



Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs
Agences ontariennes de soutien pour les personnes qui ont des besoins spéciaux

November 2009

**OASIS PRESENTATION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

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OASIS – “Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs” – welcomes this opportunity to participate in the pre-Budget consultations by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

OASIS

- Continues to strongly support the initiative of the Minister of Community and Social Services to develop a new longer term vision for the Developmental Services Sector;
- Shares the Minister’s goal of ensuring that the - “Transformation of Services in Ontario for People who have a Developmental Disability” – results in a high quality service system that is equitable, flexible and sustainable, and is designed to meet the lifelong needs of Ontario citizens with developmental disabilities;
- Emphasizes the importance of ensuring the maintenance of a strong, responsive and stable non-profit transfer payment agency system both as the Province’s primary service delivery mechanism and as the backstop for the initiation of funding directly to individuals and families under the transformed system; and
- Recommends that, to ensure the effective, ongoing, implementation of a transformed developmental services sector, the Minister of Finance provide, at a minimum, a 2% increase to base budgets for Transfer Payment agencies for 2010/11, which will enable them to meet their legal obligations; provide labour stability; enable agencies to

contribute to the ongoing transformation of the service system; and allow for the ongoing provision of quality supports and services to some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

BACKGROUND

OASIS is a province-wide association of transfer-payment agencies that seeks to ensure cost-effective, high quality supports and services for people with developmental disabilities, and to facilitate and strengthen the operations of its members. OASIS is an entirely voluntary association – it has no staff and no office. All work is performed by individuals and committees on a volunteer basis using the internet to communicate to members on such matters as best practices in financial management, program and service innovations, human resources and labour/management relations, and governmental regulations and initiatives.

Founded by 6 non-profit agencies in 1996, OASIS' membership has grown to 145 transfer payment agencies located in all regions and communities of Ontario. OASIS member agencies provide services to about 36,000 individuals with developmental disabilities, employ 26,000 full-time, part-time and casual staff, and receive approximately \$900,000,000 in operating funding, primarily from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. In addition, they raise significant funds from their communities mainly to assist in the provision of respite and recreation and leisure opportunities not otherwise funded, and in the purchase and modification of suitable, accessible properties. Our members are closely involved in the communities in which they are located.

Such agencies constitute the primary vehicle – indeed, the **“backbone”** according the Minister of Community and Social Services in her address to the 2009 OASIS Annual Conference - for delivering government-regulated supports and services to people with developmental disabilities, notably in the form of:

- Residential care via group homes, supervised residences or approved family-home programs;
- Supported independent living programs;
- Day programs, including Life Skills learning, Sheltered workshops and other training situations;
- Supported employment programs leading to independent employment in the community;

Challenges

The developmental services sector is at an important, indeed critical, juncture. With the regional institutions now closed, and the anticipated introduction of more flexible support arrangements under a transformed system, the status quo, or even minor incremental funding, are not viable options.

Ontario must face up to the problems created by growing waiting lists and aging parents, permit supports and services to reach a broader range of people, encourage and allow new

initiatives to be launched and ensure the long term stability of the sector. This must include the opportunity for longer term budgeting and financial planning, especially the creation of reserves. Agencies, families and the Ministry of Community and Social Services are jointly planning and working to meet these challenges.

System Capacity

Supporting people with developmental disabilities within communities, including those who have moved out of regional institutions, has become increasingly difficult. More complex personal needs, an aging population, and escalating demands for services (not only those individuals living with aging parents but also those young adults new to the adult system), have exacerbated the pressures on the sector and service providers have reached their limit in terms of their ability to respond effectively to these pressures. Current challenges include:

- Residential supports are unavailable for individuals whose parents have become too old to care for them.
- Individuals with high needs must wait several years for day and residential programs, placing ongoing stress on families and caregivers.
- The changing “needs” profile of individuals (aging individuals and those with multiple disabilities) requires more sophisticated and varied support services beyond the level currently available. This requires significantly more staff training.
- Increasing costs of construction and real estate (eg. Fire and building code regulations).

Long Waiting Lists / Few Vacancies

- **There has been no additional “Passport” Individualized Day Support funding for almost two years.** This has led to a significant increase in the number of young people who have left school and are without day programs or supports. In some circumstances, parents have had to give up their jobs to provide support.
- The number of people on priority waiting lists continues to grow as aging parents and the special needs of their children make current living arrangements untenable.
- There are an increasing number of young people with special needs, who are turning 18 years of age and who need to be “transitioned” from the children’s system to the adult system. Since they have priority, this has an adverse effect on opportunities for people from the community who may have been on the waiting list for a considerable time.
- The media have awakened to some of the more stressful situations and the desperate measures distraught parents are contemplating. We shall see more such articles.
- Expecting agencies to do more with the same (ICCI - Increased Community Capacity Initiative) only seeks to reduce the supports provided to some of the most vulnerable people in our society to compensate for the lack of appropriate resources from the

Ministry of Community and Social Services. Nevertheless OASIS agencies have sought whenever possible to comply with the Ministry initiative without comprising existing supports.

Human Resources Challenge

- Historically, salaries have lagged behind other Sectors, and combined with the difficult challenges of the workplace has made recruitment and retention increasingly difficult.
- Notwithstanding the \$200m investment of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, following the labour disruptions during the summer of 2007, there is minimal evidence of any improvement in the recruitment and retention of qualified workers. Unions within our sector are preparing to align contract expiration dates with the next provincial election in 2011 given their success in achieving significant wage increases in 2007. We estimate that over 100 developmental service agencies will face the pressure of this union strategy in 2011. Clearly, such collective action by our unions would leave the sector in total distress and mayhem. Further, agencies will suffer tremendous financial strain as they prepare for the possibility of a work stoppage, as they hire security firms and replacement workers to ensure Ontario's most vulnerable citizens continue to receive the care and support they require.
- However, we acknowledge our partnership with the Ministry in working on a comprehensive HR strategy that will require additional investment. We encourage the Standing Committee to support investments in education, towards making this a career of choice.

Solidifying and Strengthening the Service System

- Developmental Services sector Transfer Payment Agencies experienced a 25% reduction in purchasing capacity during the difficult years from 1993 to 2004. Additional investments since then have not made up the shortfall.
- There is no financial flexibility to revamp, upgrade or change existing programs to better meet current service demands.
- Notwithstanding the \$200m investment of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, following the labour disruptions during the summer of 2007, there was no recognition of wage gaps and no recognition of the ongoing and increasing demands for services.
- Agencies are stretched to manage existing service obligations and as such are struggling to develop new and innovative services.
- OASIS member agencies are working with your ministry's BPS Supply Chain Secretariat through "OntarioBuys" to seek to general procurement savings without affecting local relationships. We trust that any savings able to be generated will be able to stay within the organization for the advancement of services and supports.

- OASIS member agencies have contributed significantly to the work of transformation including input into a new funding model; the review of existing detail codes; and individualized funding template for agencies.

Recommendations

OASIS respectfully requests that members of the Standing Committee support inclusion, in the Committee's Report, of the following recommendations:

1. That the Minister of Community and Social Services continue with a multi -year funding approach and do so on a rolling four year basis.
2. That transfer payment agencies have four year rolling budgets of their own with the ability to establish reserves to fund capital items and major repairs and to develop innovative, cost-effective programs.
3. That to ensure the effective, ongoing, implementation of a transformed developmental services sector, the Minister of Finance provide, at a minimum, a 2% increase to base budgets for Transfer Payment agencies for 2010/11, which will enable them to meet their legal obligations; provide labour stability; enable agencies to contribute to the ongoing transformation of the service system; and allow for the ongoing provision of quality supports and services to some of the most vulnerable people in our society.
4. That the Minister of Finance increase, in the 2010-11 budget, funding for the Developmental Services Sector by \$60m, for the following purposes:
 - Assisting people currently without services, particularly where the need is urgent.
 - Stabilizing and rebuilding current service infrastructure and investing in a long term Human Resources strategy for the sector.
 - Increasing the funding allocated to individuals through such programs as Passports.
 - Harmonizing services and improving collaboration between the Ministry of Community And Social Services, the Ministry of Children And Youth Services, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and the Ministry of Education
 - Supporting new opportunities for innovation by building on the ingenuity of families, friends and community as they collaborate in new ways with agencies.

Such an investment in these difficult economic times will stimulate the economy with additional jobs and purchases of material items.

On behalf of its member agencies, OASIS appreciates the opportunity to present this submission and would be pleased to provide additional information as may be required.