumbered Facilitation and Person Directed Planning as a Crucial Safeguard for Individuals and Families

A good part of the first full day forum was directed at having individuals; families and Independent Facilitators share how Independent Facilitation prevents individuals and their families from being in jeopardy of falling apart and individuals not reaching their goals. Independent Facilitators are deeply aware of the importance of family to the individuals they support. Where there are no existing family connections, effort is made to recognize those people who love and care for the individual and who are prepared to stand by them over time and foster these kinds of relationships.

It was widely acknowledged in these conversations that the foundation of the work is relational. Independent Facilitators form and help create trusting and lasting relationships over time that lead to individuals and families being far less likely to go into crisis and needing to rely solely on the service system for support.

Independent unencumbered Facilitators are free of conflicts because they are not part of an organization that offers residential or day support programs. They also do not have any responsibility related to assessment, eligibility, and service provision or funding determinations.

It was noted that participants have seen these crucial safeguards arise almost exclusively outside of the traditional service system. The need for Independent Facilitation and for crucial safeguards arises among individuals and families within the context of creating a meaningful life in community where the individual is supported to take up his citizenship and make his or her contribution alongside others. While the individual may choose a range of services and supports it is this vision of community inclusion that sets it apart from other person-directed planning approaches. The role is fundamentally derived from a social justice perspective meaning that individuals who have a developmental disability have every right to take up their citizenship and participate alongside others in their community.

The Safeguards:

1. The Long-Term Commitment

Those experienced with Independent Facilitation understand that to work meaningfully with individuals and families one must make a long-term commitment. This commitment is about entering into a relationship and discovering what is possible and even desirable over time.

People and families have consistently expressed their desire that Independent Facilitators provide continuity of support over time. This commitment to the person and their family means a great deal to them. It is one of the most highly valued aspects of this kind of support is that families know that there will be an effort to stay connected and engaged over time. It is typical for Independent Facilitators to be there to support a range of transitions in a persons' life -- leaving school, moving out of the family home, losing support workers, deaths of loved ones. Individuals and families take comfort in knowing that the change they are considering will not have to be rushed into unnecessarily and that they can build capacity and courage over time in a thoughtful way that involves all the key people.

TRUST BUILDS OVER TIME

Individuals and families have had a lot of experiences with service workers coming in and out of their lives. This is one of the reasons why the long-term commitment is so essential so that trust builds as the relationship evolves and endures. It is assumed that if an Independent Facilitator cannot make a long-term commitment to an individual they would not assume the role and would endeavour to find a replacement. When families come to know that the person is genuinely willing to stand by them over time they begin to take the risks inherent in holding a vision for the future and embracing changes. Because the relationship is so essential for positive changes to happen, it is important that individuals and families have some choice as to who their Independent Facilitator is.

Individuals and families recognize how much Independent Facilitators help to put the control and authority for a person's life around the 'kitchen table'. Since they will be there over time, Independent Facilitators can invest more in developing the relationship and laying a strong foundation for trust so that they can help the family to work through their fears, their concerns and take a candid look at the risks involved in change. Alleviating ones' fears and doubts helps people to see possibilities they didn't see before. When individuals and families understand that the relationship will grow over time they are far more willing to consider how

things might unfold in the immediate, midterm, and long-term time frames without feeling pressured.

VISION IS ENCOURAGED

Independent Facilitators have numerous ways of encouraging and assisting individuals to develop a vision for their lives and be able to speak to others about that vision. They do not have any preconceived notions about what that vision ought to look like. They help individuals and families to 'think outside the box' and discover what is readily available in their local communities. They are less likely to direct individuals into existing services.

Independent Facilitators are not restrained or limited by the existing programs and requirements that are present within service agencies. This reality brings forth more creativity and custom solutions. Facilitators help individuals to claim a life for themselves and not be discouraged about how long it takes to see the changes they are looking for.

CAREFULLY ASKING THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Independent Facilitators help everyone understand and recognize the ongoing necessity for thinking things through carefully and evaluating whether things are working or not. At times, they assist by causing people to pause and ask themselves tough questions that they may have been avoiding. Basically, this involves getting people to be more reflective and having them stop and think before acting. This planful approach is a really valuable safeguard to decision making.

BELIEF IN THE PERSON

A fundamental belief of Independent Facilitation is that the individual is capable of being a creative source in his or her own life. Facilitators nurture a sense of possibility and self-reflection. They are aware of the importance of ongoing conversations and the need to create opportunities for people to share their stories and inspire one another to take risks. They have a deep understanding of social devaluation and the need to put in place safeguarding strategies so that the individual can avoid further devaluation.

2. Broadening and Strengthening Social Networks

Independent Facilitation acknowledges the centrality of helping to broaden and strengthen the individual's and the families' social networks.

FREELY GIVEN LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Independent Facilitators help the individual and family to build a sense of belonging and kinship with others. They help to identify and facilitate the coming together of significant people in order to broaden the planning context and deepen the social fabric of the individuals' life. They are committed to helping to build long-term relationships that are freely given and that will offer moral and practical support over time to the individual and to the family. These relationships help to care for the development of the individuals' voice and their own story and sense of self over time.

STRENGTH OF INTERDEPENDENCE

By bringing people together in this way Independent Facilitators help families realize that they don't have to make all the decisions and that they can involve others in the decision-making process alongside their son/daughter. Having others engaged over time that are willing to nurture their connection with the individual and support the persons' autonomy is a critical safeguard once the individuals' parents are no longer alive.

SUPPORT FOR DECISION MAKING

Independent Facilitators assist in bringing people together intentionally to aid the individual in supported decision making and entering into planning conversations. This broadening of the conversation with others assists greatly in gaining fresh insights into not only the challenges that they are dealing with but also the resources that can be brought to bear. Others are there to witness an individuals' life as it unfolds. They have many people who identify with their story and deeply understand and appreciate who they are and what they need and want. This helps to embolden the individual to take the next step because they know that they have many people who are there to lend a hand. Fostering a context for Supported Decision Making is a key aspect of the Independent Facilitator's role. It assists the individual to have a greater sense of autonomy and control over their life.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES; BRINGING THEM TOGETHER

Independent Facilitators also help to strengthen families by introducing them to other families who may have similar experiences and who may be able to offer mutual support. Bringing families together to share stories and gain strength from one another is key to the role of broadening the perspectives of family members and

expanding their social networks. When family caregivers feel less isolated they have more energy to deal with the day-to-day challenges they face. Linking families for the purpose of mutual support is invaluable.

3. Taking Direction from the Person

Independent Facilitation acknowledges that each person has the capacity to express their will and their preferences in some way and can be involved in directing and taking charge of the key decisions in their life to the extent possible.

LISTENING, DRAWING OUT AND STRENGTHENING THE INDIVIDUAL'S VOICE

Independent Facilitation is focussed on taking direction from the individual and helping them to develop a stronger sense of self and a vision for the future. This involves being present and listening in such a way that the individual strengthens their voice and their capacity to speak up for themselves in whatever way possible. This commitment to honouring and drawing out the individual's voice is a significant step in demonstrating to others how to listen carefully to what is being said and contributes greatly to deepening and extending relationships. Facilitators work over time to increase the individuals' opportunities for making decisions and taking charge of their life by helping others recognize the way in which they assert their will and make choices.

Helping to strengthen an individuals' voice also leads to them being more able and willing to enter into dialogue with those that matter in their lives about things that are troubling them and what they envision for themselves. It helps them to understand who they are and what their own story is. When individuals are consciously listened to over time they begin to be eager to tell their own story and listen to others stories. Facilitators aim at creating a safe place for all voices to be heard and understood so that the best decision can be made overall. There is a focus on helping the individual hear the perspectives of others and think through the options that are before them in any particular situation so that they can make informed decisions. **This commitment to supporting people to have a "say so" in their own life and begin shaping their own life goes a long way in safeguarding them against becoming silenced and not taken seriously by others.**

HELPING THE PERSON BE UNDERSTOOD AND HEARD BY OTHERS

Families shared how Independent Facilitators help them pay more attention and be more mindful to the body language and gestures the individual may be using as a form of expression and communication. They can also help to find ways to build a more universal form of communication so that the individual is better understood

by more people. As well as helping families think more broadly about how their sons and daughters may be communicating through their behaviours. The role of helping individuals be better understood and heard by others is a vital safeguard in all respects.

4. Commitment to Community Development and Innovation

Independent Facilitation organizations are committed to taking a broader community development approach to supporting individuals to build meaningful lives.

An essential aspect of the long-term commitment Independent Facilitators make is the possibility it creates for using more collaborative, community development oriented approaches. There is more potential for finding synergistic remedies to challenges that an individual may be facing, among a number of people and organizations. Independent Facilitators assist individuals and their families to explore and develop significant membership in community places and within community organizations.

Independent Facilitation organizations are committed to sharing ideas among families and exposing them to innovative practices and ideas from diverse places and organizations. They encourage dialogue between different government sectors so that best practices can be developed and obstacles can be addressed. They also partner with direct service providing agencies.

5. Building Capacity

Independent Facilitation is committed to building capacity among individuals and families.

VALUED SOCIAL ROLES

Independent Facilitators can help families better understand the impact of supporting adults to have valued social roles in the community and how that can happen. They assist individuals to have a better sense of self and personal identity as they begin to explore work, leisure and community roles.

CAPACITY FOR MANAGING SUPPORT WORKERS

They are able to strengthen the individual's' and family's' capacity for hiring, training and managing support workers for direct funding arrangements. This acts as a tremendous support for ensuring individuals get the most from their support workers.

6. Resilience

Independent Facilitation fosters resilience within families.

A leading premise of the work is to believe and be present to the resilience of families. Independent Facilitators set out to help families grow stronger by helping them identify their own capacity for coping and “doing the right” thing with and on behalf of their sons and daughters. Families are not used to having their strong points highlighted and built upon. They have grown accustomed to feeling judged and worn down by the “system”. Part of helping families build resilience is in acknowledging the steadfastness of the bonds between them and the ways in which they have uniquely faced challenges and adversity and successfully overcome them. As well, Independent Facilitators make an effort to reflect back to individuals and families what kinds of capacities they see that they are developing over time.

Independent Facilitators help families figure out what it is that makes it easier for them to cope better on a day-to-day basis and then supports them to strengthen that capacity. Knowing that there is someone who is listening to them and is supporting them to advocate and develop coping strategies goes a long way to building resilience.

7. Acknowledgement of Gifts

Independent Facilitation is committed to helping those surrounding the individual acknowledge their gifts and what they have to contribute to their communities.

8. Assistance Through Difficult Times

Independent Facilitation can assist individuals and families through difficult times and help to sort through conflicts.

Individuals and families are strengthened knowing that Independent Facilitators are able to respond quickly and stay with them and their family member every step of the way when they come into crisis by helping them to sort through the next steps so that they manage to keep their decision-making autonomy and remain as stable as possible. Families say that Independent Facilitators help to validate their families by really listening to their experiences and helping them to articulate the challenges they are facing. They also help by educating families and helping them navigate between the diverse services and supports that may be available to them.

WALKING ALONGSIDE

They also play a role in walking alongside individuals and families in times of vulnerability and weakness when they feel stuck and unable to act. At these times,

the Independent Facilitator's role is to remain steadfast, listen deeply and help the family understand and acknowledge where they are “at”. They can also help them determine what kind of support would be most useful in gaining back the will to act.

NEUTRAL VOICE

Independent Facilitators are skilled at facilitating safe conversations that are aimed at sorting through conflicts, big and small, in a way that honours the individual and the individual's vulnerabilities. They are able to bring a neutral voice and offer a process for gaining clarity to the conflict at hand.

Independent Facilitators are also extremely helpful in supporting individuals and their families to avert crisis by identifying potential problems before they have a negative impact and to develop back up plans. Sometimes it is essential for Independent Facilitators to point out the implications of not taking action. Sometimes they assist individuals and their families with their own unique ideas.

9. Documenting the Planning, Reviewing Actions

Independent Facilitation recognizes the importance of documenting plannings and action steps and regularly reviewing and evaluating their usefulness.

A key role for Independent Facilitators is to ensure that there are reliable ways to capture planning conversations and track action steps so that they can be reviewed and revised over time. The focus is on putting together concrete, thoughtful plans for taking the next step and ensuring that they are aligned with the individual's vision for the future.

Independent Facilitators are acutely aware of the need to ensure that any planning process that they use is able to capture a moment in time and at the same time permits the exploration of possibilities that are wide open and far-reaching. The planning process engages others in thinking creatively about how the individual can take up their life in such a way as to maximize their dreams and minimize their risks. Tangible and honest safeguards are key to any planning document and therefore needs to reflect both the individual's capacities and vulnerabilities.

Independent Facilitators help families develop legacy documents that lay out the details of providing care so that families can turn over responsibility to others if the need arises.

Summary - Part One

Individuals and families have eloquently expressed how important the 'role' of an Independent Facilitator 'is' and 'has been' to support them over time. This is evidenced in the nine crucial safeguards that are outlined in Part One of this report.

Individuals, families and Independent Facilitators who participated expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share, reflect deeply, and openly converse with each other over two full days at the IFCO ad hoc forums. They found it positive and energizing to share their knowledge and lived experiences with each other. They were clear about the safeguards and the accountability that Independent Facilitation brings to their lives. However, individuals and families were also brutally honest about their concerns. Many expressed specific concerns about the future, fearful that their positive experiences with Independent Facilitation would become a thing of the past.

The next part of this report outlines some of the overall issues and concerns with regard to Independent Facilitation as identified by the forum participants.

Part Two

Overall Issues Facing Independent Facilitation in Ontario

A Key Issue: Lack of Equity and Access

From the beginning, the MCSS transformation agenda was premised on ensuring fairness and equity of access to supports and services in this sector across the province. Legislation states that there will be three distinct forms of Person Directed Planning (PDP) available to individuals and their families including: Agency based PDP, Adult Protective Service Worker (APSW) PDP and Independent Facilitation. It appears that the MCSS may be relying entirely on a fee for service funding model for this type of support. We believe this to be wholly inadequate when it comes to truly offering Independent Facilitation to individuals and families as a viable option into the future. Depending exclusively on a fee for service model will not ensure fairness and equity, nor will it ensure sustainability over time.

Agency-based settings and APSW organizations that are gearing up to offer funded planning supports already have extensive infrastructure support and core funding available to them. This is not equally true for the option of Independent Facilitation in most areas of the province. This unequal access to MCSS core funding represents a substantial disadvantage. It considerably reduces the right of individuals and their families to choose Independent Facilitation as an option.

Loss of experience and knowledge

There have been a number of Independent Facilitation organizations in the province that have developed extensive expertise and generated knowledge about how individuals and families are best served through Independent Facilitation supports. They have focused their practice on building community capacity and responsiveness by offering training and/or building partnerships. Without investment this existing knowledge and expertise will be lost.

Independent Facilitation will not be sustainable over the long run without core funding. Existing and experienced organizations are in jeopardy of being weakened by lack of investment and/or diminished funding. Stable funding would strengthen their base and enable them to expand their capacity.

Following that, emergent organizations across the province would then be able to look to these more seasoned organizations for expertise and mentoring in the short and mid-term - while they develop their own expertise.

Ensuring viability

Ensuring that Independent Facilitation becomes a truly viable option for individuals and families into the future would require that the government of Ontario through its appropriate ministries, including the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), seriously consider a plan to do the following:

1/ Invest in existing knowledge and experience with Independent Facilitation; dialogue about the possibilities.

2/ Develop incentives and directives to encourage regional offices to support local community development work/solutions where partners are willing to permanently invest and/or shift existing funds to a core funded option for Independent Facilitation.

3/ Ensure that already funded local or regional solutions/models do not lose funding due to other pressures in the system (i.e. Ottawa example).

4/ Consider freeing up other provincial funds for investment in Independent Facilitation. *(One example might be to rethink the Passport Mentoring model and over time shift those funds toward the long-term relationship work of Independent Facilitation.)*

5/ Determine that a percentage of any 'new funding' to the developmental sector in the future will go toward the development of Independent Facilitation to grow it as a core funded option over time to support individuals and families who are choosing direct funding options and who need/want this support for creating a meaningful life.

Other Identified Issues:

1) Threat of Bureaucratization

(For both Direct Funding and Independent Facilitation)

Families have expressed concern that if the expectations for filling out “paperwork” are too difficult to follow and require too much administrative work they will be far less likely to choose to self manage their direct funding. This over bureaucratization will act as a disincentive for families that are willing and quite able to help their sons and daughters create positive and meaningful futures. Many families are already being asked for such high levels of accountability through 'PASSPORTS' that they are prone to ‘throwing in the towel’ unless they have ‘supportive agencies’ that can assist with the paper work and funding arrangements.

There is real concern among families that the Ministry may create an overly bureaucratized system for Independent Facilitation that would erode the essence of

the work by placing too many demands on Independent Facilitators and take away from the time they need to spend with individuals and families. There is also concern that Independent Facilitation organizations will be expected to follow the same administrative protocols as service providing agencies that are running residential facilities and day programs when it comes to accountability and quality assurance measures.

2) The Primacy of Facilitation Over Merely Creating 'Paper Plans'

The proper focus of Independent Facilitation is on standing by individuals and families over time and building a relationship of trust. Building this relationship is essential to ensuring that planning conversations are undertaken within a broader context among family and friends. There needs to be a recognition for the valued work done by Independent Facilitators who cannot write a plan as if it will shape the future - relationships shape the future. Written plans are only vision and action statements that offer ways to take stock of what needs to be considered while going forward. Focussing resources on short term planning engagements where the emphasis is on creating a “paper plan” is viewed as problematic and ineffectual.

3) Costing Plans in Advance

The growing tendency for Independent Facilitation organizations and Facilitators to have to “cost out the plan” or name a price for delivering a plan in advance to authorities is fundamentally opposed to the nature of the work. Until there is a relationship established and trust enters that relationship the Independent Facilitator is in no position to know what kinds of support may be needed or even relevant. In complex crisis situations it is impossible to determine in advance how much support an individual and/or family will need to “stabilize” a situation or work through a transition period. In those circumstances the plan is constantly evolving as learning is taking place and supports are tried out. The plan is emerging out of the Independent Facilitation support and not vice versa. Good Facilitation entails responding to individuals in concrete ways that assist them and their loved ones to “imagine better”.

4) Problems with Fee for Service Arrangements

Independent Facilitators that have had experience with fee for service arrangements have expressed concern that they were put in difficult positions making it challenging to maintain the values and principles central to Independent Facilitation and Planning. Support has often been time limited and focussed on the written plan versus the delicate process and relationship building. As well, there is serious concern among individuals and families about using fee for service funding arrangements as the sole method of funding Independent Facilitation in Ontario. Individuals without families would have difficulty finding and connecting with an

Independent Facilitator. The 'walking with' individuals over time does not work well with small amounts of funding available (i.e. 10% of Passport funds).

5) Government Imposing Expectations to 'Discharge' Individuals:

There is considerable concern among those experienced with Independent Facilitation that there will be an expectation to “discharge” individuals once a certain period of time is reached or once a “paper plan” has been submitted. This type of thinking seems more based on a traditional model of time limited counselling rather than the relational approach inherent in Independent Facilitation. This focus on discharge does not reflect the intermittent long-term nature of the work.

It can be shown that when a relationship of trust is established over time and an Independent Facilitator has been able to respond in a timely, reliable way in the past, the demand for the service goes down. This is especially true when the focus of the Independent Facilitation support has been on building capacity and strengthening social networks. Individuals and families who have had ongoing support have expressed how they begin to feel more confident in their own capacity to manage on their own. As well, Independent Facilitation organizations have operated for years on the premise that there is a fluctuating demand by individuals and families for their service because of the natural changes in a person’s life stages. Sometime a person or family will not call for a few months at a time depending on their circumstances. Other times they need support on a weekly basis. The ebb and flow of lives play a huge factor in the support.

6) Traditional Service Outcome Measures Being Applied to Independent Facilitation Organizations:

Service outcomes related to Independent Facilitation need to acknowledge the significance of providing supports that will enable individuals to contribute based on their assets rather than providing services in response to their limitations.

7) Independent Facilitation being Viewed as a ‘Fad’

For those who have spent the last decade or more receiving or offering Independent Facilitation support across Ontario, it is frustrating for them to hear it being described and treated as a fad within the sector. This 'thinking' not only marginalizes the community development efforts that have been made and the expertise that has been gained over the past 20 years, it reduces its value in the eyes of new parents who are trying to decide between various forms of person-directed planning.

8) Negative Presumptions about Whether Individuals and Families can be Trusted and/or are Competent with Funds:

Up to now, accountability measures directed at families have carried a negative presumption that they cannot be trusted with individualized funds even though the research demonstrates the contrary. Also, families in general are not viewed as being competent to manage individualized funding. The new regulations, standards and policies send the message to individuals and families that they are not competent to do it on their own.

Individuals with developmental disabilities are not taken seriously or seen as competent enough to enter into funding agreements. They are not supported to have a voice (even in the legislation), as it does not entrench their rights. This quote from a family says it all: "We need to get rid of the shackles of oppression." Most people think that the shackles are gone now that the institutions are closed and people are living in community, but a major shift in beliefs has not yet happened. When family caregivers cannot do it any longer - their loved ones have ended up in a long-term care facility - just another form of institution.

9) Concern About Directives from the Ministry Changing in the Nature of the Work by Limiting the Scope:

It is very important to families that Independent Facilitation organizations that accept funding from the Ministry not be forced into offering a 'fixed menu' of support. This is viewed by individuals and families as being far too prescriptive. Individuals and families cannot know in advance what they may need support with. They do not want to be pushed into a situation where there are narrowly defined limits on the relationship and kinds of support that can be offered. Independent Facilitation needs to remain open and flexible. Individuals and families need responsive and timely help in order for the support to make a difference.

10) Concern About the 'Over-Professionalization' of the Role of Facilitator:

There is a considerable tension between these following two concepts: '*Independent Facilitators acting professionally*' and a '*professional industry of Independent Facilitators being created in Ontario*'. Independent Facilitators are drawn to the role because it speaks to their underlying beliefs in social justice. It is felt that 'over-professionalizing' the role by creating expectations of accreditation or specific credential acquisition would limit the effectiveness of Independent Facilitators. It would also severely restrict their scope and how they are permitted to engage with families. Families need to ensure that the values of the Independent Facilitator are aligned with their own. Participants of the IFCO Ad Hoc Forums also emphasized

their expectation and belief that the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network would continue to have a positive influence on the 'work' as it evolves and gets stronger both through its Community of Practice development and increased connections throughout the Province.

Training and Mentoring

Training and mentoring of Independent Facilitators is critical and this cannot be set out in set of rules or through required standards and criteria. There seems to be an essence in good Independent Facilitators. Families describe them as "people who get it". They deeply understand the nature of devaluation of their loved ones, the oppression of the past and the need for safeguards. They understand why it is critical to walk along side others and make a long time commitment. 'We' can teach skills, but cannot teach the essence that is needed. It is based in social justice and a deep understanding of devaluation.

Mentoring needs to be ongoing so that Facilitators do not have just one-time training. Mentoring helps people to keep their focus over time. We cannot assume that Independent Facilitators will seek out and work with mentors on their own. Being connected through a Community of Practice, including the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network and local or regional networks is one way to support the success of Independent Facilitation in the future.

Conclusion

There was overall consensus among those present at the two IFCO Ad Hoc Forums to approach the Ministry of Community and Social Services with a request for dialogue and that it be undertaken differently than it has been done historically. All agreed that it is not possible to have a simple or “quick fix” to the implementation of Independent Facilitation. It was affirmed by all present, that a process that engages key stakeholders in the conversation would be positive and most helpful. We know that MCSS has had previous experience developing policy that is based on emergent leadership within a sector. We want to base this policy work on thinking with the Ministry about how to honour the innovative and distinct ways that Independent Facilitation has emerged and/or is emerging already across the province. We support going slowly and taking the time to recognize the lessons learned from the lived experience - our history in Ontario - as well as creating new and different approaches.

As communities all over the province, we are already meeting and developing what is being asked for in our communities, and moving forward. Government investment is needed to further the work. We are not saying this is the only way to do it, but rather we want to help the government understand that Independent Facilitation will look differently in each community. For Independent Facilitation to be a viable option for individuals and families it needs to be well funded across the province over time. Core funding that goes beyond the current Passport model of 10% will be needed. We welcome dialogue about how that might occur when the time is right with full understanding that MCSS is not interested in directing funds to 'new' organizations.

In summarizing some of the dialogue among key stakeholders, the following insights emerged as significant. It is our hope to build on these insights as we continue our discussions and that MCSS and other stakeholders recognize them.

That:

- Relationships are key for nurturing the individual's voice and keeping people safe and engaged.
- The outcomes of Independent Facilitation are primarily relational and based on the nature of the work that is undertaken over time. These outcomes are highly individual and unique to Independent Facilitation.
- Being able to offer ongoing Independent Facilitation with a focus on fostering a relationship of trust is essential for these outcomes to arise.
- Community development and working within a family context must be understood as the key to Independent Facilitation.
- The grounding of the work takes place locally and with other community partners.
- A diversity of approaches across the province is healthy and preferable.
- Independent Facilitation needs to be available and accessible for all people and families who request it.

- There is extensive experience already in the sector related to Independent Facilitation and this expertise needs to be acknowledged and sustained.

Other considerations for implementation:

- The 'work' demands maximal flexibility in terms of working conditions. It is not like a regular 9-5 job. The work happens evenings and weekends, the hours are variable depending on need and this fluctuates over time. It is not prescribed, not pre-scheduled or limited in scope. It is based on the needs of the person and family, and these are variable.
- The individual and family lead the process, it is not the mandate of an organization or agency. Specific timelines are defined by people and families within a broader community and not dictated by external requirements.
- Independent Facilitation is vital to supporting individuals who choose direct funding and desire to create a life in community. It is one of the key things that makes the funding sustainable over time.

The Language of Community

There is a distinct culture and language in the work of Independent/Unencumbered Facilitation and Planning. It is the language of community. It creates a way for people to be held, healed, and supported within the relationships they have with each other. It is important that this powerful reality is understood and appreciated as we move forward. Ultimately, this is why IFCO wholeheartedly embraces, supports and works toward Independent Facilitation in Ontario.