

Focus Newsletter Winter 2001

[Simcoe ACLs Design Colloaborative One Stop Access](#)
[HLDA: Hospital Disputes Arbitration Act - Decisions Important for Service Providers](#)
[Recruitment and Retention](#)
[OASIS Employee Benefits Program](#)
[A Collective Voice](#)
[Labour Relations: Overwork as a Health & Safety Issue](#)
[OADD "How's Work" Survey Results](#)

OASIS Conference 2001

The organizing committee for OASIS Conference 2001 is well underway under capable leadership of Judy Vellinga, ED, Elmira ACL, with membership from agencies in Waterloo Region. We are looking forward to welcoming you to Waterloo region May 2 - 4, 2001.

- **Mark your calanders now!**

OASIS Website Connection

All member agencies are invited to link the OASIS Website to your agency's site. Linking from your site to the OASIS homepage will enable easy access to all member agencies from your own, and further enhance the opportunity for agencies to network.

Simcoe ACLs Design Colloaborative One Stop Access

The "Making Services Work" process in Simcoe County has been a long and, at times, acrimonious exercise. After more than three years of work on the part of many people, including a MSWFP advisory group, competing proposals were increasingly difficult to reconcile.

In the summer of 2000, the five ACLs in the county began constructing an access concept which meets most of MCSS' policy objectives. This system was implemented on November 22, 2000 and promises to be a great value-added element to improving services and moving the Simcoe service sector to a more family-friendly system approach for both children and adults.

The components of One Stop Access in Simcoe include: a toll free telephone system with connecting points in all five major county communities; a countywide acceptable single-page application process; a marketing contingent; an agency and intake staff training process; a county level placement coordination committee; an emergency case resolution mechanism; and an intake worker assignment practice.

This latter provision of intake worker assignment is a key element designed to assist families through the maze of choices which sometimes confront them. It is a kind of hand-holding provision intended to make it easier for families.

There have been many different approaches to improving "Access" to service across Ontario. Some are more costly than others; some are community driven and others were MCSS driven. The Simcoe experience demonstrates the importance of agencies standing and working together proactively.

HLDA: Hospital Disputes Arbitration Act - Decisions Important for Service Providers

Agencies providing service to people with developmental handicaps are increasingly finding that labour relations disputes are being referred to the Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act. The essence of this act is that because of the physical vulnerability of many clients in the event of a strike or lock-out, agencies are likened to hospitals and the Act forces compulsory arbitration.

A number of Ontario agencies have already been forced down this path by the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB). There are both pros and cons. On the one hand, clients are no longer unsupported because of a strike; on the other hand, the compulsory wage settlements have been quite high and not within the financial means of agencies. Compliance then becomes a serious issue. MCSS may or may not bail out an agency caught in this predicament.

The agencies already designated as "hospitals" under HLDA are as follows:

George Jeffrey Children's Treatment Centre (1994)
 Surex Community Services (1994)
 North Yorkers for Disabled Persons Inc. (1995)
 Ottawa Valley Autistic Homes (1997)
 Belwoods Centre for Community Living Inc. (1997)
 Therapeutic and Educational Living Centres Inc. (2000)
 Ottawa-Carleton Lifeskills (2000)
 Total Communication Environment (2000)

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For further information, contact the OASIS Labor Relations Committee representative [David Ferguson](#), E.D., Ottawa-Carlton, at 613-569-8993.

Recruitment and Retention

OASIS has just released a comprehensive study on the topic of staff recruitment and retention. The study was spearheaded under the auspices of developmental services agencies of Ottawa-Carlton, as a project of OASIS.

The employers and management of developmental services organizations in Ontario are facing a dilemma. In a field that requires specialized skills and commitment, the prospects of recruiting and retaining employees is becoming increasingly difficult. This dilemma may reach a crisis point which will not only affect the organizations and employees currently dedicated to developmental services, but will negatively impact the many clients that rely on these services.

This report is a compilation of recruitment and retention issues identified by thirty-six developmental services agencies in Ontario. The employers responding to this survey share many of the same concerns and fears. They cannot attract new, qualified and committed staff to their organizations due to the sub-standard salaries and benefits. The hours available are inadequate or difficult to integrate into a "normal" lifestyle.

The results of this report illustrate that employers in developmental services are concerned about a number of employment issues relating to recruitment and retention. In addition to low salaries and benefits, they are concerned about stress and burnout among their employees. They are looking for assistance for this worthy cause.

The study confirms anecdotal experiences by many agencies and will be used in our continuing struggle with government to improve compensation in the system. Copies have been distributed to member agencies. If you haven't received a copy, please contact the OASIS provincial office at 519-426-5000 or by [e-mail](#).

OASIS Employee Benefits Program

Presently there are over 725 insured employees and their families as well as 250 people in receipt of support under the OASIS Benefit Program, and another 200+ employees waiting for approval from their respective boards. In partnership with OASIS, Wentworth Financial Services Inc. is extremely pleased with the growth and success of this program and member benefit.

The Process

As each new agency joins OASIS a welcome letter is sent out from your President introducing Wentworth Financial Services Inc. and explaining the advantages of this optional member benefit.

As the Benefits Consultants to OASIS, we receive a copy of this letter and respond by sending out an introduction booklet outlining the program and the process required in order to obtain a quotation.

This is followed up by a phone call to the new member agency approximately one month later.

If the member agency is interested and would like to see a quote, they must complete the data required, return it to our office and a personalized quotation/analysis/presentation will be ready for them in approximately 4 weeks.

The Plan

The plan was created to recognize and preserve each member agencies' individual employee benefit needs. This criteria is unique in the benefits marketplace. Most association benefit programs strive to place their participants in the same "benefits box" with only minor variations and cannot tailor benefits to needs.

As an OASIS member you have the opportunity to achieve a volume discount on your pooled benefits (Life, A.D. & D. Dependent Life and Long Term Disability), as well as improved expense factors on your experience rated benefits (Weekly Income, Extended Health and Dental Care) by participating.

The OASIS program is insured by The Co-operators and Green Shield and is underwritten and claims adjudicated by RWAM (a third party). Wentworth Financial Services Inc. is the recognized benefits consultant by appointment from the OASIS Board. Our team endeavors to provide a competitive, unique, and valuable benefit to the OASIS membership. It is our ongoing commitment, dedicated resources and constant communication that we believe to be the cornerstones of the continued success of this member benefit.

Questions and Comparisons

Wentworth representatives are available to come to your office and discuss your specific needs and respond to your questions. Wentworth was specifically selected as the OASIS benefits consultant based on their thorough knowledge of the marketplace, proven ability to keep abreast of current benefit trends and commitment to an ongoing strategic analysis of competing benefit plans members

may be asked to consider.

We would like to hear from you!

Gary Hepburn Employee Benefit Consultant
Heather Dunsby, Manager, Employee Benefits
Ruth Teszeri, Benefits Analyst

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A Collective Voice

A little over two years ago, representatives from OACL, Great Lakes Society, Christian Horizons (which indicated it would like to broaden their involvement to be the Faith Community including groups like L'Arche, Reena, St. Mary's, etc.) MARC (which is a group of some 50 Toronto based agencies) and OASIS, met to see if there were common issues that could be presented to the Government as a collective voice and the following were identified: 1) staff salaries, 2) staff retention, 3) the issue of aging parents with sons/daughters at home, and 4) the need to develop a long term plan.

Those that have been in this field for any length of time will know that the philosophical positions of these organizations have been at odds over the years and in some cases, relationships have been strained. Yet when we sat at the table and identified issues that we all felt needed to be addressed, the baggage of the past was left at the door and a spirit of a positive working relationship was a driving force to meeting with the Deputy Minister (then Kevin Constante) and Assistant Deputy Minister Jessica Hill. These meetings happened before the May announcement of the \$50 Million dollars for this sector and before the Minister publicly stated that he was aware of the under-funding of salaries of the staff in this sector. I realize that other groups presented to the Ministry during this time including OASIS, but we all came with generally the same message and the Network was able to show that the sector can and would work together on common goals. We felt that this had a major impact on the Ministry at the corporate level.

When the Ministry called for a consultation process in September/October of this year (2000), the Network met and drafted a position paper that was submitted and this has been circulated to all OASIS members. This paper identified a need for a long-term plan, discouraged quick fixes, and emphasized the need for salaries and infrastructure to be shored up before we could proceed with a major expansion to community based services. In the planning we recommended that the senior parent had to have high priority and we recommended some tax adjustments that could help with finding some of the needed dollars.

The Network met again on Wednesday, November 8th and decided that we need to meet with the new players at MCSS as soon as possible. We had developed a really good working relationship with Kevin Constante and Jessica Hill and felt we needed to start again to build the trust of senior management of the Ministry since only Jessica Hill is a carry over from past meetings with the Ministry.

Norfolk ACL had agreed to take on the responsibility to do a survey with respect to staff retention and KPMG has been hired to analyze the material and verify the findings. It is hoped that this can be a jumping off place for our next meeting with the Ministry.

[Keith Hudson,](#)

OASIS Representative on the Provincial Network

Labour Relations: Overwork as a Health & Safety Issue

We all know that an employer has a duty to provide an employee with a reasonably safe work system and to take reasonable steps to protect the employee from risks, which are reasonably foreseeable. An English court has now gone further to examine the employer's responsibility where it failed to relieve the pressure of work on an employee who had suffered one nervous breakdown due to overwork.

In this case, a social worker had supervisory responsibilities, which were steadily increasing as a result of rapid population growth in his work area. Government cutbacks aggravated the situation and although the employee complained, nothing was done. The employee eventually suffered a nervous breakdown. After some time, the employee returned to work and was provided with an assistant for a limited period of time.

In attempting to address the accumulated backlog and the continued growth in workload, the employee suffered a second nervous breakdown and was consequently fired due to permanent ill health. The court found that, although the first breakdown may not have been foreseeable, the second breakdown was and damages were awarded.

The court stated that, despite the fact that almost all health and safety cases deal with physical injury to the employee, as distinct from injury to the employee's mental health, there was no logical reason why risk of psychiatric damage should be excluded from the scope of an employers duty of care.

Although the courts in Ontario have not gone as far as this, there is some authority to suggest that a court can make a similar ruling on the basis of s.25(2)(h) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which states that the employer has a duty to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for protection of the worker.

OADD "How's Work" Survey Results

In 1999, the Board of the Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD) made the decision to conduct a survey to try to learn how people felt about working in the field of developmental disabilities. The intent was to present the information at OADD's Conference 2000, as well as post a summary report on our website. By the end of February, 2000 we had received 352 responses, representing a cross section of positions from senior managers to frontline staff. Although this is a small sample, nonetheless, we felt respondents raised certain issues that will need to be addressed in the field. In a MCSS consultation meeting held on October 3, 2000 with Andrea Maurice, Assistant Deputy Minister, we had the opportunity to join other provincial groups and raise some of these issues. A summary report is now available on our website at: www.oadd.icomm.ca. As well, anyone interested in hearing the presentation made at the Conference, can do so by visiting the "classroom" section of the website.

The following summarizes some of the issues brought forward:

Staff need to have access to a wide range of training modules, otherwise they will not be equal to the current service philosophies and practices in the field, ie: individualized, person centered models of support. The community living philosophy works and many staff believe strongly in this movement. However, there are not adequate clinical and specialized resources in the community to support this approach of service. There is a need for sufficient funding to develop or purchase these services. Time dedicated to accountability mechanisms must not infringe on time devoted to direct client contact - in other words, there has to be a proper balance between these two functions.

The level of staff remuneration must remain a priority concern for agencies and funders. Low salaries compel employees to work longer hours, often taking on extra contracts, just to make ends meet. This must undermine the quality of life of both clients and service providers.

For those of you who are not familiar with OADD, I would encourage you to visit our website to learn more about our Association and how to become a member.

Terry MacMillan

Chair, OADD Board of Director

[webmaster](#) | OASIS copyright 2005