

***Families Are Strong* Event Housing Options, Part 2**

Planning for housing must happen early: Panel of Parents Looks at Housing

When should I start planning for housing? Why learn about innovative housing models? What support will my child need? Where do I start? These are questions all parents whose sons and daughters live with a disability must surely ask themselves.

In September, 2015, *Families Are Strong* hosted Developmental Services Ontario and Peterborough Housing Corporation, who discussed with parents the realities of long waiting lists for housing, and the need to be on lists as soon as someone is eligible, usually at 18 years of age. Though most parents are not ready to look at, or even think about housing before this age, it's important to anticipate each stage in life and plan ahead for smooth transitions, and to stay open to possibilities. Learning from other parents and families who have gone through this process can be a lifeline. Getting tips could be invaluable, saving money, time and effort.

Connecting families so they may learn from each other is what Community Living Peterborough's *Families Are Strong* events are all about. Most recently, *Families Are Strong* hosted a panel of six parents who are looking beyond waiting lists and taking housing into their own hands. With a different vision in mind, these parents have created, and are working on, innovative housing models for their adult daughters and sons. Each of their children has very different needs, and hence models of housing. In this article you will read about and learn from these six parents: Teresa Glaeser, Lucinda Hage, Christine Cannon, Karen Galloro, Brenda Dowey and Linda Viscardis.

When laying a foundation for your child to move toward independent living, and building a life in the community, typically, most planning happens in the high school years. Linda Viscardis, mother of Laura Viscardis, aged 31, suggests that waiting until high school is too late.

Looking back, Linda would have started the planning process well before the end of elementary school. "We started visioning when Laura was 10, and I wish we had started earlier," she says. "Why not turn on your dreamers early. Don't let any perceived or real barriers colour your dream. It *is* a dream after all, so why not dream BIG."

And dreaming can't just be about bricks and mortar. Planning for a meaningful life involves so much more.

"It doesn't matter where your son or daughter lives, if they don't have a life," says Lucinda Hage, mother of Paul Tiller, aged 30.

"You must start by thinking about what their meaningful day will be once school is over," adds Teresa Glaeser, mother of Meagan, aged 30. She suggests starting the planning early, experimenting, trying new things, and believing all is possible, and adds that "developing skills and a sense of self" is essential in preparing for life in the community and living in their own home. Consider things such as: who are

their friends; what are their interests; what are they involved in; where will they work or volunteer; what do they enjoy at home and out in the community; and, do they know how to navigate transit?

Some of our panel parents never thought their child would live on their own, or even ride a bus by themselves. Teresa reflected that learning from experienced parents has been a great resource.

"I said to myself, if their kid can make it, my kid can make it," says Teresa, adding, "As parents we want our own lives at some point, and so do our children. We won't always be around. What then?"

Securing a home that is sustainable, with quality care, can give parents peace of mind. Meagan has been living on her own with supports for over three years, and now has her own apartment. Two of her neighbours also require supports. The families of these three young adults living with an intellectual disability are working together, sharing resources, and building a sense of community. Together, they may hire and share support workers, saving time and effort, while supporting each other along the way.

And, for some, faith plays a role. Lucinda remembers taking a leap of faith with her son, Paul.

"If I hadn't let him take the bus that day, and trust he would make it," she says, "he may still not be riding the bus. But today, he rides all over the city, traveling independently. He is known by all the bus drivers, and what makes him feel safe is that he's known in the community."

This milestone, along with living in an apartment in the family home, led to thinking about the possibility of Paul living on his own. With the help of support workers, Lucinda's son has now lived on his own for over five years. Lucinda recognizes that her son is as "strong as his supports." To access the community, many people with physical disabilities require a wheelchair ramp – that is their accommodation; individuals living with an intellectual disability are accommodated by support workers. Lucinda, who has written a book about her son's journey called, *"What Time is the 9:20 Bus? A Journey to a Meaningful Life, Disability and All,"* says, "Supporters make it possible for Paul to live a meaningful life."

Christine Cannon, mother of Christopher, is in the midst of building an incorporated entity with five other families, to create a home for their children, all of whom live with high needs. Their vision has them reaching out to community and finding the partners to move this dream, called *Shared Dreams for Independent Living*, into reality. Christine says it's a huge learning curve, but she is determined to create what is rightfully her son's, a home of his own. For a long time, she hadn't thought about her son moving out, but the realization that she and her husband won't always be around has them motivated to do what it takes to make their dream a reality.

Karen Galloro and Brenda Dowey, two of four parents who have worked together to create Casa De Angelae (www.casadeangelae.com), have been through the process of incorporation, and are seeing the fruits of their labour in action. Their four daughters, Katie Galloro, Andrea Dowey and two others, who are in their 30's and 40's, share a beautiful home where they live with a mentor who assists with independent living skills, and provides supports as needed. Karen and Brenda note that the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) is looking for innovative housing ideas, but has yet to recognize

their model, which is a cost effective alternative to a traditional-style group home. They continue to promote this model of housing and support, both with other families and the MCSS.

But change doesn't happen overnight, according to Linda, who wrote to the MCSS every six months for more than 10 years, advocating for adequate funding and appropriate individualized supports. Whether this is why her daughter received increased, direct funding, she doesn't know, but, when the additional funding came through, it made a big difference for Laura, who has now been living her dream of having her own apartment for over six years.

Laura receives individualized, daily supports that are overseen by a Team Leader and a volunteer board of directors. They ensure that Laura's vision and mission in life are realized, and that her quality of care and supports are at their best. Although daily supports ensure she lives a full life, Laura enjoys a lot of independent time that she wouldn't trade for anything. She is proud of her home and her independence.

But, receiving individualized supports in her own apartment is not where Linda's dream ends. She is seeking home ownership for her daughter, in an intentionally diverse community, where Laura may find a true sense of belonging. This will be where she will find her most sustainable support – from caring, involved neighbours – and where she will enjoy reciprocal relationships, and make a meaningful contribution to others in the community.

"The only way for this to happen is for us to look way outside the box," says Linda.

Finally, Linda's words sum it up: "Envision something amazing. When you have a vision, something remarkable happens."

It seems these parents are all in agreement: have a dream; take steps every day towards it; build partnerships; trust; and, never, ever give up!

This event was not about answers or formulas – there aren't any. Everyone, and each situation, is unique. Our goal was to get a glimpse of and reference point into planning for the future, along with inspiration, insight, and hopefully new connections with other families, to assist each of you on your journey.

Thank you to Teresa Glaeser, Lucinda Hage, Christine Cannon, Karen Galloro, Brenda Dowey and Linda Viscardis for sharing their journeys, wisdom and time with us.

More *Families Are Strong* events are coming up in the New Year!

Financial Planning

January 20th, 2016

6:30 to 8:00pm - Peterborough Lion's Community Centre.

Learn more about RDSP's, wills, Henson Trust, guardianship, and more.

My Direct Plan

February 17th, 2016

6:30 to 8:00pm - Peterborough Lion's Community Centre.

Learn how to use this free online direct funding management tool: expense management and reporting to personal budget forecasting and more. This service aims to assist in the Monitoring and Reporting of all Direct Funding Programs, so that you can Organize Smarter and Live Better.

RSVP for events: kbrailey@communitylivingpeterborough.ca or 705-743-2412 ext. 547