

## Vision Statement “Family Engagement”

The role families have played in the Community Living movement has been essential to ensure vitality, commitment and influence from the beginning, whether locally, provincially or nationally. Virtually all local Associations had, as their founding members, families who understood the importance of working together to accomplish things that they knew they could not do alone. The history of this movement is the story of families that gathered together to challenge the status quo and each other, advocate for human rights and equal opportunities for their family member and develop a variety of services and supports through local efforts. This family-led movement, originating in small meetings across the province, would eventually and radically alter the landscape with the advent of institutional closures, governmental declarations of human rights and freedoms for people with disabilities, person centered approaches to service and support and a more inclusive nature to our communities.

Understanding the Community Living movement’s history and, in particular, its rootedness in the shared experience of families, is necessary to grasp the reason for much of the movement’s success. This understanding can also help shape our future. The centrality of families in this movement meant that they were integral to the conversations and decisions that defined organizational priorities and action. This preeminent role was embedded in organizational structure. Families, which include a person with a disability, parents, brothers and sisters, extended family and longtime friends, were recognized as being most important in a life-long journey that was often marked by vision and risk taking. Family involvement provided the moral authority to the movement in its efforts to promote and protect the interests and rights of people with a disability and their families and, as we came to understand, could not be duplicated in any other form of representation.

Understanding our history also makes us aware of the relatively recent dislocation of families from the central and integral role they once played within the confederation. Accompanying the rise of the professionalized service industry has been a decrease in the role and influence of families. History has also informed us about the change in the cultural conditioning regarding the valuing and importance of people with disabilities. While slowly shifting towards a more valued perception, this change is still in its infancy. There is much to do to alter societal misconceptions, limiting assumptions and myths that continue to affect the lives of people with a disability and family understanding of what is actually possible to achieve. In this regard, the voice, leadership and engagement of families are critical for a good life of belonging in community

Laying claim to a membership of 12,000, Community Living Ontario asserts its moral authority with achieving its Vision and Mission on behalf of families and their vulnerable family member. Confirming, retaining and growing an aware, value based and deeply committed network of families to support this assertion are essential to the provincial body’s distinctiveness from other representational bodies. An effective family voice requires a recognition and acknowledgement of the importance and centrality of families in the past and in the future. Ensuring that the voice of families is central to organizational efforts requires a place that is valued and embedded in organizational structure and practice.

The centrality of the family voice and family engagement is required within our organizational culture to maintain Association legitimacy and its moral authority.

### Community Living Ontario

1 Valleybrook Drive, Suite 201  
Toronto, ON M3B 2S7

Tel: 416-447-4348 Toll Free: 1-800-278-8025 Fax: 416-447-8974  
Email: [info@communitylivingontario.ca](mailto:info@communitylivingontario.ca)