

March 31, 2020

Mr. Marty Wexler, Chair  
Disability Rights Coalition of Nova Scotia  
Email address: [disabilityrightsns@gmail.com](mailto:disabilityrightsns@gmail.com)

Dear Marty:

Deputy Taweel has asked me, as Executive Director of the Disability Support Program (DSP), to respond to your letter of 25 March 2020.

First of all, I want to acknowledge the Disability Rights Coalition's (DRC) commitment to advocating on behalf of persons with disabilities, both generally as it relates to their human rights and specifically for de-institutionalization.

I want to assure you that DSP shares your commitment and that we support community-based living for all persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia. In fact, this past February, we were overjoyed with the provincial government's commitment to create 400 new placements in community over six years. This investment will support transitioning participants to community and will also address pressures on the Service Request List. As I'm sure you can appreciate, the COVID-19 global pandemic will delay this work. However, DSP remains committed to resuming this initiative once the pandemic is over.

With regard to the DRC's specific requests I need to preface my response by setting the stage with our current reality. Even prior to the global pandemic, DSP had a wait list for placements and service providers were contending with staffing shortages. With the new instruction around social distancing, self-isolation, and other measures, these challenges have increased.

Please see below the response to the four DRC requests (which I have edited for brevity):

1. **Initiate immediate consultation with stakeholders** – As you know, I have a personal commitment to working with participants and other stakeholders and engaging them in addressing issues and building solutions. But, to be frank, as we work to address the challenges related to the pandemic, we are unable currently to develop and deliver a participatory planning process. I fully intend to establish an advisory group with participants and other stakeholder representation once the pandemic is over.
2. **Implement full transparency around the COVID-19 Protocols** – Having been a residential service provider yourself, I know you are aware of the licensing and program requirements to operate a licensed home. These requirements include having an Emergency/Disaster Plan. Our service providers are now actioning these plans. Taken together with our other licensing requirements, on-going work with service provider associations (NSRAA, CCANS, Diverse Abilities and DirectioNS) and general guidance and specific orders from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, I assure you that we are using every possible tool to ensure the safety of our participants.

3. **Department of Community Services move as many people as possible out of congregate institutional settings to community based settings** –During the global pandemic, DSP will only be making emergency placements to relocate participants currently in hospital and/or under an Adult Protection Order. This is being done to create hospital capacity which will ultimately help ensure the safety of Nova Scotians. Aside from the lack of available placements and all of the other safety concerns associated with a pandemic, moving participants out of a familiar setting staffed by a team familiar with their respective unique requirements does not seem appropriate at this time.
4. **The government provide the necessary resources to ensure that community-based organizations are able to provide supports and services to persons with disabilities** – DSP is actioning this on a daily basis. Examples include:
- Providing additional funding to cover staffing needs associated with staff absences related to COVID-19
  - Funding a host of exceptional expenditures related to COVID 19 i.e. supplies, special needs and supports for participants
  - Providing additional respite funding for families supporting participants at home.

The health and safety of our participants and staff are at the heart of every decision we make as we address the challenges brought on by COVID-19. The team within the Disability Support Program is working exceptionally hard and I hope we can continue to count on your understanding and support as we all navigate through this unprecedented time.

Thank you for your letter and please stay safe.

Regards,



Maria Medioli , CPA, CMA,RSW  
Executive Director  
Disability Support Program

c: Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister, Community Services  
Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Public Health Officer