

Focus Newsletter Fall 1996

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New Support Umbrella Emerges

A coalition of agencies, known as COR (Coalition of Regions), has been meeting for over two years in an effort to improve networking and offer mutual support. The initial thrust for this initiative came as the result of a shared need to develop a provincial organization focused on supporting community agencies which support people with developmental disabilities.

The intent was to have agencies supporting agencies in an effort to develop a more qualitative and cost effective service.

In the spring of 1996, the COR members agreed to form a new provincial umbrella entity to assist with the coordination of this endeavor. Much work followed over the summer and early fall of 1996, pulling together the various pieces. On November 22, 1996, a new provincial organization called Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) was officially established through a founding meeting which ratified a charter, statement of principles, and a transitional Board of Directors.

The new umbrella body is expected to operate very differently from other organizations. For detailed information, see both the [FAQs \(Frequently Asked Questions\)](#) section of this newsletter and the section on Principles.

Many of the structural and constitutional components of the new organization will be in the formative stages in the first months. It is a fundamental principle of this new organization to proactively involve all members in the ongoing process of change.

Qualified agencies which share an affinity with our principles of operation will be welcome to join. [Membership fees](#) are modest and the resulting benefits will be worth the investment in both time and money. Agencies interested in this initiative are invited to contact the OASIS secretary, Wendy Matthews, at (519) 756-2662 for further information.

Proposed Acronym for Provincial Body

The name, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs, was adopted at the November 22, 1996 founding meeting held in Ottawa, Ontario. The acronym OASIS will become the more commonly used name.

The symbolism of an OASIS lends itself well to the business of supporting people with special needs. Words such as respite, transitional support, temporary holdover, shelter and sustenance, come to mind when one thinks of OASIS. And indeed, these are all the words and actions agencies employ as they support people.

Agencies in support of individuals with special needs, provide a sense of well being in the midst of discrimination, competition, abuse, disinterest, economic inequality and social injustice.

Agency supports are intended to be transitional in nature. The objective is to move people ever more closely to their natural destination of greater independence, community participation and physical and emotional well being.

Newsletter Name: Focus

The choice of Focus as the title of the OASIS Newsletter, relates directly to one of its primary objectives. The new umbrella entity intends to "focus" energies on limited and primary functions. Member agencies are committed to building a modest provincial support entity, which does not take on a life of its own with ever increasing costs. In addition, the member agencies believe that there

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must be a manageable focus on core functions. All functions undertaken should be relatively circumscribed so that they are doable and professional in their execution.

OASIS on the Net

OASIS has established an Internet site to facilitate the sharing of information and enhance its visibility. Presently, our Internet site is under construction. However, a wealth of information about OASIS activities already exists. The URL address is:

"http://www.oasisonline.ca"

All OASIS member agencies have also established Internet Home Pages. Soon they will be able to fully utilize e-mail capabilities with one another and take full advantage of file sharing. This technology has the potential to create a provincial profile tying together agencies who are part of the network. Agency web sites will be developed much more extensively in the coming weeks and months.

It is fully expected that the monthly sharing of information through the OASIS umbrella can happen almost entirely through the Internet once all agencies are connected and trained on how to maximize the use of this wonderful tool.

The OASIS web site can be accessed each day by a delegated person to retrieve and disseminate e-mail and other information. The question of providing web access to all staff with computers can wait for much later down the road, if ever. Security issues are rapidly being resolved and costs of access will continue to come down. The cost of Internet access is currently about \$30.00 a month.

FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions Interview)

In an interview conducted recently with OASIS secretary Wendy Matthews, our newsletter reporter Catherine MacDonald asked a series of questions about the function and purpose of the new OASIS umbrella agency about to be formed. This interview was conducted in anticipation of questions people might have about the new provincial presence.

Catherine - Hi Wendy, thanks for taking the time to meet with me today. I guess the first thing which comes to mind is the question of why are agencies forming a new provincial umbrella network at this point in time?

Wendy - There's nothing like getting to the heart of the subject and your question really does just that. For many years there has been frustration within OACL about their dual role of representing agencies and individual consumers at the same time. The needs and goals of both are important and often blend nicely together, but there are many times when they diverge because in the real world, both the pace and process of reaching goals varies from community to community, government to government, budget to budget and individual circumstance to individual circumstance. The realities for agencies are that they need time and flexibility to move forward. We believe that this can be better accomplished with a clearer sense of accountability where the new umbrella entity represents agencies and local associations represent the families and consumers to whom they are directly accountable. The pace of change and the methodology have to be determined at the local level. Naturally, agencies will try to help one another and develop a broad based consensus, but no provincial entity will call the shots in terms of methodology, directions and so on. You might say this provincial federation will be much more decentralized in its make-up.

Catherine - Can you give me an example where individual aspirations conflict with an agency's ability to support those aspirations?

Wendy - Excellent question! For example, there are many people who feel that providing congregate care support is archaic and ought to be replaced with totally integrated options. Our agencies of course support integrated options and implement them when possible, but not when other alternatives are unproven or unworkable. A more specific example was the move to close sheltered workshops by the previous government which was supported by integrationists and many advocates. Even some associations acted quickly and in several cases their efforts resulted in complete failure. In one case other agencies had to step in and pick up the pieces by supporting clients who were left at home or wandering the streets with nothing to do; and in other cases workshops were reopened because people were vegetating in drop-in centers with little or no direction, incentive or structure left in their lives. If the business of developing alternative integrated opportunities was easy, we would all have them in place by now. The fact is that many integrated options (be they employment, day activities or accommodations) are plagued by issues of cost, durability, community acceptance, client readiness, lack of community supports and so on. Therefore supports must be in place and developed on an individualized basis and we need flexibility over a continuum of support models to appropriately support the diverse needs of our population of special people. Agencies have real transitional issues to deal with and they cannot blindly embrace idealist solutions which can put people at unreasonable risk physically, emotionally or otherwise.

Catherine - What can this new agency promise its members in return for their support which would be demonstrably different from the status quo?

Wendy - We have tried to outline the answers to this question in a statement of principles (see Statement of Principles in this newsletter). I guess there are about four things we would like to highlight which we feel will make a difference to our agencies. They are as follows:

- This umbrella agency is accountable to agencies and agencies only. It will endeavor to communicate with, listen to and focus on the needs of agencies as they go about the business of supporting people.
- This agency will respect the roles of volunteers and professionals in a way that says both are needed to build a system responsive to the community and determined to develop cost efficient supports which meet the needs of people. There will be no attempt to divide volunteers and professionals at conferences, meetings or within the constitutional structure. The emphasis will be on cooperative mutually respectful working relationships.
- The new constitution and operations will not confer special status on special interest or advocacy groups. The Board will be open to and in fact seek out opinions from all relevant perspectives. This should minimize in house fighting and disruptive power plays.
- The development of policy positions at a provincial level will be orchestrated in a comprehensive and inclusive fashion ensuring all member agencies have ample opportunity for input and participation. Any policy positions which may come out of provincial meetings and which are backed by resolution, will need Board approval. Resolutions must not become the basis of policy development in a selective, random or biased way.

Catherine - What will the costs be to agencies and what is the time frame for implementation?

Wendy - These questions have not been determined with finality but it has been decided that all agencies will pay the same membership fee and have equal voting status. Discussions have centered around initial memberships at a level of \$500 per year increasing to \$1,000 a year thereafter or until the Board decides otherwise. This new umbrella entity should be officially up and running by the beginning of 1997.

Catherine - Where will you establish a headquarters and how many staff do you intend to hire?

Wendy - The place of the headquarters is not important at this time since most of the coordinating efforts will be done by various staff and volunteers of member agencies. At some point in the foreseeable future one or two part-time or full-time staff could conceivably be hired to provide a more stable and active coordinating function. When that happens, the decision of where the headquarters will be can be decided. It is felt at this time that this organization will not need more staff than one or two.

Catherine - How does your new provincial entity differ in theory from MARC (Metro Agencies Representative Counsel) and is the difference significant?

Wendy - Well firstly, MARC does not allow full voting membership for agencies outside of the Metro area. In this sense it is not a provincial organization. Secondly, they have a scaled membership fee mechanism which levies higher fees on larger agencies. Thirdly, they have an elected volunteer Board and an elected counsel made up of agency administrators, each meeting separately. In effect it is a dual decision making structure. While there may be advantages we can also see the potential for deadlock and dispute. But we like a lot about the MARC organization and their approach to a more decentralized initiative. Many of our agencies have been supportive of MARC policy statements in the past and we will endeavor to link with MARC as a means of keeping each other informed. Oh, and yes Catherine, the difference is significant. There is no interest within our membership in reinventing the wheel or doing something someone else is already doing well. We see a significant gap and we intend to fill it.

Catherine - Will this organization get involved in province wide advocacy with government and elsewhere or is it primarily a mutual support network for agencies?

Wendy - The primary function is as a mutual support network, however, as the OASIS agency matures it will seek a place at the table when government consults with our service sector and most definitely we will seek to make our positions known to government and others. One of the most important differences is that the process of policy development and the development of consensus will involve all of the member agencies. Mechanisms will be put into place to catalyze consultation and proactively seek input even from the less active of our members so that when we speak, we speak for all. This may well mean that it will take more time to generate positions but it will be done in a holistic and comprehensive way.

Catherine - How many agencies are members of this new organization?

Wendy - In addition to the six founding agencies we fully expect about another half dozen agencies to join in the coming months. Our combined budgets will exceed 100 million dollars and we know our provincial government will welcome our input as a collective group. I might add that we are not proactively seeking new members, but we welcome with open arms those agencies which are looking for a "home" and who feel some affinity to our Statement of Principles and our goals.

Catherine - Listen Wendy, I want to thank you for your time and wish you and your colleagues the best of luck as you go about constructing this very exciting alternative provincial support agency. This information will help our readers better understand where OASIS is going with this endeavor and I appreciate it. Thank you!

Tsubouchi Announces Four Year Plan to Move People with Developmental Disabilities into their Communities

The recent announcement by MCSS Minister David Tsubouchi to downsize and close institutions, renewed the current government's commitment to a long standing Ontario depopulation initiative. The process of deinstitutionalization has been on hold for several years and this, taken together with budget cutbacks of about 10% over three years has festered a stagnation within the community based support system. Waiting lists have grown and to a degree some service supports have been eroded. The prospect of clients from the institutional system transferring to communities presents both a challenge and a concern.

This announcement and the resulting activity must be approached with caution by agencies and the families who may find placement openings. Many of the people transferring to communities need a higher level of supports. MCSS is looking to get more bang for the buck by reducing the per diem allocations for transferring individuals from where they used to be and then asking agencies to take in other clients at no cost using the same dollars to support them. Add to this the fact that in many communities the agencies are not well equipped or funded to support multiply challenged individuals who may require more staffing time and more in the way of costly and sometimes unavailable specialized supports, and it can result in over spent budgets, unhappy families, increased behavioral problems and increased serious occurrences.

Agencies must negotiate reasonable agreements taking into account all of the above factors. Don't make assumptions about your day support capacity to handle several more people without increased staffing at some point. Keep in mind that certain individuals may require more one on one support. There was a time when MCSS funded unexpected costs along these lines. This is no longer the case.

Work with your local planning committees and other agencies to negotiate better arrangements with the Ministry as these new placements come to your door step.

It is critical that all existing institutional funds be used to build the community support system. The community system is less expensive but it has been cutback and is lean and cannot afford to absorb further erosion without also becoming mean.

New Certification Training Announced for Joint Health and Safety Committee Members

On May 29, 1996, Labour Minister, The Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, announced that new certification standards have been set for certified members of Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committees.

The new certification training system has a number of new features:

- Certified members in all workplaces receive a basic certification training program;
- Each workplace must determine its own hazard training needs based on an assessment by the employer done in cooperation with the Joint Health and Safety Committee;
- Public or private groups may now be approved to offer certification training programs with additional flexibility on how the programs are delivered; and
- Committee members who have already been certified under the previous system will not be required to be certified.

It should be noted that the new certification training program will be administered by the Worker's Compensation Board, given that the old Workplace Health and Safety Agency has been disbanded.

For more information, contact Tim A. English, of the firm Filcon, Wakely and Thorup, Toronto, (416) 408-3221.

Internet Mental Health Web Site

The feature Internet Site this issue is the Internet Mental Health Site out of Vancouver, Canada at: "<http://www.mentalhealth.com>". This service was created by Brian Chow, B.Sc and Phillip W. Long, M.D. The site provides a wealth of information on disorders, medications, magazines - all related to mental health. We have chosen to include a list of their identified mental disorders. Every item in this list is linked to a full description of the disorder.

Agencies are well aware that we have many people with a dual diagnosis in our system. Often, our

training and community supports are deficient. A lot is being done around the province to fill this void in service. Understanding more about various mental disorders is the first step to helping these people.

This is a wonderful example of a free mental health encyclopedia and is most useful to better understanding disorders which are common to people with developmental handicaps. The list is as follows. Check it out!

Adjustment Disorder
Agoraphobia Without History Of Panic Disorder
Alcohol Dependence
Amphetamine Dependence
Anorexia Nervosa
Antisocial Personality Disorder
Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Autistic Disorder
Avoidant Personality Disorder
Bipolar Disorder
Borderline Personality Disorder
Brief Reactive Psychosis
Bulimia Nervosa
Cannabis Dependence
Cocaine Dependence
Conduct Disorder
Cyclothymia
Delirium
Delusional Disorder
Dementia
Dementia Associated With Alcoholism
Dependent Personality Disorder
Dysthymia
Generalized Anxiety Disorder
Hallucinogen Dependence
Histrionic Personality Disorder
Induced Psychotic Disorder
Inhalant Dependence
Major Depression
Multi-Infarct Dementia
Narcissistic Personality Disorder
Nicotine Dependence
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder
Opioid Dependence
Oppositional Defiant Disorder
Panic Disorder

Paranoid Personality Disorder
Phencyclidine Dependence
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Primary Degenerative Dementia Of The Alzheimer Type
Schizoaffective Disorder
Schizoid Personality Disorder
Schizophrenia
Schizophreniform Disorder
Schizotypal Personality Disorder
Sedative Dependence
Separation Anxiety Disorder
Simple Phobia
Social Phobia
Tourette's Disorder
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Best Practices of Agencies

One of the more exciting components of the OASIS web site is the "Best Practice Database". This innovative database represents a collection of best practices of agencies with respect to their systems, programs, processes and so on. The intent of this list is to catalyse the sharing of information between member agencies where the submitting agency finds that a given practice works well for them and where there is a willingness to share "how to" information and resources.

The "Best Practices" list is already on the Internet as an example of how the system will work. It is expected that the areas of expertise on the database will number in the hundreds once this feature is fully activated. Plans are to add items on a monthly basis so that it does not become stagnant. Each heading has a linked description helping the reader to determine whether or not the shared resources will be of value. Support may take the form of documentation, verbal dialogue, hands on assistance, references, videos, etc. In each case a contact is supplied and can be reached by e-mail, telephone, fax or letter. Member agencies will be prepared to share documentation on "Best Practices" as well as assist one another with hands on application where it is possible and practical to do so.

The goal of sharing valuable information and the commitment to mutual support is a major operational component of the umbrella strategy of supporting agencies. The address to the Best Practices database is no longer available on our website.

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