

January 2022

### **Pre-Budget Consultation:**

My name is Marietta Drost and I am the Executive Director of L'Arche London, a local agency providing Supported Group Living services which are MCCSS funded, and Day and Evening Supports at our Community Hub, the Gathering Place, which is not Ministry funded.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you!

I would like to speak about 3 pressures that we face as a local agency at this time: Staffing pressures; insufficient housing and support pressures; and the fact of baseline budget pressures.

### **Staffing Pressures and important of Wage Enhancements made permanent**

First, I would like to speak about the vital importance of making permanent the current Provincial Wage Enhancements provided to frontline Developmental Sector Staff.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of safe, high-quality care for people living with developmental disabilities, who are among Ontario's most vulnerable.

The Assistants of my community perform challenging and difficult work that keeps the individuals they support healthy and safe while providing enriching programs and vital services.

During the ongoing pandemic, the Ontario Government has taken essential actions by implementing the \$3/hour wage enhancement for frontline Developmental Service sector staff.

The wage enhancement has directly ensured continuity and consistency of care for individuals living with developmental disabilities, who currently receive services in Ontario. (stable work force)

As we look ahead to the post-pandemic recovery, **we cannot return to the pre-pandemic status quo** for developmental services in Ontario.

We at L'Arche London are a member Agency with Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs - OASIS. With OASIS, we strongly urge the Ontario Government to **maintain the current wage enhancement for DS sector staff on a permanent basis**, which is otherwise set to expire on March 31, 2022.

We are deeply concerned about the detrimental effect that discontinuing the wage enhancement will have in our organization.

Recently, valued staff and DSW trainees in our agency have migrated to work in other sectors – Education in particular, where wages are higher.

This trend is a significant risk. We must help ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities continue to benefit from excellent services, and that DS staff are respected with fair compensation for the essential work they do.

As we advocate strongly for the Wage Enhancements to become permanent for frontline staff, a comparable wage enhancement must be extended to non-frontline Management. At L'Arche London we are seeing a wage compression issue between front line and management staff that is worrisome and may erode the good morale that we experience in our Leadership team. We need to maintain our strong leaders as well, and it effects morale and the ability to support oneself and one's family, when people are not adequately compensated.

### **Housing Crisis:**

There is an extreme housing shortage here in London and across the province. Housing has become a focus for the developmental sector as rising costs, limited stock and increased needs across vulnerable populations compete for the same resources and units. Here in Middlesex London, Developmental Services Ontario has a wait list of 683 people + (April 2021 Stats) for Supported Group Living, and 832 people for Supported Independent Living. In the year 2020-21, 39 people were placed, and came off this waiting list at the DSO.

This poses an extreme challenge for families and people who live with a developmental disability. Affordable housing with assessed appropriate supports is not sufficiently available.

**Example:** Recently we came to know an 89 year old father with an extreme health condition, and his 59 year old daughter with Down Syndrome who had lived together all their lives. In a desperate stage of Dad's health, when he was no longer able to care for her at home, and unable to find placement in the DS system of Supported Living, she moved into Long Term Care. She passed away there about 6 months later in September of 2020. She never had an opportunity to live independently with friends. She would have been very capable of this, and deeply desired it. Here at L'Arche London, we supported her with several days of Respite per month in the year prior to her going into Long term Care. Her father was in an emergency status with his health – and she thrived for several days monthly in our supported residential environment with 4 other supported people. It is a tragedy that faithful families never have the opportunity to live an experience of independence for their adult child. Aging parents are living with a heart-breaking uncertainty about what happens to their aging adult child with a disability. The crisis is similar for younger families with adult children. The hope of placement in appropriate supported living setting is a distant dream at best.

## **Base Operating Budget Stagnant**

**Our Base Operating Budget at L'Arche London remains unchanged over a decade plus years. Our budget has not changed to** to address inflation, rising costs, the need for stable teams and annual increases. The inflation rate in Canada was announced last week as 4.8 percent – the highest rate in 30 years. Increases to our budgets occur when we increase service capacity only. While there has been a wage increase in our sector in the last decade, 17% to Developmental Services/sector frontline workers, this increase pales in comparison to a 68% increase to Personal Support Workers in the Health Sector during the same time.

We advocate strongly that the Ontario government **maintain and build upon the work of the 2021 Budget** which made the following commitments:

- 1) 13 Million dollars over three years for Housing Access and APSW supports for independence**
- 2) A recommitment to 361 Million in new DS Sector support funding to continue to support clients currently in service.**
- 3) Emergency funding throughout pandemic – addressing immediate pressures confronted by DS Agencies.**
- 4) Wage enhancements for DS Frontline Support Staff. We advocate strongly that this subsidy become permanent.**

Thank you so much for this ongoing work, and this opportunity to share our pressure today!

**Reference: OASIS Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals With Special Needs: Virtual Advocacy Kit, 2021**