

With Skilled Family Engagement We Believe Families Will:

- Develop and/or strengthen* a vision for their family member and inspire other families as they develop their own vision (*not to imply weakness, but recognizing the vulnerability families experience, which can veer things off track or bring to a halt due to systemic barriers or system flaws);
- Feel better supported to safeguard their family member from harm and achieve the visions they hold for them to have a full and meaningful life, thru their involvement with a broader network of families
- Have opportunity to advance their learning on relevant issues or issues that place particular pressure on families. For example: housing, education, individualized funding and transitional planning;
- Receive more opportunity to develop clarity, strengthen their voice, learn and practice articulating the issues as they relate specifically to their situation;
- Have increased confidence to navigate services more effectively and be better informed of resources and tools;
- Build better working relationships with service providers, by helping to better inform and define the service provider's role and relationship to families. Develop their capacity and skill in the art of facilitating helpful conversations, which move people from struggling with the complex issue to a solution, focused cohesive conversation with service providers.
- Further develop families' capacity to be effective advocates;
- Provide more opportunity and support for families to take on leadership and mentoring roles;
- opportunity to be exposed to others who hold a positive imagination for the future;
- Be respected for the wisdom they hold and will be listened to, not judged or screened
- Have a 'safe space' for families to reflect on, challenge and enrich their own perspectives;
- Discuss the negative narrative on disability and the implications within a culture of segregation;
- Learn about the power of roles that hold value and status in people's lives and the vulnerability that lies in the absence of these roles in the lives of their family members;
- Help to show others how to appreciate more fully the power and influence that comes with unpaid relationships and natural connections to community for their family members.

What We Have Learned About Family Engagement Thus Far:

- Families are strengthened when brought together in a dedicated space, that is intentionally created for reflection and sharing with the company of other families;
- Establishing a common set of principles and values must provide the basis for all discussions;
- Skilled facilitation is one of the most critical aspects of this work;
- Families know their children best;
- When given permission and support to dream, families are able to craft a powerful and positive vision of good lives for their family member;
- When families are supported to articulate what a good life could look like for their loved one, they no longer envision that life built within services. Instead, they see the role of services as a tool they may or may not need in order to achieve and safeguard that good life;
- Families are eager to not only connect with each other but are willing to stand alongside and be active participants in creating those good lives with one another;
- Families have a curiosity and hunger to hear about and learn from other families, family groups and networks across the province;
- There's a relationship of tension between many families and local associations, created over the past several decades wherein support organizations saw themselves as "doing for you" and families who have a new vision, want support organizations to be "with them". Recognizing this distinction is fundamental to an evolving relationship between support organizations and families;
- Many local associations struggle with the notion of this new relationship and expectations of families. They want to be alongside supporting families but struggle to do so in this manner;
- Families want support from organizations and government that is relevant to their needs and that complement their efforts to create good lives for their children;
- As a collective, we must continue learning about family engagement; what does it mean for families, and for organizations. What is the role of associations in supporting family engagement and what do families need of their local organization;
- There is a need to grow and support leadership among families across the province; this support to family leadership and engagement is integral to the long-term vitality and strength of the Community Living Ontario and the Community Living movement.