



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

January, 2008

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

**By: Gerald Sutton, President
John Bedell, Treasurer**

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 implementation of a transformed developmental services sector, the Government agree to increase funding for the sector by \$60 million in 2008/09 over and above existing commitments. This will not only enable agencies to provide supports and services to people on the waiting lists but also contribute to closing the wage gap that has developed over the past many years.

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 139 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 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 being wound down, 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 moving 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.
- Increasing costs of construction and real estate (eg. Fire and building code regulations), especially when assisting individuals who are leaving the institutions.

Long Waiting Lists / Few Vacancies

- Across the province, people are in “temporary arrangements” awaiting residential placement, while many more families and their adult offspring are without day programs or supports.
- 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.
- 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.

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.
- Developmental Service Worker graduates are opting not to work in the sector.
- Some Community Colleges have reduced or eliminated their developmental disability programs.
- Developmental service agencies are hiring untrained workers, but many agencies do not have the resources or capacity to establish training programs.
- Notwithstanding the above, we acknowledge that the Ministry is beginning to work on a comprehensive HR strategy that will require additional investment. We encourage the Committee to support investments in education and making this a career of choice.

Solidifying and Strengthening the Service System

- Transfer Payment Agencies experienced a 25% reduction in purchasing capacity during the difficult years from 1993 to 2004.
- There is no financial flexibility to revamp, upgrade or change existing programs to better meet current service demands.
- Agencies are stretched to manage existing service obligations and as such are struggling to develop new and innovative services.

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 the multi - year funding approach approved in last year's budget 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 repairs and maintenance and to develop innovative, cost-effective programs.
3. That the Minister of Finance increase, in the 2008-9 budget, funding for the Developmental Services Sector by \$60 million over and above the amounts already approved in the previous budget, 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.

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.