

FAITH/CULTURAL GROUP

Participating Agencies:

Bethesda
Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf
Christian Horizons
L'Arche Daybreak
Mary Centre
Meta Centre
Reena
Salvation Army
Vita Community Living
Tamir Foundation

Myra: As discussed, enclosed please find the Faith/Cultural response to the Transforming Services document.

Sandy

Transforming Developmental Services: The Faith and Cultural Dimension

INTRODUCTION

Every person needs to be understood and appreciated as a wholistic individual, with faith and cultural identity being an integral part. This identity needs to be valued, supported and developed in the same way that other strengths and needs are addressed.

The simple rules-of-thumb and one-dimensional ideologies that guided some of Ontario's earlier approaches to the challenge of developmental disabilities left many subtle and important issues unaddressed. The unfortunate result has been that, for many individuals with developmental disabilities, the resources, services and agencies that support them are ill-equipped to honour, much less support, the cultural and spiritual dimension of their lives

Participating in *whole citizenship*, when one has a developmental disability, is not easy. It needs the understanding and support of a society that takes the concept of a whole person as its starting point — a society that recognizes that one's ethno-cultural and spiritual identities are fundamental to being a whole person. For people with special needs, who are already at risk of being marginalized in our complex world, the connections to their families, their cultural communities and their faith are crucial.

For this reason we, as an inter-faith group of agencies serving people with developmental disabilities, strongly urge that the need to include a "faith and cultural dimension", as part of the Ministry of Community and Social Services' transformation of developmental services, be identified explicitly.

We also urge that the Ministry begin immediately to promote the development of an ongoing, shared leadership, both at the provincial and at the local levels. This leadership needs to include a representative cross-section of:

- cultural and spiritual leaders,
- family care providers, and
- care provider organizations

in order to identify principles, needs and opportunities that can help achieve real results in affirming and supporting the cultural and faith identities of every person in Ontario who has a developmental disability.

ONTARIO'S CHANGING ETHNO-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

As we look forward to transforming services in Ontario for people with developmental disabilities we also need to take a look back at another dramatic transformation i.e., the remarkable change in Ontario's ethno-cultural make-up that has taken place over the last twenty-odd years. Throughout Ontario, but most strikingly in Toronto and the GTA¹, a massive shift in the faith and ethnocultural population mix of our communities has occurred.

The more than 5 million people who make up the Greater Toronto Area constitute one of the largest multicultural cities in the world. Approximately half of all Torontonians were born outside Canada. More than 100 languages and dialects are spoken in Toronto and more than one third of Toronto families speak a language other than English at home. According to self-report data, 43 per cent of Toronto's population identify themselves as belonging to a visible minority.

These linguistic, racial and cultural differences are matched by a similar, significant diversity of religious affiliations and beliefs. "Toronto is home to all the world's religions. While 71 percent of Toronto's population is of Christian affiliation, the city's diversity is exemplified by the fact that Mass is now said in 35 languages in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto. Toronto is home to half of Canada's Jewish population, more than 200,000 Muslims observe Ramadan in Toronto and about 8000 Sikhs marched in Toronto's annual Khalsa Day celebrations."²

2001 census data on the distribution of faiths within Ontario as a whole reflect a similar story. Data are available on the Statistics Canada website³.

Not surprisingly, this diversity is rapidly becoming reflected in the population of people with developmental disabilities.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

¹ These data for the City of Toronto and the GTA are drawn from information provided on the City of Toronto's website at: <http://www.city.toronto.on.ca/>

² *ibid.*, Fact Sheet.

³ Statistics Canada website (Ontario religions)
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/on.cfm>

Grappling with the faith and cultural dimension of developmental services will not be easy. Nonetheless, although faith and culture may be complex and occasionally contentious, they are at the very heart of the citizenship concept. They are matters of great importance in the community-at-large and, therefore, considerable support will likely be found to help persons with developmental disabilities to understand and express their own faith and culture.

Because faith and cultural identity are so fundamental to citizenship, Ontario's achievements in this area will serve as a cornerstone in making the paradigm shift from the "community services" phase to the "citizenship" phase of the developmental services transformation agenda.

While the specific mandate and priorities of a faith and culture initiative are beyond the scope of this proposal, a number of particular considerations are worth highlighting:

- Members of some faith/cultural groups may be relatively new to Canada and, indeed, some may be refugees with limited resources. Their faith/cultural communities may, in some cases, lack the base of cultural institutions that other faith/cultural communities have created over many years. Outreach, on both a community and individual basis, may need to be a consideration in helping members of these faith/culture communities to understand and access appropriate services.
- On the other hand, there may be considerable variation in the extent to which various faith/culture communities would welcome such an outreach,
- The amount of faith/culture integration that prevails in the provision of services may also be a thorny issue, with strong feelings both favouring and rejecting such integration. The availability of a variety of service models and choices will likely continue to offer the most acceptable approach to addressing different preferences.
- In general, Ontario's resources and services for persons with developmental disabilities belong to one of three broad types, each of which plays a necessary role in helping ensure a range of choices that respond to various needs and preferences i.e.,
 - **family-based care,**
 - **faith/culture-generic services** (the organization or service is not associated with any single, specific cultural / faith group or identity),
 - **faith/culture-specific services** (the organization or service is associated with a particular cultural / faith group or identity, and that association is reflected in its environment, programs and daily activities).
- In regard to **family-based care** the challenges may include:

- people who may be isolated from their faith cultural community,
 - lack of understanding of available resources,
 - cultural preferences that preclude the use of public services,
 - fear of government(s),
 - current lack of the resources necessary to help families provide suitable, and culturally appropriate, supports at home.
- In regard to **faith/culture-generic services** the challenges may include:
 - an agency's lack of a connection to the particular faith/culture community(s) of those they serve,
 - an agency's lack of the necessary knowledge and resources to support a wide range of cultural and religious observances (e.g., dietary, worship, special events, language, holidays and other aspects of daily life),
 - agency's lack of knowledge, lack of trained staff,
 - isolation of individuals where only one or a small number of members of a given faith/culture community are receiving service.
 - inflexibility of accommodation arrangements
 - inflexibility of programs
- In regard to **faith/culture-specific services** the challenges may include:
 - some faith/culture communities may lack the formal organization or skills to be able to provide the necessary leadership and sustenance to create a faith/culture-specific resource or service,
 - some regions may lack a sufficient population base to make a faith/culture-specific resource or service viable,
 - policy or cost barriers
- Specific strategies that could help enhance the opportunities for faith/cultural identity and expression, for persons with developmental disabilities could include:
 - make explicit the Ministry of Community and Social Services commitment to the promotion of faith/cultural respect, opportunities and full participation for persons with developmentally disabilities in Ontario.
 - develop explicit standards for transfer payment agencies that ensure that this commitment is reflected in the day-to-day practice of service providers,
 - develop and support a broadly-based, provincial advisory group on faith/culture issues in developmental services,
 - assist various faith/culture communities, both provincially and locally, in their efforts to support their members who have developmental disabilities in a culturally appropriate way — especially those communities that lack resources,
 - enhance the current MCSS and MCYS *Agency Governance and Accountability Initiative* to specifically encourage the inclusion, on

the Boards of transfer payment agencies, of a array of Directors that is representative of the persons that are receiving service and their faith/culture communities,

- encourage the inclusion, and the active involvement, of members of various faith/culture communities in all areas of agency life and operations (i.e., as agency general members, volunteers, managers, staff, suppliers and supporters).

In conclusion, we would like again to emphasize the importance of placing the faith and cultural identities of developmentally disabled persons at the cornerstone of the transformation of developmental services in Ontario.