

Facilitation Wellington Dufferin - part of the community

Written By Constance Scrafield

Joanna Goode, Director, wants the community to know that Facilitation Wellington Dufferin, is there to help.

Here is the story: 13 years ago, a group of parents in Guelph wanted a different kind of support for their post secondary school children with special needs. These young people were no longer actually children but now 21 years and older, for whom government assistance, as it is given to younger students, is cancelled. This means, generally, they and their parents or care givers are on their own to find other means of education and involvement. These parents felt their children had something to shine.

So, while there are day programs, clubs, group homes, offered by more than one organization, this group of parents was looking for another way of inclusion into the community at large. It was at this time they heard about a model ? Windsor Essex Brokerage ? through which people with special needs are introduced in the the broader society not as disabled adults but as people with common interests to others.

Ms Goode was working for Families for a Secure Future, doing the same sort of thing. She had been working with special needs people in group homes and otherwise. By 2010, she and the group of parents connected and, in due course, created Facilitation Wellington Dufferin.

?I was doing the same sort of thing they wanted,? she told us. ?I had the experience to bring to this group but I was the only one and we soon realized that we would have to train and pay other facilitators.?

To clearly define what ?facilitating? means in this context, finding the core of a person's enthusiasm, what stirs the soul and inspires ambition can be at the base of any person's desire and at any time of life. This thrust of a facilitator for a disabled person is as important as it would be to all of us.

Ms Goode explains it like this: ?This is an one on one, independent facilitation ? a worker helps one person find out what are his or her talents, passion and work on that. What does that best life look like?

?There are day programs out there but this is one person at a time to become one of the community. Our accountability is to help each person mix in with the community.?

Ms Goode and her colleague, Jodee Jack, sat together with the Citizen in a coffee shop to discuss the basic philosophy about Facilitation and the desire for the whole community to understand and come on board with it.

?One of our people might find a gym and want to start going? said Ms Goode beginning to explain the process. ?Each one has the same facilitator all the time to assist and discover that best life and, where needed, accompany the person to where they are going. So, for the first several times to the gym, they might learn what bus to catch or other transportation. Then, that person might find it's possible for them to go by themselves or they might meet another person who goes to the same gym from the same place and they can go together.?

The commitment made by the people working for Facilitation W-D is no small one: said Ms Goode, ?Our commitment is life long.? She went to explain this extraordinary declaration: ?There's an ebb and flow to this.

Needs come and go. When the life changes, they'd like to have the same person. Same choice of type of facilitator. The match is really important. As a facilitator, you have to leave yourself out of it. The work is complex and you have to own your mistakes rather than try to rationalize them or deny them.?

Definitively, she remarked, ?This is really a social justice movement: it's about taking people on the fringe of our society into the community.?

Ms Jack shared the wisdom: "Our community is enriched by the diversity of its members," she said.

There is a loose structure to the facilitation movement, as it were. Ms Goode explained, "Our facilitation is part of the Ontario Independent Facilitation Network. There are seven organizations like ourselves. At the heart of it all, we believe that this works.

Agencies might not plan for evolution and we do. We're trying create a space where it's alright to fail ? how do we all learn to grow and try new theories??"

Growth is inevitable as long as there is life.

She told us, "We support adults. The bulk of our funding comes from social services or a parent can pay for a younger person. It didn't take long when I was the only worker to realize that wasn't enough. Jodee has been on board pretty well since the beginning. Now, we have eight trained workers and support 100 people.

"What do we want? The breaking down the labels, the pre-conceptions. Who are these people in their souls ? the more diverse we are, the stronger we are as a community."

Facilitation Wellington Dufferin is now run by a Board of Directors but there is no office, no bricks and mortar.

"We are a mobile workforce to keep as much money on the work as possible, the work of connecting and building those best lives."

The facilitators communicate and work from home. One central telephone connects to each cell phone with an extension number.

The next of Ms Goode's remarkable statements was : "There are no barriers. Everyone has some way of communicating, whether they're verbal or not. It's a matter of learning to listen."

She continued by saying, "The areas where they do need support, are practicing and transportation. We do job carding when there could be five or six items where they can do things on their own, matching strengths and skills. Instead of depending on a support worker, the person meets another person who loves the same thing, like yoga, for example. So, the two of them are just people who share the same passion, not a disabled person and a person who is not necessarily disabled.

"Everybody has a place in the community."

There were tough questions too, of course. What about resistance to their brand of support? Primarily, Ms Goode took it this way: "If you're given the label of disability, if you haven't thought of yourself in any other way, you might not be able to imagine anything else.

"Part of our role is to find out how to open them up."

"There's the famous story of the non-verbal adult who, at 30 years old ? everyone thought he didn't understand anything - but he learned to type. Suddenly, he could express himself. Since then, he's been writing books, lots of books," Ms Jack reminded us.

Ms Goode continued, "To have someone in your corner who believes in the best you ? as a parent, you can tell - but for a lot of people we support, we have to listen differently."

For Ms Goode, the best thing about her job is, "to watch a person blossom. Community development happens with each individual and the starting point is already knowing a person and the joy that grows from there."

Ms Goode affirmed, "I've come to know it happens and here's how people can strengthen their own voices."

For more information, how to help or be helped, all that and more, contact Ms Goode at joanna@facilitationwd.com