



## 2016 Annual General Meeting Message from the CEO



As another year comes to a close, we take this moment together to celebrate the successes of the year gone by, and also recognize the struggles that we have shared. In a dynamic agency such as Niagara Support Services, we know that our work is never done, our services never cease, and our history continues to be written each and every day.

As we celebrate 63 continuous years of service in our community, we recognize that those services have changed and evolved many times over the years. What has remained constant throughout all of those changes and evolutions, however, is our relentless pursuit of service excellence for those we support.

From our Ministry's perspective, the 2015-16 year was a busy one. The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) has identified the trends that it recognizes as impacting our sector, and by extension, Niagara Support Services. These trends are:

- an increase in individuals presenting with challenging and complex needs;
- enhanced inclusion and competitive employment opportunities;
- an increased focus of planned support for significant transitions at various points in life, such as Transitional Aged Youth planning;
- increased focus on collaborations and partnerships between service providers;
- and an increase in accountability in all areas of the funded sector, from the Ministry itself, and within the transfer payment agencies such as NSS.

We are well positioned to work with our funder to adapt to these trends.

This summer, a long-awaited report was released by the Ontario Ombudsman's Office entitled, *Nowhere to Turn*. The Ombudsman's Office is Ontario's watchdog, keeping an eye on governmental issues. This report was the result of an investigation that began back in 2012, and focused on our Ministry's response to crisis situations involving adults in our sector in Ontario. The 182-page report is troubling in many ways, but also offers hope for the future in our sector.

To quote Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé from his Executive Summary:

*"During the course of this investigation our Office received more than 1,436 complaints about the state of Ontario's developmental services system and we continue to do so. Our investigation focused on how the Ministry of Community and Social Services responds to situations of crisis and administers the process for coordinating, monitoring, and facilitating urgent access to resources for adults with developmental disabilities. What we found was a fragmented, confusing, and complex assortment of hundreds of community agencies and local processes, impossible for many individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to navigate. The process for accessing supports and services in the sector is multi-layered and inconsistent across the province. Families were often bewildered by the confusing web of service providers or oblivious to the distinctions between the various service agencies, Developmental Services Ontario offices and Ministry officials. Many were discouraged by interminable waitlist delays and were desperate for help. Some were on the brink of crisis, others firmly in its midst."*

Why I suggest that this report also offers hope for the future, is that he closes his Executive Summary as follows:

*"The Ministry has acknowledged that despite its efforts to transform the developmental services system to support personal choice, independence, and inclusion, some unacceptable situations continue. In responding to my findings, the MCSS has fully committed to working with our office, individuals, families, and the developmental services sector to improve outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities. The Minister has personally agreed to all of my recommendations and the Ministry has provided a detailed response on how they will be implemented. I am encouraged by these developments and acknowledge the progress that has already been made in recent years to improve the developmental services system."*

*“It is often said that societies are judged on how they treat the most vulnerable of their members. The time has come to move beyond apologies and work towards a consistent, coordinated, collaborative, and responsive developmental services system, able to effectively and humanely meet the needs of individuals and families in crisis.”*

At NSS, we intend to be a part of this solution.

Our employee team is now nearly 200 strong, and we are grateful for their continued dedication and commitment to our collective vision of *a community that inspires the well-being of its citizens, celebrates meaningful relationships, and benefits when everyone participates fully in community life*. Our broader team is made up of not just our employees, but also the 350 individuals and their families that we serve, our community partners, our funders, and all of our other stakeholders that make up our collaborative organization. It is only when all of these pieces come together that we can deliver the best possible services that we know we are capable of providing, and we are grateful for everyone’s contribution to this team.

This is an intentional statement that I am making here, about the collaboration that we live every day. This effort is truly a collaborative and no single piece works without the others. When I spoke about our team in past years, I was referring to what I called, “our professional, caring and inspired team”. By that version of team, I meant our employees. These are indeed, the incredibly talented, committed and dedicated folks that NSS is fortunate to call its employees.

We talked about delivering services, as though our services were an item to be had. With the advent of individualized funding sources such as Passport, we even spent time and energy creating programs and service options that could be purchased. Of course, there are many good examples of inspired programs and service options available, but as we move forward, I would submit that the best ones, the ones that will have the greatest impact on the lives of people engaged in the life of NSS, are not in program brochures, but are already inside of each person who will experience them.

As it turns out, we are all a part of one team. Anyone who would like to identify as being a part of the NSS team, or NSS family, can choose to do so. To be considered a part of this team that we can all be proud of, you no longer need to be an employee of this agency. In fact, as we transition our focus away from agency-centred supports and services, toward more community-based, individualized and person-centred supports, it is more important than ever that we recognize and celebrate the fact that this is a collaborative effort that includes all of us.

A number of years ago, I had some items branded with “Team NTEC-Team NSS”, but those were the exclusive domain of our employees. This was deliberate, as it was my hope that each and every talented member of our staff group would identify as being a part of this agency. At that time, I wanted all of our employees to be proud of the services that we delivered, and regardless of what program they worked in, to identify first and foremost as an NSS employee.

Today, as we continue to be planful about the shift from agency-centred views of supports, to more person-centred views of supports, one of the first things I want us to do is accept, agree and celebrate that this team is a collaboration of all of the pieces and people who come together in the life of this agency.

So, we have created new key lanyards that read: *Team NTEC-NSS* and they state our **new Core Values** of **Respect, Choice, Citizenship, and Excellence**. These are not just for employees, but for anyone who would like to consider themselves a part of our team. I welcome you to help yourselves to both our new key lanyards, as well as cell phone screen cleaners on your way out this evening. Both celebrate our new Core Values, and both are offered to everyone, with our thanks for your contribution.

As we were reflecting on our existing set of Core Values and what they said about our agency, we realized that maybe they said too much. They spoke of Respect and Choice, Inclusion and Community Life, of Excellence and Collaboration, of Corporate Social Responsibility, and of Integrity and Accountability. Those are all noble values, and they have served our agency well, but what we would like to focus on as a team moving forward, is the fact that inspired lives and inspired work can be guided by less corporate and simpler terms. They do not need to be overly wordy or complex.

At the foundation of everything we do as individuals, as employees, and as members of our broader team and society, must be **RESPECT**.

Respect for each other, and respect for ourselves. All positive relationships and exchanges in life are built on a foundation of respect, and little of meaning can be achieved without that. This has nothing to do with ability or disability, but it is recognition that we are all equals, and there is no division among equals.

**CHOICE** is second. We affirm the right that we all get to make choices, but this only works if it is layered upon a genuine respect for one another. We believe that it is important to respect not only what is 'important **for**' someone as they make choices in their life, but also what is 'important **to**' that person. We have so often assumed that because an outcome was not pre-determined that there had been choice, and so often this was not really the case. A choice of two possibilities is much different than the choice of all possibilities.

**CITIZENSHIP**, and by that we mean full Citizenship, is the critical measure of success in the Developmental Services sector and in society itself. What we mean today by full Citizenship is the opportunity for full participation in all aspects of society, regardless of ability. We used to think of access to citizenship within our communities to mean things like ramps and elevators, and of course those still prove to be challenges, but full participation is bigger than that. It involves the exchange between a local business and an individual citizen with their own money, not a person seen as a 'supported individual'. And it involves the exchange of ideas, thoughts, friendships, caring, support and love between people who have come together because of choice, not because of circumstance.

The fourth and final Core Value that I would like to share with you tonight is **EXCELLENCE**. Excellence is where we place the standards to which that smaller team, our employee team, aspires. We commit to conducting our business through effective leadership, integrity and accountability, and all of our actions and initiatives will be governed by this. This is where we celebrate being just the second agency in Ontario to be accredited by FOCUS Accreditation Services three times, and where we celebrate our recent Ministry Compliance Inspection results where we earned a 97% compliance rating.

However, what I am more proud of moving forward is the recognition that of the four Core Values, the one relating to our employees and our business practices is not first, but is fourth, after **Respect, Choice and Citizenship**. This is not because the way that our employees engage every day is not critically important, but because **Excellence** is the foundation on which we will live and achieve the first three values that are directly connected to the people we serve.

By the end of 2016, we will be ready to present our new, revised Strategic Plan to carry NSS forward for the next number of years. This new plan will integrate the new Core Values of **Respect, Choice, Citizenship and Excellence** into our action plan, and we look forward to sharing this with you along the way. Our Core Values will underpin all that we do going forward in our pursuit of our vision *of a community that inspires the well-being of its citizens, celebrates meaningful relationships, and benefits when everyone participates fully in community life.*

As always, we are grateful to the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Children and Youth Services, as well as the Regional Municipality of Niagara for their continued support and funding of our various programs and services across the agency.

We are also thankful to our management team, as well as our Board of Directors for their leadership through these somewhat difficult times, within a sector that continues to evolve, and provides both challenges to overcome, as well as opportunities to grasp in the pursuit of more inspired services.

Finally, and most importantly, we are grateful for the continued dedication and commitment of our Direct Support Professionals in their tireless pursuit of our vision. They are truly the heart and soul of our agency, and we could not be more proud of their place in our history.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Lewis  
Chief Executive Officer



# OUR CORE VALUES

## RESPECT

WE TREAT PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

## CHOICE

WE VALUE WHAT IS "IMPORTANT TO AND IMPORTANT FOR" THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT AND ENSURE THEY ARE INCLUDED IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR LIVES

## CITIZENSHIP

WE VALUE THE RIGHTS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS AND ARE COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING FULL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

## EXCELLENCE

WE STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP, INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY



All NSS and NTEC locations will soon be receiving this updated CORE VALUES plaque, as well as new lanyards and cell phone screen cleaners, which were distributed at the AGM.

Included here are a few snapshots from the AGM. We will let you know when more have been posted. Our own Adrian Dudziak took some fantastic shots that evening!

