



Creating a Path Forward

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Background

Quad County Support Services has traditionally provided supports for individuals with developmental disabilities through its residential and day programs. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, and social distancing restrictions, resulted in the closure of the day programs.

Over the last few months, staff have focused their efforts on adapting to the new restrictions and realities related to COVID-19. In doing so, we continue to evolve on how we provide supports and services to individuals.

As part of this evolution, and in response to COVID-19 related restrictions, the difficult decision was made to not reopen the day programs. The age and design of the building prohibited Quad County Support Services from meeting the Province of Ontario's Stage 3 reopening requirements.

Honouring our commitment to offer services that match the choice and goals of the individuals supported, in the fall we reached out to our community to explore new ways of doing this moving forward.

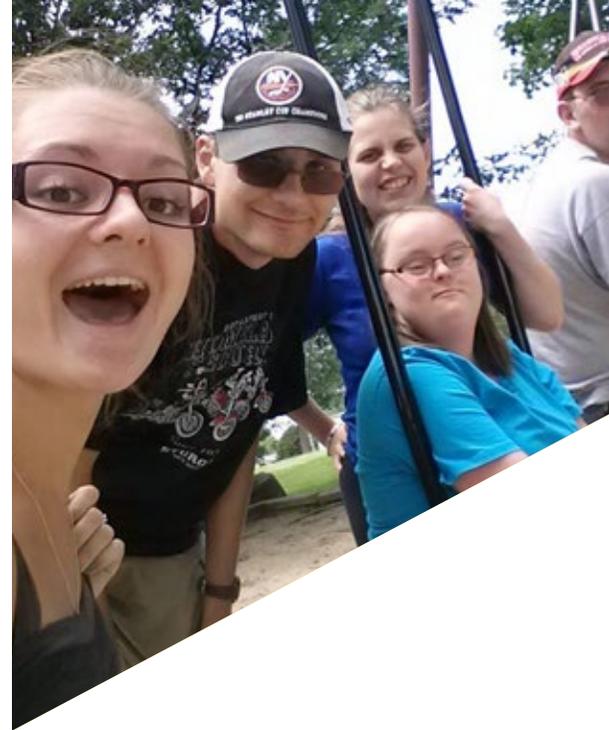
We will continue to focus on furthering core strategic directions identified in our 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. These include advancing our service model toward person directed supports and focusing on community development and strengthening our partnerships.

Over the period of two months, we consulted with families, individuals, staff, community and board members to hear their thoughts on how best to support the individuals we serve. This was done through questionnaires, phone calls, Zoom meetings and one-on-one conversations. The variety of ways offered to share feedback allowed people to choose the method that worked best for them.



Our consultation included:

- 60 questionnaires completed
- 15 phone calls with families
- 28 one-on-one meetings with individuals we support
- 4 Zoom meetings with staff
- 20 letters mailed to families asking for their input



▶ Summary of feedback

In our engagement with families, staff, community members and individuals, some common themes emerged on how the day programs were perceived as well as how to best support individuals moving forward.

Socialization

The ability to be with friends and interact with peers and staff was mentioned by the majority of respondents. This was seen as the primary benefit of the day programs as well as the key consideration in how to support individuals moving forward. Many noted that Zoom, Facetime and other technologies have been well used since March in keeping individuals connected to friends and family.

Activities, outings and special events

Related to socialization, many people would like to see the continuation of activities that individuals could choose to attend, based on their interests. There was recognition these do not need to be Quad County Support Services led, but rather could involve taking part in community programs and events.

Community involvement

There is a common desire for individuals to be more included in the communities in which they live. This not only gives individuals a sense of belonging, but also raises awareness and understanding amongst community members. Respondents felt there is benefit to individuals taking part in community programs, based on their unique interests. Creating an inclusive community benefits everyone.

Individualized interests

One of the challenges with the day program format was the lack of individual choice. There wasn't the ability for individuals to choose the programs or time of day they wanted to attend. Others had personal conflict with other attendees, thus avoiding the programs.

Moving forward, many people would like to see a more individualized approach to supporting individuals. This means taking the time to get to know their individual likes, dislikes and interests and finding connections and resources that align with their interests.

Technology

As we continue to live through COVID restrictions, there is a greater need and reliance on technology. While the challenges with internet reliability in rural areas is outside of the control of our organization, we will explore the technologies being used, identify gaps and review the distribution of resources.

Staff awareness

Finally, there was recognition that staff require training and education on how to understand individual's interests as well as identify opportunities in community for programs, resources, connections and integration. This involves training staff on how to support individuals in the community in a new way.



Recommendations

In developing the recommendations, we feel it's important to acknowledge there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. There are intergenerational issues due to the ranges of ages of the individuals we support and their families.

Everyone comes with their own perspective. We need to respect this and look at how to support individuals with a different lens. Our younger individuals and families will have different needs and interests from our older individuals and families.

There is also the recognition supporting individuals goes beyond a building. Rather, it's more about determining how we support people as individuals, appreciating their needs and interests.

To ensure their voice is included as we move forward, an individual will be included in the working group tasked with implementing the recommendations. This working group will also include representatives from families, staff and our board.

We also feel it is important to welcome the community in to create a more inclusive community for all.

In preparing the recommendations below, we did so recognizing:

- No in person group activities will be held for the next 6 months due to COVID restrictions
- We will continue to explore ways to connect virtually
- We will have ongoing conversations with individuals, families and staff (this the beginning not the end)

Based on the feedback from the community engagement process, the following recommendations will help us create a path forward.

Short-term – next 3 to 6 months

- Continue to develop and schedule virtual activities based on interests identified by individuals
- Continue to advance our technology while trying to assist with barriers individuals and families are experiencing
- Look for community connections for programs – partnering with existing organizations, looking for activities for individuals to participate (ex. cooking classes, exercise groups)
- Create an inventory of community groups and organizations to determine what connections can be made with individuals – both formally and informally
- Provide staff training on the model of community development – helping staff understand how to use their connections to support individuals





Long-term – next 6 months to 2 years

- Engage a third-party planner to create a path forward for each individual based on their unique needs and interests
- Provide ongoing staff training as identified through this process via Zoom and other online technology

Ongoing engagement

As we implement the above recommendations, we are committed to keeping the lines of communications open with our community.

This will be done through the following ways:

- Email info@quadcounty.ca if you are interested in being a member of the working group. The working group will meet on a regular basis to continue the conversation, provide input and monitor the progress on implementing the above recommendations.
- Monthly Zoom drop-ins for staff to share their thoughts and brainstorm ideas
- Monthly Zoom family drop-ins to bring forward ideas, concerns or just connect with other families
- Email ideas@quadcounty.ca or phone us if you find an online event or activity that you feel would be of interest to individuals we support, have ideas for community connections or anything else you would like to share

► Acknowledgements

The members of the community engagement working group would like to thank all the families, staff, volunteers, individuals and community members for your dedication and commitment to our community. We have truly appreciated the conversations, feedback and personal stories you have shared with us these last few months.

We encourage each of you to continue to be involved in the process as we create a path forward based on the specific needs and interests of the individuals we support.

► Thank you

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Quad County
Support Services
recognizes and
respects the
uniqueness of
each person
supported by
the association.



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