



The Next Stage: Retirement Planning for Older Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Building Bridges: Aging in Place Discussion Paper

March 2008

For this paper, the metaphor of “bridges” is used to discuss the links needed between aging and disability sectors. Bridge supports are the connections that exist in communities. Bridge building units relate to the themes discussed.

The [Positive Aging] Strategy defines “aging in place” as the diverse range of programs and housing options needed to ensure seniors maintain personal dignity and functional independence in their homes, neighbourhoods, or communities for as long as possible.

(Nova Scotia Seniors’ Secretariat, 2005, p. 40)

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Project

*The primary purpose of **The Next Stage: Retirement Planning for Older Adults with Developmental Disabilities** project is to build links between the aging and disability sectors to foster social inclusion.*

Purpose of Discussion Paper

The purpose of this brief discussion paper is to stimulate dialogue and foster collaboration between the aging and disability sectors. The intent is to inform practice and policy relevant to retirement planning for aging adults with developmental disabilities. This paper reflects knowledge gained during the project, *The Next Stage: Retirement Planning for Older Adults with Developmental Disabilities*, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada from September 2005 – March 2008. Insights are gleaned from various project activities and reports, including focus groups, interviews, and dialogue with both the aging and disability sectors.

Nova Scotia is an inclusive society of caring communities that supports the well-being of seniors and values their contributions. (Nova Scotia Seniors’ Secretariat, 2005, p. 25)

Issue

Nationally and internationally, service providers and policy makers have identified an increasing impetus to respond to and plan for the changing needs of an aging population of persons with developmental disabilities. This aging population is placing new expectations and requirements on both the aging and disability service sectors. Historically, the aging and disability sectors have not been closely connected. They differ in many aspects: education, clientele, experience, programs, services, policies, funding streams and philosophies (Ansello, 2004; Bigby, 2004). Each sector has developed extensive expertise and knowledge about programs and services to meet the specific needs of their clients, which has served them well. However, with a growing population of aging adults with developmental disabilities who are living longer than ever before due to improved health care and services, program and service demands are changing. Each sector is exploring new opportunities while embracing new challenges. There is an emergent imperative for the aging and disability sectors to work together to share their expertise and knowledge. Also, there is increased recognition of the importance of a cross-sector approach for effective policy and program planning (Campbell, 2007; Ansello, 2004). Despite a broad societal commitment to inclusion, aging adults with developmental disabilities have not usually been included in programs and services planned for seniors in the general population, and so, continue to remain marginalized (NACA, 2004). The outcome is that they may not receive services for which they are eligible. Policy makers and service providers in both aging and disability sectors are seeking pathways to support “aging in place”.

Supportive communities are where various sectors and individuals work together to achieve a shared vision. (Nova Scotia Seniors’ Secretariat, 2005, p. 57)



Community-based not-for-profit organizations can play a number of critical roles in the development of aging in place programs.

(Nova Scotia Seniors' Secretariat, 2005, p. 137)

Sector Definitions

The **disability sector** consists of agencies, organizations and/or individuals that develop policies, provide services, and advocate for people with disabilities. The **aging sector** consists of agencies, organizations and/or individuals that develop policies, provide services, and advocate for older adults. Within the sectors, services are available to a range of ages and abilities.

(Adapted from Butler, MacLellan & Humble, 2006)

Building Bridges: Creating New Community Opportunities

The metaphor of “bridges” is used to provide a visual image of the links needed between the aging and disability sectors. These links are necessary to improve policy, programs and services for all aging adults in Nova Scotia. Building bridges offers new pathways for the exchange of resources. Many groups have already developed informal pathways, or bridges, and are both participants and catalysts in building community capacity to respond to changing needs. These existing connections are supports for building bridges. In the course of gathering information throughout *The Next Stage* project, specific topics emerged which can provide focus for bridge building activities.

Relevance of Aging in Place:

The Next Stage project information, other national and international projects, and the Nova Scotia Positive Aging Strategy all identify “aging in place” as a focus for designing programs and services for adults aging with developmental disabilities. Aging and disability sector collaboration is needed to ensure that there is effective design of a range of supportive services in response to changing needs. The existing commitment by policy-makers, service providers and organizations in Nova Scotia to work together to support “aging in place” is a support for bridge building.

Education:

The aging and disability sectors have unique language, philosophies, educational directions, experiences and knowledge bases. Bridges are needed for joint educational offerings and for

Education is the bridge that spans the distance between the aging and disability sectors, offering a means to connect through sharing expertise. (Butler, MacLellan, & Humble, 2006, p. 58)

facilitating the exchange of the unique knowledge between the sectors to ensure that common understandings emerge. This enables an effective response to the changing needs of aging persons with developmental disabilities. The sectors can be a tremendous resource to each other. However, there are few bridges currently in place for sharing information and experience about aging and retirement. Education can help to build bridges. Education occurs both informally and formally through cross-sector dialogue, networks, workshops, professional development opportunities and in-service training.

Community inclusion:

The aging sector has been a long-time advocate for community inclusion of older adults but generally, their focus has not included the population of adults aging with developmental disabilities. Based on its long history of supporting community inclusion for persons with disabilities, the disability sector can work with the aging sector to advocate for social inclusion of all older adults in Nova Scotia. The commitment that our society has to inclusion, and the evident willingness of community groups to have programs and services available to all older adults in Nova Scotia is a support for bridge building.

Healthy aging:

The aging sector has amassed considerable information about healthy aging and retirement, including expectations for active living, social supports, and strategies to maintain health and well-being. However, few health care providers have had specific education about the unique health needs of persons aging with developmental disabilities. The disability sector has considerable information about their clients, including their lifestyles, communication strategies, health issues and interests but has received little education about healthy aging and age-related changes for this population. Bridges can be built between the sectors to share their unique knowledge bases. The commitment to support healthy aging is a support for bridge building.

Leisure interests:

As people move from workplace to retirement, they often seek leisure activities as a way to connect with others, keep engaged in the world around them, and maintain their health. Numerous seniors' or municipal groups across Nova Scotia offer a range of leisure activities designed for retired people. As the first group of older adults with developmental disabilities moves from workplace to retirement, some may also look to local social/recreation/leisure activities as an opportunity to participate in their communities. Existing community opportunities for social and leisure activities offer support for bridge building.



Recommended Policy Goals

The following recommended policy goals offer the potential for bridge building between the sectors and provide a platform to inform policy and program discussion. Collaboration among governments, service provider agencies, and organizations is required to attain the goals, with each group having key interconnected roles. For example, governments have a leadership role in setting policy and standards as well as establishing funding mechanisms that enable the needed work to be carried out by service provider agencies and other organizations.

Coordination between government departments

Joint planning among government departments is needed to enable cross-departmental, integrated development and implementation of policies, programs, and services. In addition, the voices of people with developmental disabilities, families and support persons, service providers, and educators need to be heard in the policy planning stage to enable the development of inclusive social policies.

One of the core components of the ability to remain in an existing home as one ages is the availability of support services in the local community.

(Shiner, 2007, p. 41)

Seamless, portable funding

Government departments need to coordinate funding strategies to ensure that funding follows the individual throughout the life course, enabling person-centred planning. Funding needs to be seamless from the individual's perspective and support the choices and needs of persons at different stages of life to enable a meaningful quality of life. For example, when an individual retires from the work setting, funding for transportation should remain accessible.

Review of eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria embedded in policies related to programs and services need to be reviewed to ensure that individuals aging with developmental disabilities can access services based on functional need rather than age criteria (Butler, MacLellan, & Humble, 2006).

Bridges between sectors

The disability and aging sectors need to develop and implement cross-sector planning strategies to meet changing client needs. Cross-sector educational opportunities are also needed to enable the development of common understandings.

A Provincial Network that focuses on building bridges between service providers in the aging and disability sectors is one pathway for sharing information relevant to aging in place, healthy aging and retirement (Butler, MacLellan, & Humble, 2006, p. 59).

Service providers working in seniors and in disability sectors should co-operate to respond in a flexible and coordinated manner to the needs of aging persons with developmental disabilities.

(National Advisory Council on Aging, 2004, p. 14)

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Housing options

Adequate, affordable, appropriate and flexible housing options are needed to enable aging in place in an environment which is comfortable for the individual and is able to support changing needs.

Social inclusion

Collaboration among persons with developmental disabilities, families and support persons, community groups, service providers, policy makers, and educators is necessary to ensure opportunities for social inclusion. Processes to enable social inclusion include cross-sector partnerships, resource sharing, recognition of equal rights, and visionary leadership within many groups (Butler, MacLellan & Humble, 2006, p. 44-45).

Transition planning for retirement

Education and discussion about retirement planning, including healthy aging, is needed for persons aging with developmental disabilities, support persons, families, and service providers in the aging and disability sectors. Models of transition planning for the move from workplace to retirement are needed for the later stages of life (Butler, MacLellan & Humble, 2006).

Accessible transportation

Accessible, affordable, and flexible transportation is needed to ensure that people have options to participate in their community when they retire. Transportation is consistently identified as a major barrier to participation in both rural and urban areas.

In summary, building links between sectors is an opportunity to enhance services.

The [Ontario Partnership on Aging and Developmental Disabilities] is between two service sectors in the interests of building new knowledge and capacity to support people with a developmental disability as they age.... The idea is not to hand off clientele from one sector to another but to draw on the services and knowledge within each sector in order to help individuals receive the right services, at the right time, in the right place as they age. (Ontario Partnership on Aging & Developmental Disabilities, 2007, p. 2)

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