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Where choices change the lives
of people with an intellectual disability

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LIGHTS

NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2013

When LIGHTS was founded a little over two years ago, there were 2300 people with intellectual disabilities waiting for acceptable housing in Toronto. The critical shortage of appropriate housing was (and still is) the single biggest crisis facing the disabled,

We knew we could never reduce that list to zero. But we had an idea, a belief: if we could be nimble, and creative, we could help people with an intellectual disability find homes of their own.

In the two years since, no fewer than **seventy individuals and families have engaged with LIGHTS. Eighteen individuals with intellectual disabilities are now living on their own**, outside their family home. And homes have been just the start of it. LIGHTS has created networks of caring relationships for families of disabled people; supported these families in difficult decision-making; helped them develop realistic and detailed financial plans; and, in several cases, provided start-up funds to clear a path to independence.

The process and services we provide are mercifully streamlined and efficient, but they still require courageous, careful, and always creative planning. Our facilitator, Laura Starret's initial consultation with an applicant family is followed by extensive life planning and budgeting sessions. An application for funds is prepared (if funds are needed; some families require only advice and guidance, a helping hand through the jungle of the assisted living bureaucracy). Families often pause at this juncture, and begin to prepare themselves emotionally for the prospect of a newly independent family member with a home of his or her own. But Laura is there to guide them through that tricky passage as well, helping them find homes that are appropriate and other families with whom to partner. A new home is also a new life, and we help families create both, to secure the futures of their loved ones for many years to come.

After that, the future doesn't look so daunting. "It was a leap of faith for us," one parent recently reported, "exciting and terrifying at the same time. We can breathe a little easier, knowing that our son is in a safe, protected, yet still challenging home environment."

LIGHTS continues to try to turn its accomplishments into permanent achievements. As a Board, we recently approached John Milloy, Ontario's then Minister of Community and Social Services, to convert our annual support from the Ministry (which currently covers our facilitator's salary) into base funding.

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Donations are what makes LIGHTS possible.

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

Since the government was prorogued, no decision has been reached, but our financial numbers are as impressive as the growth in our client base. Each LIGHTS client is supported on a **combined average investment of \$30,000 a year**. This represents \$20,000 from LIGHTS, \$5,000 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (the allocation of the Facilitator's salary), and \$5000 in-kind support from Community Living Toronto. That's a good news story for all our partners, and especially for the Ministry of Community and Social Services: costs for residential support frequently run **in excess of \$80,000 per year per person**. We hope that a positive response to our base funding request is imminent given the completion of our two year evaluation and the reopening of the Legislature.

Needless to say, given the seriousness of the housing problem and the effectiveness of our approach, LIGHTS continues to receive inquiries and expressions of interest from other agencies and family groups across Ontario. We want to make it easy to replicate the LIGHTS model, so that our ideas can build better communities for people with intellectual disabilities across the province. Together, we can continue to break radical new ground, and help solve one of society's toughest and yet most revealing problems—the challenge of providing long-term, sustainable housing for people who have an intellectual disability. The way we treat the people who need us most is the way we will be judged as a society.

But none of this—absolutely none of it—would be possible without you, our donors. Thank you for helping us build the LIGHTS community. We have raised close to \$3 million thus far. Your engagement and support reassure us that our vision of “enabling citizens with an intellectual disability to live in a home of their own, thereby enriching our communities” is not just essential and realistic, but attainable.

Warm regards,

Mary Pat Armstrong and the team at LIGHTS

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20 Spadina Road Toronto, ON M5R 2S7
P. 416.968.0650 F. 416.968.7320 E. LIGHTS@cltoronto.ca
Charitable Registration # (BN) 10769 4143 RR0001
www.lights.to