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OASIS 2nd Annual General Meeting

As OASIS agency membership growth spirals upward approaching sixty, Woodstock Developmental Services hosted a watershed [AGM](#) under the able chairmanship of Sue Garton. The conference offered excellent sessions and best practices material for agencies. It also provided an opportunity for individuals to compare notes as the developmental service sector goes through a significant restructuring period.

The conference began with what is becoming a tradition at AGMs: a staged opening ceremonies. This year's theme: "Embrace the Past, Get Fit for the Future" was a fitting base on which to move into the future with a little bit of nostalgia. The colorfully attired Town Crier announced with great ceremony, the entry of new agencies into the OASIS fold.

The newly elected Board of Directors has a greater provincial representation and is led by newly elected President, Sue Dolan, also from Woodstock.

Conference participants were treated to some of the most hilarious entertainment one could ask for, in the person of comedian, Ron James and a Murder Mystery group call "Mystery to Me" produced by Michael Millar.

Kevin Constante, Assistant Deputy Minister of [MCSS](#) was in attendance to answer questions on the Friday of the Annual Meeting. OASIS members are grateful for the continued interest and support of representatives from MCSS at meetings and conference of this kind.

The staff of Woodstock Association did a fantastic job of pulling together a memorable conference. Conference 2000 will be held in [Kingston](#). Alan McWhorter and staff will host this event on May 4 & 5, 2000.

The ISA: Will it help or hinder?

In January 1998, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) announced that adults with a developmental disability who receive Ministry funded services, or their families, must sign an annual Individual Support Agreement (ISA) with the providers(s) of those services. The agreement includes a life plan for the person and specifies the average cost of services for the next year. MCSS stated that for a person to be eligible for government funded services after April 1, 2000, there must be a signed ISA and it must be renewed annually.

As agencies and families have come to know more about ISAs and have started to work on them with staff, they have raised many serious concerns. The introduction of the Individual Service Agreement (ISA) by MCSS is one of the most significant and contentious system change in the developmental service sector in years.

The ISA tool is essentially designed to inject a greater degree of accountability into the service system. As agencies and families become more familiar with the details, a number of issues have arisen which demand clarification and, perhaps, change in the way the tool has been designed.

What complicates the matter further, is the fact that the Levels of Support (LOS) initiative, which has run into problems of its own, really should have been fully developed prior to the implementation of ISAs. It is a classic case of the cart before the horse.

The financial component of the ISA process is useless without some kind of more precise tool to measure the cost of service to individuals. The financial or service costing piece of ISA is the most important piece of the ISA initiative and there is widespread recognition that it is merely an accountability facade, where costs are averaged and have no real relevance to individual needs or financial accountability.

With the above as a background, it is no small wonder that many families and supporting agencies are skeptical and deeply concerned. These concerns were expressed in the recent position paper released by the Metro Agencies Representative Council (MARC) in Toronto.

OASIS member agencies share many of the concerns of MARC, families and others. Some of the more salient issues present themselves as follows:

- Preparation of ISAs is, by any standard, extremely time consuming and will pull staff resources from front line work.

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This is contrary to the government's stated principles in "Making Services Work."

This may well be the most significant drawback of the new process.

- The ISA is a slight to the dignity of people with disabilities. People will need to bare the most intimate details of their life in a public contract to be eligible for funding. The legal nature of the contract is indisputable despite what government says and this makes the process more formidable.

- Government refuses to sign these agreements, even though they provide the funds to make them happen. This refusal to sign is an indirect acknowledgement that government cannot guarantee to provide the resources to fulfill the requirements of the agreement.

- Questions about family contributions raise fears that government will withdraw more public funding from service over time. Families must sign or they will receive no service. Many are reluctant to do so and forcing them will create animosity and anger. There is also a widespread fear that the ISA is the first step in a process which will trigger a redistribution of funds and many clients will lose support eventually.

- Government has been clear that the ISA process can address changing needs for support of an individual during the time of the contract simply through renegotiating the contract. This is easy to say when the government is not party to the agreement. But government is also clear that no new funds will be provided. One statement does not equate with the other.

OASIS is adding its voice to the request to government that MCSS put the ISA on hold until some considerable rethinking can take place. The government's desire to hold the system more accountable is shared by most agencies and families. The ISA is not the way to do it.

OASIS Admin Cost Study

An OASIS task force has spent the better part of a year working on a service sector admin cost benchmarking project. The objective of the project is to better understand how agency costs are distributed between central admin, program support and direct service. From this, it is likely that service sector benchmarks or guidelines will emerge. Benchmarks should be of some value for agencies as they go about restructuring. It is hoped that some reference point to what others in the sector are doing, will be helpful.

A primary challenge in this exercise is to glean so-called "apples to apples" data comparisons between agencies in the study. The fact that agencies distribute costs so differently among their budgets, makes it difficult to get accurate and therefore meaningful summary data. For purposes of this project, participating agencies have agreed upon a set of common methods for collecting the data. From this cross agency data, certain patterns, ranges and benchmarks are emerging. OASIS will share the conclusions and summary data with all member agencies in due course.

As of this writing, about 12 agencies are participating in the study. Agency budgets are of course confidential, but the averages are beginning to tell an interesting story. More agencies are being invited to participate so the data is truly representative of the field.

Since the project is not yet complete, we can only share some preliminary findings which will be subject to further verification. On average, central admin costs are well below MCSS guidelines. Agencies cannot find money for MCSS system restructuring initiatives, in most cases, without cutting staff, since about 85% of all costs are expended on salaries and benefits. Large agencies generally are no less cost effective in terms of combined central admin and program support costs than small agencies and there are justifiable reasons for this. Salaries in this service sector are very low on average, compared to other government sectors.

While some of the above information may not seem new to experienced observers, this study will at least confirm long held assumptions. We do expect to release more precise information on central admin, program support and direct service averages, ranges and so on.

We will also have information on salaries and benefits.

A missing component in this study is the variable of service quality. For example, we do not know if there is a correlation between varying admin costs and service quality. Measuring service quality is the subject of another study. We know that historically, it has been an illusive goal within this service sector to arrive at some standard quality measurement tool. Nonetheless, we believe that the data will be useful for agencies and perhaps even for government as it tries to rationalize how we do business.

This group is supported by CMCS consultant Tom Little. Interested agencies can participate by contacting the task force chair, Gordon Anton, by [e-mail](#) or by phone: (705) 445-6351 ext. 258.

Member Agency Highlights

Community Living Huronia

The Supported Employment Service of this agency is now in a location along with Human Resource

Development Canada and the Employment Resource Centre. Most employment services for the community as a whole, are now under one roof, making it a one-stop service for everyone.

This allows those individuals in the agency program to use the resources available on a regular basis. This includes resumé writing on the computers at the Employment Resource Centre, as well as pre-employment training classes and information about potential wage subsidies.

Niagara Support Services

Niagara Support Services is proud to announce that Rhiaanon McGean, whose family receives some supports from their agency, is the 1999 Easter Seals Tammy Ambassador for Niagara Falls.

Congratulations to [York South Association for Community Living](#) for 45 years of service to your community!

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