



An Overview of the Network . . .

Who We Are

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network is a network of independent facilitators, people who have a disability/self-advocates, families, and agency representatives (including facilitators) who are committed to the development and preservation of a provincial Community of Practice for independent facilitation and planning.

What We Believe about Independent Facilitation

We believe that independent facilitation and planning is an ongoing process of exploration and discovery, rooted in relationships, to help people with disabilities and others to achieve a good and valued life that includes their participation and contribution as citizens.

Background

It has been the desire, from the first initial gathering of those involved in independent facilitation and planning, that families, people who have a disability/self-advocates and facilitators come together in conversation, shared learning, mentoring and building a principled context for this work. This has been consistently true from the early forums hosted and facilitated by the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) through today, where the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network (OIFN) operates autonomously as a respected network carrying forward the work.

The vision for independent facilitators to have a way to connect and learn from each other was birthed at the IFCO Workfest in 2004. Following this event, as an action, an Ad Hoc Group of Facilitators worked to develop the Terms of Reference from which these efforts would evolve. Three independent facilitation dialogue forums were later hosted by IFCO, with support from agencies also committed to the work, to lay the foundation. Facilitators, family leaders, self-advocates and others were invited to attend; more than 40 participants came out to each forum. The information gathered further evolved the vision, and work began on securing funding and partners to establish regular forums and a Community of Practice.

By 2008, the Modeling Community Change and Innovation (MCCI) project (funded in part by the Ontario Trillium Foundation) had begun. Three forums were held, with some project support, as the network grew in vision and strength. Invitations went out to representatives from various groups and communities in Ontario; approximately 50 attendees participated in each of these forums. The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network held four more forums after the close of the MCCI project, with continued support from financial sponsors and volunteers. With an

established volunteer organizing group, sponsors, and in-kind support the sustainability and regularity of forums was strengthened. In total there have been ten provincial independent facilitation forums held in Ontario since the year 2005.

Today

As part of the Network's efforts to strengthen the capacity of independent facilitation across Ontario, we work hard at connecting to local community initiatives that are doing or championing independent facilitation with invitations to be a part of this 'Community of Practice'. We have successfully developed connections around the province. It is our intention to continue to expand our connections. Much of this work is done through the efforts of volunteers and with the limited financial sponsorship of supportive organizations. As such, the work moves slowly but steadily forward.



Participants from around the province are typically involved in one or more of the following: an organization or program that offers independent facilitation, a local steering group, and/or a local facilitation network working toward the strengthening and/or initial development of independent facilitation in their community. Those interested in learning about the Network and the concept of independent facilitation, who are not affiliated with any ongoing work, are also welcome to attend the forums and decide if this is a direction they are interested in pursuing.

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network is proud to carry the important work of connecting shared learning forward with: clarity of purpose, established beliefs and principles for working together in a Community of Practice, a workable structure, opportunities for learning and connecting, and linkages with others. The Network is always listening and looking to improve.

Purpose

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network has grown in its vision, efforts and activities to gather facilitators, families, self-advocates and others to fulfill the following purpose:

To provide a variety of ongoing opportunities for facilitators, families and self-advocates committed to independent facilitation and planning to:

- **Continue the development and sustainability of a Community of Practice where people can engage in shared learning regarding the values, knowledge, experience, strategies and resources that contribute to excellence in independent facilitation and planning.**
- **Connect with each other and support one another at local, regional and provincial levels through person to person meetings and various electronic means.**
- **Share information on issues and initiatives that are relevant to independent facilitation and planning in Ontario.**
- **Further develop outreach to those who have an interest in independent facilitation and planning throughout Ontario.**

Working Principles

We believe that:

- We all have something to teach and something to learn from each other in the Network.
- Everyone has gifts and everyone is able to make valuable contributions.
- Creating, nurturing and maintaining a safe environment enables all people to respect and be respected, while also holding differences of opinion and complexity.
- There is value in our differences.
- Dialogue helps to safeguard vulnerable people.
- It is essential for people who use independent facilitation and planning as a support to be the directors of the support they receive.

Community of Practice

“A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Key elements are:

The domain: members are brought together by a learning need they share (whether this shared learning need is explicit or not and whether learning is the motivation for their coming together or a by-product of it)

The community: their collective learning becomes a bond among them over time (experienced in various ways and thus not a source of homogeneity)

The practice: their interactions produce resources that affect their practice (whether they engage in actual practice together or separately)”

<http://wenger-trayner.com/map-of-resources/>

Structure

We have found that creating a Community of Practice through conversation and dialogue, in an atmosphere of trust, respect and hospitality provides an essential and effective means to safeguard and promote excellence and accountability in the work of independent facilitation and planning. Our success as a Network is a direct result of remaining an autonomous, neutral body, where facilitators, families and self-advocates feel welcome to participate and to learn in an atmosphere of creativity and collaboration. Maintaining and protecting the democratic, free-flowing nature of the Network will ensure that the development of mutual relationships and shared learning continue to grow in healthy and productive ways. The Network is a focal point and clearinghouse where people can get to know one another, learn more about the values and best practices of facilitation and planning, share resources, find mentoring opportunities, and exchange information on what is happening around independent facilitation in their area and across Ontario.

Participants

Network Forums have had participants attend from every region in the province at one point or another, particularly during the period of time that the MCCI project was supporting some of our work. This included places like Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay.

More than 140 participants have been involved in our activities since inception. This includes forum participation by facilitators, families, self-advocates, and others who attend as representatives from their local communities, as well as those connected via our recently established Listserv. Additionally other people are kept informed through the representatives who take back information to local and/or regional organizations, steering groups and facilitation networks. We have active participation from the following areas:

- Windsor Essex
- Thames Valley (London, Middlesex, Oxford, Elgin)
- Huron Perth
- Grey Bruce
- Waterloo Region
- Wellington Dufferin
- Toronto and Area
- Durham Region
- Belleville, Kingston, Brockville Area
- Ottawa Carleton and Area
- Huntsville, Nipissing, North Bay Area



Ontario Independent Facilitation Network Leadership

The Planning Group for the Network is a small group of committed volunteers who, with input from the broader Network, design and organize forums twice a year, foster outreach to those interested in independent facilitation, share information on learning opportunities and resources, and seek support for the continued development of the Network. Current Planning Group members include:

Barb Fowke, Member at Large; former President, *People First Ontario; Facile Waterloo*

Brian Tardif, Executive Director, *Ottawa Citizen Advocacy*

Cathy Bloomfield, Family Support Facilitator, *Durham Association for Family Respite Services*

Joanna Goode, Independent Facilitator, *Families for a Secure Future and Facilitation Wellington Dufferin*

Lynda Kahn, Independent Facilitator, Director of Development, *Inclusion Press International*

Rhonda Alcott, Family Support Facilitator, *Durham Association for Family Respite Services*

Susan Beayni, Independent Facilitator and Coordinator of Family Services, *PLAN Toronto*

Susannah Joyce, Independent Facilitator, Director, *Realizations Training & Resources*

Current Approaches and Activities to Accomplish Our Purposes

The Ontario Independent Facilitation Network offers opportunities to develop the craft of independent facilitation and planning by:

- Providing a place to practice and learn.
- Building capacity as individual facilitators, as community members, and as small groups of facilitators and families in different communities through a Community of Practice.
- Valuing community development, professional development, and relationships.
- Sharing of resources.
- Being a place for us to hold to high order values & principles that stand the test of time.
- Valuing human rights and the civic responsibility we all share as Canadian Citizens.
- Endeavouring to assist each other to operate with integrity.
- Developing and maintaining clarity about independent facilitation and planning.
- Recognizing that there is value in our differences.
- Intentionally developing relationships across the province.

These approaches are achieved within the context of relationships by:

- Connecting, networking and learning from each other
- Supporting one another
- Assisting people to find mentors and to offer themselves as mentors
- Being a place of hospitality
- Providing tangible and relevant opportunities for networking, for both newer and seasoned independent facilitation and planning leaders

Forums

The series of Forums we continue to offer is one of the ways in which participants have opportunities: to develop clarity and insights about independent facilitation and planning, and why we do this work; to honour our commonalities and recognize value in our differences; to build capacity in our practice; to strengthen relationships; to participate in learning; to share resources, strategies and concerns.

Each Forum builds on the previous ones, in a developmental process that relies to a great extent on the feedback from forum participants on evaluation sheets provided at each gathering, as well as through conversations with members of the Network's Steering Group. We endeavour to host two Forums per year, spring and fall, and are pursuing venues in broader areas of the province to encourage wider provincial attendance.



Evolution of the “Community of Practice” learning community concept and work

Time Frame	Activity	Description
2004	IFCO Workfest	Action Step: the vision for 'connecting as facilitators' is birthed. A commitment is made to form a working group of facilitators and develop a Terms of Reference.
2004/2005	Ad Hoc Working Group	A Terms of Reference is developed through a series of teleconferences and meetings.
2005/2006	Laying the ground Work; Gathering Information	Three facilitator forums hosted by the Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) gather information and obtain more clarity about the value of facilitation and what families, individuals and independent facilitators deem would be helpful into the future. The importance of developing a Provincial Network and Community of Practice was identified as one of the goals for the future, as was the importance of linking with local facilitation networks that were starting to develop.
2007-2010	Moving Forward with a Provincial Network and regular forums	Work was built upon the information gathered 05/06. Volunteers with IFCO began work on a proposal for funding and on partnerships. With support from the Modeling Community Change and Innovation project to build capacity provincially through forums, partners and volunteers committed to working on evolving the Community of Practice.
2011- 2012	Growing, Strengthening, Learning and Expanding Connections	Volunteers, sponsors, and partners continued their commitment to grow and strengthen the Network after the MCCI project funding ended by holding forums and finding ways to link and network between events. The name <i>Ontario Independent Facilitation Network</i> , although used informally since the year 2009, was officially adopted along with the logo in 2011. Learning and sharing continued; energy and excitement grew, as did the need for more volunteer involvement and networking. A call went out to join the Ad Hoc Website Committee.
2013	Planning for the Future, OIFN to Expand its Reach	Early in 2013: The development of a website began with a launch planned for spring of 2013. Two strategic planning days were held. Acting on priorities identified by participants/ members, the future will include: expanding connections and linkages to local and regional groups; supporting the practice of independent facilitation provincially; addressing gaps; proposal writing; governance and shared leadership. Additional Ad hoc working groups formed to take on priority projects.

List of Past Forums

All forums were financially supported by IFCO and supportive agency partners. Three of the forums also had some coordination support through the MCCI project in addition to the other resources.

- Nov. 2012 **Ready or Not: A Day to Discuss the Development of the Network**, Pickering
- Nov. 2011 **Finding Our Ways through a Changing Landscape**, Cambridge
- Apr. 2011 **Nurturing and Protecting the Sacred: What We Hold Dear**, Kingston
- Oct. 2010 **Rooted in Relationships**, Cambridge (Supported by sponsors, during MCCI)
- Apr. 2010 **Building a Community of Practice**, Cambridge (MCCI supported)
- Oct. 2009 **Driving the Work**, Cambridge (MCCI supported)
- March 2009 **Growing the Work**, Cambridge (MCCI supported)
- July 2005, Nov. 2005, June 2006 **Laying the Groundwork: A Series of Three Provincial Facilitator Forums**, Thornhill

Feedback from Forums

At each Forum participants were asked to fill out an Evaluation Sheet and/or notes to share what they have appreciated about the Forum as well as offer suggestions for future Forums. People have said that they value the chance to be with others who are like minded: to learn new ideas and approaches, to have time with people they know and make new connections, to get the perspectives of families and self-advocates as well as facilitators, to learn and to share what is happening around independent facilitation in various parts of the province, to be heard and supported, to be inspired and encouraged to keep being involved in this work.

Google Group

In 2012 a Google Group Listserv was initiated, with the help of a volunteer from the Network, to offer another way to share information and ideas. Various articles, notices of training events and information about local, regional and provincial initiatives are being shared by people in the Network.

Website Creation and Development

Our website, launched in April 2013, is another effective way to reach out to those people / communities not yet involved in the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network as well as others interested in learning more about independent facilitation and planning and how to connect to local initiatives. It is a place to: further build a Community of Practice; share the values and principles of the work; share ideas and stories about people's lives. It is a place to develop capacity for greater engagement and for people to strengthen their presence within the Network. Our new logo was launched with the website as well.



Linking with Local and Regional Facilitation Networks and Related Groups

A number of people involved in the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network and its Steering Group have participated in and/or contributed to events sponsored by local and regional networks and organizations such as: Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario (IFCO), Windsor Essex Brokerage for Personal Support (WEBPS), Durham Association for Family Respite Services (DAFRS), Extend a Family (Toronto), Families for a Secure Future (FSF), Family Alliance Ontario (FAO), People First Ontario, Citizen Advocacy Ottawa, Facile Perth and Waterloo, Facilitation Leadership Group, Inclusion Press, Life Path, Realizations, Brockville and District Association for Community Involvement, Community Living agencies like Windsor, Huntsville, and St. Mary's and other organizations not listed here.

Examples of local initiatives: The Huron Perth and Thames Valley Facilitation Networks collaborated to host a Learning Marketplace event for facilitators in June, 2012. They had participants from as far away as Sudbury, with over 40 people attending the day. Additionally Windsor-Essex gathered families, self-advocates and independent facilitators in London in March 2012 for a discussion facilitated by Jack Pearpoint and Lynda Kahn on the benefits of a Regional Independent Facilitation Network; a white paper has been developed as a result. These are just two examples of the networking taking place among those involved with independent facilitation and planning and the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network.

Celebrating the Benefit of a Vibrant Network

We celebrate the strength of our vibrant network as a provincial Community of Practice and a respected link to other networks/practices. We recognize that we still have work to do in connecting with communities in the north, south, east and west that are interested and that are engaged in the work of independent facilitation.

Having a more public presence will enable others to make contact with the 'Network' and allow us to extend invitations to be a part of this Community of Practice. We also see that there is a real need within many communities to provide more information about the independent facilitation and planning option.

To accomplish these important goals we plan to utilize a variety of strategies that build community capacity and nurture local initiatives grounded in values and principles reflective of this community of practice. Some of those strategies, both short and long term will require additional resources and partners.

Working toward the Sustainability of the Network's Next Phase

This involves:

- Writing grant proposals for assistance with outreach, communication, and paid assistance with some of the activities of the Network during this phase of further linking and outreach expansion.
- Written and in-person requests for financial support to continue holding Network Forums twice a year, and bursaries for some people to attend.
- Discovering capacity and expertise within Network members and ways people wish to contribute these.

Looking Ahead: Ontario Independent Facilitation Network Plans

Continue to Increase Outreach Activities

- Continue to learn more about and share information on what people in different parts of the province are doing or want to do regarding independent facilitation and planning.
- Map the activity of independent facilitation based on the information reported and shared by active participants of the Network in published and electronic form.
- Promote informal means of sharing information about skilled independent facilitators in various locales.
- Promote more ways for self-advocates and families to make informed choices about independent facilitation and independent facilitators.
- Promote more discussion on accountability and safeguards based on relationships and Community of Practice.

Offer Additional Learning Opportunities

- Continue to host Forums twice a year, developing the participation of people from more parts of the province.
- Sponsor training opportunities on aspects of independent facilitation and planning and community connections.
- Share information about other trainings in independent facilitation, various approaches to personal planning, community connecting, circles, etc.
- Share written and electronic resources on the above topics.
- Offer information on mentoring opportunities for those wishing to provide and/or receive this support.

Expand and Strengthen Connections and Communication

- Strengthen the membership in the electronic Listserv.
- Develop a greater social media presence through our website
- Support communication and connection among local and regional independent facilitation networks (as well as Steering Committees and supportive organizations) and the sharing of information by their representatives at Forums and with people in their own locales.
- Build on the Outreach we have begun by strengthening existing connections and adding to them through some in person visits by Network members to other parts of the province, including the near and far north.

Strengthen the Sustainability of the Network

- Continue to develop and nurture the involvement of increasing numbers of network members/volunteers in a shared leadership approach.
- Continue to secure more ongoing resource investments and commitments.
- Secure one-time grant funding for the Network, to better prepare for the next evolutionary phase, to include: research, development, planning, resource creation and further capacity building toward the implementation of this next growth phase.