



Ontario Disability Coalition Youth Advocates & People First Toronto Meeting with MCCSS

Friday September 20th, 2019, Queens Park PC Caucus Room from 10:00 am to 10:45am

Attendees from MCCSS: Honorable Todd Smith Minister of Children Community and Social Services
Aaron Sears VP Policy & Vijay Chauhan Senior Policy Staff

Attendees from Ontario Disability Coalition (ODC):

Dante Wellington High School Student, Ipek Kababtas ODC Executive, Ashley Caldwell, High School Student Sherry Caldwell co-Founder ODC, Lexi Tokhi, York U Student Gul Tokhi, Brandon Colatosti, High School Student Gabe Colatosti & Nina Colatosti, Maja Rehou, Director ODC & Advisor People First Toronto Chapter, Kevin John-Head Self Advocate with People First Toronto, Michael Madden VP People First Toronto, Mariah Robison, 1st Grader and Melissa Lawler

Absent: Anthony Frisina due to illness ODC Advisor

(Anthony message was given to the Minister Todd Smith and is attached with these minutes.

Minutes Summary:

Sherry Caldwell – explained that Ontario Disability Coalition is a grassroots organization working to break down the barriers accessing therapy and essential health services as well improve the lives for ALL living with disabilities in Ontario. The systems in Ontario set up to support people in Ontario with disabilities are in various states of reform. People are languishing on waitlist and going without life changing therapy or assistive device. We know and feel that Ontario can do much better. We brought self-advocates to share their experiences and hopes for a more accessible Ontario.

Dante Wellington High School Student – grade 10 from Toronto

Barriers to Therapy

He would like to know why he cannot get therapy? And there is no Funding for it. He needs it reach his goals? He requires funding for physical therapy and gain more independence in transfer and for his overall health.

Minister Todd Smith said they are working on it. He is new to this role only 3 months but he takes this file very seriously. He shared that MCCSS is investing in children rehabilitation as they are funding two new Children's Treatments Centres in Ontario one for Grandview in Durham and another for CHEO in Eastern Ontario.

Lexi Tokhi York University Student

Barrier to Attendant Care, Post-Secondary Education & Employment

She is at York university – it was a struggle to get where she is now due to lack of funding for attendant care. Lexi had initially enrolled in college Seneca last year but had to leave early in the year due to complete lack of accessibility ie (attendant care). There wasn't much accessibility it is not a priority and the pressure was put on her to get things in place. Students with disabilities want to go to school and want to work but there are these barriers in place which contributes to the false stigma that they don't want to contribute even though they do.

Minister Todd Smith shared that his daughter also attends York U. He fully agreed that people with disabilities do want to work. He also shared that when companies hire people with disabilities these employees are some of the most reliable and hardworking employees they have. He has been hearing this message repeated and echoed

from many different organizations he has met with including Rena's. Finding the pathway to make it employment easier is a challenge the Ministry is working on.

Michael Madden from People First Ontario:

Barrier to Employment, Community and Economic Equality

Michael provided an introduction of People First of Ontario, it is the provincial voice for people who have been labeled with an intellectual disability. Michael explained the organization background and collaborative work to close institutions and move people into the community where they belong. The last large institution was closed in 2009. We continue to demand work, fair wages no more sheltered workshops REAL JOB for REAL Pay. We demand Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is the same across the province and that it is designed to support to have economic equality. We Demand, No more Institutions No more segregated schools, No more Sheltered Workshops, Inclusive Communities, Increased funding. Together we can make a difference.

Minister Todd Smith Responded that they are talking to many stakeholders, community living, Reena's place to name a few and including people in the decision making. The want to invest in people he talks about getting people with disabilities in minimum wage jobs. Agreed that sheltered workshops are limiting. He wants to build in support not supportive places.

Brandon Colatosti grade 12 High School Student Keswick

Barrier to Accessibility, Therapy, Transportation & Employment

Stressed that his community is invisible. He would like the Premier Doug Ford to listen to the disability community and ACT to ensure we eliminate endless barriers in Ontario. Brandon shared that due to his degenerative disease he needs access therapy to reduce his pain and make him more comfortable. Right now, the rehabilitation system is so broken no one is getting preventative treatment or help that will improve outcomes or improve their health and well-being. He has not been able to access any therapy in years.

He has faced barriers using public transportation which limits his ability to participate in the community. Mobility plus is demeaning to the person with the disability as you must go on their time. (System needs trumps the Persons needs). For example, you have to leave a Doctor's appointment early to due to pick up time. You must pre-book weeks in advance. Brandon greatest fear is employment and being able to gain a meaningful career. In 2019 Brandon feels all people should be able to gain meaningful employment. Per Statistic Canada Employment rate is 59% for people with disabilities and 80% for able-bodied people. Through all this Brandon has a dream that government will listen and stop discriminating of individuals with disabilities. I have a dream that one day I can go into any building in Canada with next to no struggle, ride public transit, live pain free life and be employed. Is this not everybody dream? I want to work and be a functional part of society. When we will have policy and funding in place to help us move forward.

Minister Todd Smith - Currently when you apply for ODSP they help people with job resources /placement supports. He provided example of successful employment for some individual on the ASD spectrum in a North York Golf Course.

Kevin John-Head - Barrier – Insufficient Financial Support

Shared how he grew up in foster care and must rely on the government for his support, care and advocate for him due his intellectual disability. He is not living the life he wants to live. He expressed that bad things have happen to him in care Kevin asked about the Provincial legislature how it works and asked if Minister Todd if he cared about him?

Minister Todd Smith nodded and said YES I care about you. His government wants to include people in the decision making. He asked about where Kevin was living.

Maja Rahou shared that Kevin is a ward of the province of Ontario. The government has a responsibility to care for adults in Kevin situation and that responsibility does not end when he is 18 he needs ongoing care for this lift to time live his best possible life.

Mariah Robison – 1st grader from Hamilton, Ontario - [Barriers to Therapy](#)

Mariah shared that she needs funding for intensive physiotherapy to learn to walk. She wants to walk and grow up to be a veterinarian.

Minister Todd Smith Talked about his investment the CTCs and about the investments made for Autism. Shared that is making a point of is talking and listening to all stakeholders.

Maja Rehou

Summarized ODC request for a robust and comprehensive Ontario Disability Program that is inclusive of ALL ages and ALL labels to ensure no one is left behind. It is time to end the injustice and harm happening in Ontario. Maja shared that It is financially smart to support child and adults with disabilities early and ongoing to ensure everyone reaches there potential and can be a contributing member of society. If therapy and assistive devices are funded and provided in a timely manner Ontario will ensure everyone is as independent as possible. Cost savings for tax payers by avoiding expensive, painful and at times preventable surgeries and reduce the burden on support services.

Maja - [No Where to Turn](#)

Urged Minister Todd to implement the recommendations in the August 2016 “No Where to Turn” Ombudsman Report to ensure young adults are not falling off a cliff at 18 years of age waiting for reassessment and abandoned on multiyear waitlist for Passport Funding. Support for the **Noah and Gregory Bill** is essential to ensure continuous funding while also providing supportive housing to avoid inappropriate housing people in care facilities, jails or worse homeless which is extremely expensive and neglectful way to treat Ontario vulnerable citizens. This destructive cycle needs to end.

Melissa Lawler commented that her daughter Mariah Robinson needs intensive therapy the amount and type of therapy offered at her daughter CTC in Hamilton is not going to change her daughter’s outcome. She gave an analogy of an adult working out to get in shape to her daughter once a week therapy. One session a week would not work for a healthy person to gain strength and it will not work for her daughter. She also acknowledged that her daughter is one of the lucky ones accessing once a week therapy as most children in Ontario are only getting consultation. She is requesting choice of therapy, high frequency, time and location too that works for her family.

Ipek Kabatas commented the government should provide families with adequate funding for. Whether it be occupational or physiotherapy, or speech therapy, families should have direct access to money to help pay for such supports much as is happening for children with autism.

Nina Colatosti commented that our system has not improved in 20 years for people with intellectual disabilities. That her son has no access to direct funding for therapy and worried about his future as it is Ontario is full of barriers.

Minister Todd Smith – He asked the parents in the room where funding for the therapy to the CTC is going? He mentioned Autism community was offered Direct Funding and they are communicating now they want Direct Service. He mentioned that intellectual disabilities and FASD are lifetime diseases.



Gul Tohki express her concern about told lack of PSWs, and attendants to serve the community, this lack of attendant care has serious effects on the lives of people living with disabilities such as her children. It can cause people to leave their employment or education.

Minister Todd Smith that he would follow with Sherry Caldwell on a follow up meeting to continue this discussion.

End of Meeting.

**Message from Anthony Frisina Queen's Park – Sept 20th 2019
Absent due to illness but has a critical message to share.**

Good Morning – My name is Anthony Frisina, a proud resident of Hamilton, Ontario, a Student Services Representative at Mohawk College and a passionate advocate for Accessibility Awareness and Inclusion.

Why am I here today? To present to you my mission and principles, that I have shortened to the acronym M.I.C.E.E. – Motivation, Inspiration, Celebration, Education and Empowerment. Persons with disabilities are first and foremost PEOPLE. Just as anyone else in our communities we deserve equity and fairness in our communities. On a continuous basis, my goal is to break down attitudinal barriers, barriers that stem from poor language and communication and alleviate stereotypes and stigmas behind a PERSON with a disability.

Let me reiterate. We are PEOPLE first! Our livelihoods, our quality of life, and our impact that we have on our communities are critically based on funding support from the government. I am before you here today as a confident man, because I earned it! Respect and dignity are two words that I value with the highest integrity. Funding for myself along with many others has allowed me the privilege to be my best self and represent my community. So much so now that I share stories that encompass my principles of Motivation, Inspiration, Celebration, Education and Empowerment on my television show and brand Above & Beyond – Bridging the Gap to Accessibility and Inclusion. Because there is a substantial gap, a gap that needs to be addressed for ALL PERSONS with disabilities to be treated as equals and not just an afterthought in our communities. I believe that actions speak louder than words, but if no words are being spoken how can one's action super cede that? I am here today, before you as an advocate for change, an advocate so that ALL PERSONS with disabilities are treated with the same amount of dignity and respect and that comes with the assurance of the adequate funding for ALL PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES so that our lives matter in alignment with our able-bodied counterparts. So that we may bridge the gap to meaningful employment from approximately 60% of persons with disabilities to 80% from the able-bodied community. So that we may have the confidence to seen as who we are as PEOPLE, not because of disability, but in spite of it.

Speaking for my community in Hamilton, where the percentage of persons with disabilities is greater than the provincial and national averages. There is NEED, a need for our government to allow persons with disabilities to be people, to be respected, to be valued, a value that may come with a price tag on one end of the spectrum but is priceless to those whom the funds are life-changing for. Funding has allowed me to hire my own support team and with their support I aspire to live my best life and be the best person I can be, I aspire to support others, I aspire to action. In my community, I live my best life through the support of many others, I implore to understand the value of funding to ALL PERSONS with DISABILITIES. I implore you to seek value in the M.I.C.E.E. principles, I implore you to seek value in initiating a proactive approach to and seeking the information that justifies the means for funding for all PERSONS with DISABILITIES and lastly I implore you to value the power of progression!