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NEWSLETTER - August 2013

LIGHTS is an evidence-based program that bridges a critical gap for families who need to create supported residential opportunities for their sons and daughters with intellectual disabilities, while they wait for government-funded services.

We've been doing just that for three years. In that time our ideas and assumptions have proven workable and valuable.

We have always known that "a good life" for people with intellectual disabilities means having a supported housing option, with family and friends nearby, and days filled with personal choices. We also realized, long ago, that most families who have a son or daughter with an intellectual disability can't afford a supported housing option, and that such housing is in ever shorter supply, thanks to an aging population, and rapidly shrinking family and government resources.

LIGHTS was born to solve this dilemma.

There are three distinct phases in the LIGHTS model.

The planning and budgeting phase involves first identifying and then engaging with families who want their sons or daughters to have an independent, self-reliant life; creating a plan and a budget; connecting them with other families of like mind; and helping them implement their approved plan.

The second phase is the twelve month transition stage – the first year of independence for the family's young adult with an intellectual disability. This is the learning phase, when both the family and the individual need support and advice on their way to independence.

In the third phase, as families become more self-directed, LIGHTS encourages them to develop personal support networks. These networks let other families and friends share the responsibilities of caring for a son or daughter living on their own, so that the care-giver role or the role of any one person in the support network is never too large or overwhelming.

Our model demonstrates the great need LIGHTS is serving. In an average family case, 58% of the funding for housing is covered by LIGHTS; 26% is covered by government (that includes ODSP); 16% is covered by families. Thanks to LIGHTS, families are able to leverage existing government resources into the amount they actually need. Civic partnerships of this kind are essential if the government is to meet the many challenges it faces.

Donations are what makes LIGHTS possible.

Please make all cheques payable to: **Community Living Toronto re: LIGHTS fund**

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LIGHTS

LIGHTS isn't a giveaway program. Families always have some resources, and LIGHTS helps find them, and deploy them more effectively. We do this the only way it can be done, with a collaborative approach, combining the resources of families, philanthropists, agencies, government, and the hard work of our sole staff member to provide essential services to families in critical need. With the help of partners and networks of supporters, families that once faced their crises alone can now help create sustainable models of support that look to the future as much as to the present. This sort of planning means longer-term savings for the government, with the result that more people can be helped.

How big can those savings be? What is the cost of LIGHTS-style intervention now, versus the cost of more intrusive services that may well be required if intervention is delayed into the future? We are finding evermore precise answers to this question, but so far we know that the average cost of support within the LIGHTS model is about \$35,000 per person while traditional group home costs can exceed \$100,000 per person. The efficiencies within our model derive from family assets (this will be a growing necessity for families going forward), family economies (scaling back expenses), integrated teamwork, and our unique way of combining resources amongst an efficient but still personalized number of families. LIGHTS will not be an option for everyone, but it can develop new sustainable models of support to build on.

At LIGHTS, we have already begun to look to the future, to find more ways to make LIGHTS sustainable for years to come. We have strong partnerships with our donors, with the Ontario government (which funds our single staffer), and with Community Living Toronto, the highly respected service provider to those with intellectual disabilities.

We recently welcomed a new partner, MaRS. This unique not-for-profit organization is “ where science, technology, and social entrepreneurs get the help they need. Where all kinds of people meet to spark new ideas. And where a global reputation for innovation is being earned, one success story at a time” (to quote the MaRS website). MaRS is helping us find other ways to ensure our longevity and fiscal security. Having discovered a way to address a complex and pressing social challenge, LIGHTS now needs to make its footprint permanent!

We are thrilled that the Ministry of Community and Social Services has extended its fiscal funding for the LIGHTS facilitator position for three years. The Ministry's commitment is concrete evidence of its partnership with and support of LIGHTS. It is time that families of people with intellectual disabilities are encouraged, recognized, and appreciated for the active role they are taking, and must take, to ensure that their adult sons and daughters have a home and a meaningful life of inclusion.

Our mission has always been the same: to work, via partnerships, to make supportive housing a reality for individuals with intellectual disabilities. It is a mission that connects all of us, within our families, within our partnerships, and within the greater community of compassion that we all inhabit and need. Thank you for your connection to LIGHTS, and for supporting this highly effective program. Together, we do great things.

Warm regards,

Mary Pat Armstrong and the team at LIGHTS

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