

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IS A BUILDING BLOCK TO SUCCESS



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A commitment to moving away from traditional group living arrangements and property ownership to more person-centered, community-based opportunities is paying off for **Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley** and the people they support.

In recent years, the support organization has been focused on creating partnerships with community stakeholders. The *Innovative Housing Symposium* that Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley hosted in 2014 is one such example. Nearly 100 people took part and participants included private developers, entrepreneurs, regional council members and representatives from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Relationships with municipal representatives and builders were formed as a result of that initial meeting.

Last month, the Ministry of Community and Social Services announced it was awarding a two-year grant of \$121,217 to Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley through the Ministry's Employment and Modernization Fund. The funds will be used to provide training to staff and to assist people transition from group homes. Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley's new relationships were also integral to the organization's application.

"I like the thought that the Ministry is paying attention to a fairly small organization that is doing something that might have the potential for provincial impact," said **Chris Grayson**, Executive Director for Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley.

"We have to look at the staff structure and the mechanics of who's going to go where, and we have a person internally that will be dedicated to the project. In total, we're transitioning 21 people and 14 are connected to the project."

As part of the initiative, Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley will be supporting seniors to live in integrated community apartments through a partnership with the Town of Petawawa. The town is constructing a 14-unit building geared to seniors. Two of the units will be made available to people supported by the agency.

Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley is also working with a property developer who

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took part in the symposium. He recently purchased a group home and converted the property into a five-plex. The developer also owns a 36-unit building and plans to add a third floor with an additional 16 accessible units. Three of the units will be allocated to people supported by Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley. A fourth apartment may be used for temporary respite; another idea is to have agency staff share the space with personal support workers from the Local Health Integration Network who assist other residents in the building.

A third project will have the agency partner with a developer to create an accessible triplex, using the intentional neighbour concept for overnight support.

As a result of the transitions that will take place over the next year, Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley also intends to sell two more group homes. All proceeds from the sale will be invested in the Pembroke Petawawa District Community Foundation. The interest will be used for rent subsidies.

"We'll give them the money, they invest it for us and charge us a small fee to manage it, and then it's pooled. The United Way has their money in there, all kinds of charities do, and ours will be a dedicated fund for people with developmental disabilities associated with our agency."

Grayson believes the Ministry of Community and Social Services has an active interest in having support organizations that are utilizing the overhead once dedicated to the management of group homes to be used to support people to live more independently, and also taking the annual overhead costs associated with each home to create additional rent subsidies.

He adds his organization sees the benefit of being involved in community discussions related to housing, such as the Housing Steering Committee for the County of Renfrew.

"In general, we are having conversations with people that we wouldn't normally and it's starting to benefit everyone."

**Ron Laroche, Community Living Ontario**