

Workshop aims to engage people who self-advocate in policy change

REACH Out group hoping provide people with information to take back to their communities

Friday, May 15, 2009 -- Deron Hamel

A workshop being held at the upcoming 56th annual Community Living Ontario conference is aimed at engaging people who advocate on behalf of themselves and others in ways to make changes to policies and practices at their local associations.

Representatives from Community Living Brant will lead the charge in the session, entitled Systems on Edge: Demands of Social Inclusion Act — Complaints Process and Investigations, which will examine the successes of REACH Out, a group of people who self-advocate. REACH is an acronym for respect, empower, advocate, courage, honour.

"The presentation was developed with the REACH Out self-advocates' group and the message that they want to give is how can a self-advocates' group work with their community agencies to make changes to systems and practices of the agency that affect them," says Debbie Cavers, the director of Community Living Brant.

"Their goal is to give some suggestions and ideas about how they work as a self-advocates' group."

Two areas that REACH Out has made inroads at Community Living Brant are improving the language used within the Brantford association's complaint policy and increased engagement in the hiring process.

Specifically, REACH Out sat down with the association's leaders and examined how the wording in the complaint policy could be changed so it was understood by all, and included suggestions on how to reach out to people who require information to be presented in a non-written form.

REACH Out has also been instrumental in advocating to have association members to be included in the interview process when new staff members are brought on board.

This has led to REACH Out working on a training package for people who are receiving supports and will be working with the association's human-resources staff in the hiring process.

The group is aiming to have the training package ready by autumn.

Gary Kusch and Diane Jones of REACH Out will lead the June 5 presentation with Cavers, and provide attendees with input on how the group's subcommittees developed the recommendations that were presented to the association, which have led to policy and practice change.

"The goal is to not to talk about the end result, but how they went about doing this and hoping that other self-advocates in the province might learn some ideas (to) take away to their community," says Cavers.

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