

**Presentation to the Round Table on Affordable Housing, hosted by the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Ontario Lieutenant Governor, and mayor Darian Foster of Clarington on January 30, 2018.**

In December, at a public community event of stories, a neighbour who was invited to speak began with... "I live in the neighbourhood that Joel created" and she proceeded to talk about the impact on her neighbourhood, (her family and herself) by the presence of Joel - a young man who in other ways might be seen to have significant disabilities that could prevent him from contributing to his community at all. However the neighbour describes how Joel's intentional daily walks with his mother, sister or dad through the neighbourhood have encouraged others to do the same, how his consistent "hello's" to others now prompt small chats in return, how he often surprises his mother by inviting people for dinner (and they come!), how asking people to come and sing carols together has started an annual event, (and how encouraging his neighbour's Christmas decorating brings energy and awe to everyone.) It was not always that way, but now, in Joel's neighbourhood people know each other.

What are we losing out when people like Joel are not included into the heart of our growing communities?

For over two years my organization, DAFRS, has been supporting families who have a member with a disability to come together around housing. First and foremost these families know the truth of the stories like Joel's - that community is stronger, that neighbourhoods are more cohesive, and that families are more resilient when everyone gets to take part.

The families who have come together have taken two related and mutually supportive paths - some, like Marilyn are interested in taking part in developing a building where their family members with disability make up no more than 10% of the community. Others are exploring ways that they can design housing solutions uniquely for their family - one person at a time - with a combination of new ideas, supportive regional and municipal policies, and their own energy and assets.

Without a dollar of government funding, and no changes in policy yet, nine 9 families have already figured out their creative solutions -- several have financed their own renovations, one has found an apartment in her neighbourhood for her son so that

much of his support is natural, one family down-sized their home and are renting the basement suite from their daughter for the months they are not in Florida. Families are creative, energetic, resourceful and outcome oriented. We need to support and take advantage of this energy by figuring out how to support their creative solutions.

As for those who want to look at a building where a few of their sons and daughters can call home in the future, I know that they are greatly inspired by the experiences of the Rougemount Cooperative in Pickering. This Durham gem of an experience is a 105-unit housing cooperative that a group of families just like the ones today designed and had built with federal-provincial dollars nearly 25 years ago. Their seven sons and daughters call this home and contribute enormously to the spirit of the intentional community at Rougemount. It is a community where there is great diversity and everyone benefits.. I worked with those founding families for 21 years and through 2 books and countless presentations, I have shared this story and its success around the world. Many envy the example we have right on our doorstep.

Let me just underline Marilyn's points because the families have understood well the real issues. (Their sons and daughters can and want to be contributing members of ordinary neighbourhoods - not in congregated grouped settings. Their issues are ones affordability. Both portable rent subsidies and renovation loans could greatly increase the affordability for people.)

On **Affordability** - let's be clear for people with disabilities on ODSP pensions, can afford to pay \$479 per month on rent , regardless of where they are living. The national housing strategy has suggested a housing benefit of \$250 - this alone will not make rents affordable in Durham. The question is in a larger build how do we keep down the costs of 10% of the units...and then how do we look at portable rent subsidies of real power for others?

**Portable** means choosing where and how you live - it increases the chances of the person finding or making housing closer to their families and natural supports - a richer, better lifestyle and less government support.

**Portable** means that a family might be able to afford their own home renovation - can't think about that when your adult child (a tenant really) can only pay \$479 but what if they could pay double that? That second apartment might just be possible. On the other hand, access to renovation loans will increase the families who might take this on.

Even if the young person with a disability moves on from here, this is an investment in housing in Durham as it becomes available to future tenants for the family.

Your Honour, you are interested in matters of sustainability and social cohesion. Helping people to live together in diverse and vibrant communities, communities made just so because of the mix of income levels, abilities, ethnicity, and contributions is an investment in sustaining healthy communities. Housing Is a community issue.

We are interested in these same issues and feel so ready to take this on that we would offer a pilot project for 20 families -to show the impact of portable subsidies, or of rents in buildings where a few units are truly affordable, or access to loan dollars. In addition, we can explore supports from other Ministries so that a truly collaborative process can be brought together.

These ideas are just as applicable in northern Ontario as they are in east Durham. These are issues of social justice, of sustainability and about nurturing the social cohesion that make life a rich adventure. These ideas start and end with people.