

## NIAGARA NETWORK HOSTS SERIES OF WORKSHOPS

The NIAGARA NETWORK on Aging & Developmental Disabilities has been actively building steam since early 2006. On the heels of a Regional workshop hosted in Hamilton in 2005, two Niagara Region staff from within the developmental sector forged ahead with plans to create a Niagara network. Some of our first steps included a presentation to the Niagara Region Executive Directors Forum to recruit participation of an executive director; recruitment of other staff from within the developmental sector that were passionate and knowledgeable about aging issues and the pressure being faced within the developmental sector; and recruitment of partners from within seniors sector care. Our ability to solicit senior sector participation was aided by the knowledge of staff within the developmental sector that had previous working relationships or contacts. One contact lead to another and soon we had some real “champions” participating on the NIAGARA NETWORK from Region Niagara Seniors Community Programs; Alzheimer’s Society; and Community Care Access.

Initial meetings allowed for the development of our Terms of Reference and brainstorming about the opportunities, barriers, and strengths within the Niagara Region. We quickly identified a need to “get the word out” about OPADD and about the formation of the NIAGARA NETWORK. Workshop plans were developed for March 2007, with a guest speaker from OPADD and a local psychiatrist specializing in dementia and aging issues related to persons with a developmental disability. Invitations were circulated within senior sector care and the development sector and about sixty people attended with good representation from both sectors. This was the spring board for the development of three additional workshops. We recognized a need for specific sector training and hosted a September 2007 workshop specifically for staff from the developmental sector with guest speakers presenting on The Natural Aging Process; Aging and a Developmental Disability and an overview of P.I.E.C.E.S., a best practice assessment tool used within senior sector care and exhibitors from senior sector services within Niagara. Our November 2007 workshop was hosted for senior sector staff and focused on Developmental Disability-The Basics; Provincial OPADD movement; Developmental Disability and Aging and a vendor fair with representatives from all developmental disability agencies within Niagara. Our vision of bringing together all participants from each of these workshops came to fruition in February 2008 with about 120 participants with equal representation from each sector focusing on Building Effective Partnerships. This was a very interactive day with a four, 30 minute presentation followed by 20 minutes of Table Talk working through a set of questions such as; What is most exciting about the provincial perspective? What assets/strengths do we have in Niagara to contribute to this picture? What kinds of partnerships currently exist between the two sectors in Niagara? What needs to happen to facilitate greater partnering between the sectors? What are the next steps to strengthening

our partnerships so aging persons with a developmental disability have their needs met through innovative service provision? Are all the right players at the table if we really want to be innovative and collaborative? Who is missing?

Capturing the amazing results of this day is very difficult. We assigned participants to specific tables in an effort to disperse senior sector and developmental sector staff. This proved to be extremely useful as, almost immediately, staff were raising questions with each other, sharing phone numbers and brainstorming ideas on how to work together. Mid-morning a suggestion was made from a senior sector staff to have us sit within our geographic work locations so that we could better develop working relationships with staff from our geographic locations. Recognizing this was a wonderful suggestion we took 120 people and reassigned them to geographic table arrangements. Despite the logistics of this (can you picture it?) the results were well worth it. Partnerships were truly being formed.

Our next steps include an analysis of the feedback from all workshops recognizing this will inform our work plans for the future and ongoing recruitment of participants from each sector for participation and sustainability of the NIAGARA NETWORK.