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Newsletter – August 2011

In the last eighteen months, LIGHTS' Advisory Board and staff have been laying the groundwork of a unique initiative to provide housing opportunities for adults with an intellectual disability. The passion and commitment of our donors has enabled and ensured that this foundation is solid and secure.

Now families are starting to build on our groundwork! Laura Starret, our dedicated LIGHTS' staff member, has been extremely busy helping families walk the journey to a home for their loved one. Take a look...

When we last wrote to you, Laura had assessed twelve families as potential LIGHTS' candidates. Today, over thirty families are at various stages of their personal journey towards independence. Many are at the stage of developing a Person Directed Plan. Six families have been granted LIGHTS funding! Five of the six young adults whom we have assisted were already living independently, but in order to secure long-term sustainability of their housing situation – one of LIGHTS' key objectives - they needed financial help.

Laura also worked diligently with these families to find the right balance in each of their living situations and individual circumstances. That sometimes required a healthy communication between the sets of parents or guardians involved in the home; a broader understanding by the caregiver of his or her role; a step-by-step analysis of the house budget; a facilitation of the family's personal finances to allow their participation in the home. All these dynamics are extremely important in a group living arrangement and LIGHTS is there to give families the support they need to make it work.

The sixth grant has allowed a young man to live independently for the first time! Without financial help from LIGHTS, his family was reluctant to make this life-changing move.

Laura has been working with many families since September 2010 to help them find and nourish an optimal housing arrangement. The process for each one is extensive and carefully executed. Some of these families have already made connections with other families but need help with management of their family member's living situation. This may include some additional funds. LIGHTS helps these families.

Other families are motivated and ready to begin the journey to independent housing for their son or daughter but aren't sure where to begin. They need help making a plan, finding housemates and a home, settling in to their new arrangement, and, in some cases, receiving additional funds. LIGHTS helps these families.

Many more families have made inquiries to LIGHTS, and are beginning to think about the possibility of independent living for their family member. It is an emotional process that can often take months or years to resolve before a family is ready to actively engage in the journey. Here LIGHTS can be really helpful. By listening carefully and creatively, Laura helps a family move from “maybe” to “absolutely!” LIGHTS can help these families do this – help them see a world of possibilities.

LIGHTS has also received inquiries from several agencies, wanting to know about our services for the families they support. Some of these agencies are outside Toronto. If the families live within our Toronto region, they can access LIGHTS’ services regardless of which agency affiliation they have. (There are thirty-six agencies in the GTA to assist people with intellectual disabilities; however, LIGHTS is the only initiative that we know of providing this particular model of housing assistance.) If they are not within our Toronto region, we cannot help them *at this time*. However, they can access all the information on our website, and when we have completed our two year Pilot Phase in 2012, we will actively look at how we can help other agencies initiate their own LIGHTS program. Our goal is to share the LIGHTS model across Canada, helping adults who have an intellectual disability from coast to coast.

Fundraised dollars continue to come in from individuals and foundations, and we have started to actively approach large corporations. Thus far, CIBC has donated \$75,000, CIBC Mellon \$25,000, and RBC \$50,000. We are extremely appreciative of their responses! Their support truly demonstrates the foresight of their institutions and their understanding of the value of their investment in our overall vision.

LIGHTS mitigates costs by partnering with Community Living Toronto and with an investment from the Ontario government. We find creative solutions to complex problems by collaborating with families, Community Living Toronto, agencies, government and donors. And we make dreams come true by bringing together families to develop healthy living arrangements.

LIGHTS is about partnerships at every level. Partnerships are the way of the future in providing sustainable services to people with an intellectual disability. Through these partnerships, LIGHTS will have a positive impact on housing opportunities for people with an intellectual disability, and on making their dreams of independent living come true.

On behalf of the LIGHTS Advisory Board, staff, and most importantly the people we serve, thank you for your continued support and belief in LIGHTS.