

# The Community Inclusion Initiative



## Collective Learnings in Systems Change

Prepared by the Canadian Association for Community Living  
and People First of Canada

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### Plain Language Summary

The National Community Inclusion (CI) Project, started in 1997, is a partnership between People First of Canada (PFC) and the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL). Partners in this project also include provincial and territorial Associations for Community Living (ACLs) and People First Chapters. The Project is funded by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability component. The goal of the Project is to help communities across Canada include people with intellectual disabilities as full citizens in society.

This document (referred to as a communiqué) tells the story of the Community Inclusion Project. It gives a short history of the Project, its background, and the reasons why the Project was begun. More importantly this document describes and gives examples of what we have learned, as partners, about helping communities become more inclusive. It describes how the Project has made a difference in this country and how it has had positive impact on the lives of families and people with intellectual disabilities all across Canada.

The Project began by talking to families, self-advocates, community and government organizations to try to find out why people with intellectual disabilities and their families were not included in community. From these discussions, **isolation and poverty** were identified as the two biggest barriers to inclusion. Based on this, the project partners developed a plan to address these barriers.

In the early years of the Project, activities across the country focused on providing supports for individuals and families and increasing the ability of communities to include families and individuals in community activities. Projects occurred in hundreds of communities throughout the country each year, involving thousands of individuals and families. During this phase of Community Inclusion, projects focused on helping people find employment, helping people become more involved in activities and organizations in the community, providing needed supports to families, and helping the general public better understand disability and the importance of inclusion.

During 1997 to 2005, the community inclusion partners learned much about how to help families and individuals become more included in their communities. Much was also learned about how to best help communities become more inclusive. Some of the major lessons learned are included below:

- **Shared values** – Public awareness was very important in getting the message of inclusion out and in creating an understanding of what inclusion meant. The general public began to understand that community inclusion was not just about disability but was really about accepting diversity in general, and that inclusion was good for everyone not just people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Partnerships** – Efforts toward increased inclusion were only successful when they involved many different community and government organizations from across all parts of community, not just disability organizations. These partners included youth groups, seniors, local service clubs, churches and many more and helped people understand that inclusion affected all parts of community.
- **Leadership** – Although local, provincial, and national ACL and PF leadership was important, projects were most successful when leadership was shared. Successful leadership encouraged community interest, community ownership, and involvement of many different partners, rather than by a top-down approach.
- **Capacity building** – Projects helped change happen at a number of different levels (local as well as regional and provincial) and in different areas such as social, economic and political. The capacity of ACLs and People First Chapters and the community living movement in general grew as result of the Project because of increased family networks, self advocacy groups, partnerships, and greater public understanding of inclusion and diversity.
- **Involving Individuals and families** – During the time frame, the Initiative reached thousands of families and individuals who were actively involved in projects in communities all across Canada.

Based on what was learned, the Community Inclusion Project grew and changed. For example, it was found that although progress was being made and many thousands of individuals and families were reached perhaps just as many remained isolated from community living. To address this issue, the national Project changed from directly supporting individuals and families to focusing more on ‘systems’ change. The Project defined community systems to mean the way in which communities organize themselves (rules, policy, practice) to meet the needs of community members, and enable their participation in community.



This rethinking of Community Inclusion led to the development of a new framework and the result is the Community Inclusion Project we know today. The focus is on five priority areas – Deinstitutionalization and Housing, Income and Employment, Education, Family and Disability Supports, and Community Associational Life and Capacity – and all include the goal of systems change in policies and practices.

To help create systems change, the Community Inclusion Project uses a number of strategies that have proven effective. These include:

- **Strategic Partnerships** – creating new connections and community leadership among key people and organizations within different systems.
- **Organizational Training** – activities that focus on training delivered to a range of people (such as teachers, principals, employers, etc.) from different areas.
- **Family Networking and Development** – engaging families in issues surrounding disabilities and inclusion and supporting groups of families to advocate for more inclusive communities
- **Policy Engagement and Political Leadership** – developing and suggesting new policy in each of the five priority areas. This includes writing policy papers based on research, and engaging in political advocacy.
- **Research and Knowledge Networking** – gathering, analyzing, and using information related to policy and practice. This also includes sharing of information between key people in each sector and hosting public awareness events.



The Community Inclusion Project is unique and innovative. This paper provides many examples of what has been learned about how to create positive change within the sectors of education, income and employment, disability and family supports, deinstitutionalization, and community life in order to create more inclusive communities. In the final section of the paper, many examples are given of how the various community inclusion projects have been able to break down barriers and help create real inclusion for people in communities throughout the country.

## PART I: Introduction

In 1997-1998, the Community Inclusion (CI) Initiative was launched, representing a coordinated national effort to advance the citizenship, participation, and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. The formal goal of the Initiative is:

*“To build the capacity that communities require to successfully include people with intellectual disabilities in ways that promote their roles as full citizens in society”*

As a national initiative, Community Inclusion is over a decade old. Over the lifetime of the Initiative, much has been learned about promoting and sustaining systems change and supporting the creation of inclusive communities. These shared national learnings are rich and extensive and have consistently informed the evolution of the Initiative itself. The Initiative has adapted and changed over time to respond to the best ways to build inclusive environments.

This communiqué is a reflection on these important learnings. In the pages that follow, we trace the history, background, and rationale of the Initiative, and describe the creation of a national framework that has guided systems change activities designed to build inclusive communities. To complement this discussion we provide a selection of stories and illustrations of how the Community Inclusion Initiative has promoted and supported systems change.

### The Character of the Community Inclusion Initiative

The scope of this Initiative is enormous and the partnerships that guided and built it represent a unique example of grassroots community development that reaches from local families and communities right up to a national collaboration – and back down again. The central partnership is comprised of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and their Provincial/Territorial counterparts (ACLs) and People First of Canada. These organizations are *federated*, which means they enjoy national, regional, and local representation, with several hundred local chapters spread across Canada.

This partnership structure is very innovative. CACL and PFC represent and support provincial/territorial ACLs and PF Chapters. Working within such federated structures has ensured that the Community



### Reach of the Community Inclusion Initiative

A Formative Evaluation of the Community Inclusion Initiative (undertaken by the Evaluation Directorate, Strategic Policy and Research Branch, HRSDC and published in July 2007) revealed that for the period 2003-2005, 163 CI projects reached over 60,000 people directly, including participants, family members, persons with disabilities, community members and representatives from governmental and non-governmental community organizations. Further evidence indicated hundreds of partnering relationships with governments, schools, health agencies, church organizations and others. During this period alone, work involved collaboration with partners from community (924), voluntary sector (836) and government (392) in nearly 500 communities throughout the country.

Inclusion Initiative is driven from the ground up by the real identified needs of Canadian families and individuals with intellectual disabilities in communities throughout the country.

### The Beginnings of the Initiative

The creation of the Community Inclusion Initiative began in 1997 with regional planning events attended by the partnership, families, individuals, and government organizations. Dialogue and analysis of current barriers to inclusion and strategies to address these barriers led to the development of a guiding framework for action. Alongside this development was the creation of a participatory action research model in order to evaluate the progress and impact of the Initiative. The guiding framework identified *isolation* (physical, social and emotional) and *poverty* as two overarching barriers to community inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

In these early years, it was agreed that CI activities across the country would focus on *strengthening supports for individuals and families* and *increasing community capacity*. Within these two main areas, four priority themes were emphasized:

1. Facilitating and enriching personal relationships
2. Strengthening supports for families
3. Facilitating employment
4. Enabling citizenship

This consensus on a national framework ensured that projects developed by the ACLs and PF chapters were linked to a shared strategy while also allowing for flexible responses to local community needs.

### Key Learnings of Community Inclusion: 1997-2005

This period of the Community Inclusion Initiative was characterized by a tremendous reach of local projects to individuals and families across Canada. Alongside these efforts there were concerted efforts to build the capacity and leadership of the movement by developing and nurturing partnerships across social, economic, and government sectors. It was particularly important that the Initiative record and reflect upon the learnings through the life of the Initiative. A detailed account of this time period is far too expansive to reproduce here, but as we reflect on where Community Inclusion is now, in 2010, several fundamental learnings are important to review:



**Promoting shared values.** Core concepts of “inclusion”, “disability”, and “community” were defined and debated and led to a more developed and consensual understanding of what is meant by “community inclusion”. Public awareness activities about intellectual disabilities evolved to a dialogue about the importance of diversity in general in Canadian communities, reflecting the position that the benefits of inclusion are not limited to people with intellectual disabilities, but to all citizens. Diversity itself was promoted and celebrated, moving beyond disability as a “special interest”.

**Partnerships.** As proposals and projects were developed and implemented, it became readily apparent that diverse, cross-sector partnerships were crucial to the promotion of inclusive communities. The community inclusion partnership reached out beyond what was traditionally considered the “disability community” to other groups, such as youth and seniors groups, churches, economic development organizations, anti-poverty groups, multi-cultural and immigrant organizations, and many others. Partnerships were instrumental in identifying community needs, co-delivering projects, addressing organizational and system barriers, leveraging resources and funding, and engaging in collaborative research and knowledge exchange.

**Leadership.** The success of Community Inclusion has been attributable to a leadership structure that has emphasized community interest, ownership, and partnership, rather than a top-down approach driven by the P/T ACLs. The leadership has provided national oversight and strategic support, so that local projects remained within the mandate of CI priorities. However, this support has been non-directive and has ensured local autonomy. In short,

### Rankin Inlet, Nunavut: Creating a Shared Understanding

The Territory of Nunavut (which means ‘our land’ in the Inuktitut language) came into existence on April 1, 1999. In 2000-01, several two day workshops were delivered in conjunction with CACL and attended by families, government and community representatives from communities throughout the Territory. These initial meetings helped establish **shared values and a common understanding** of disability issues in a culturally appropriate manner. These efforts led to the establishment of the Pamiqsaiji ACL. Pamiqsaiji is an old Inuktitut word given to the Association by an elder. It means compassionate, caring, enhancing and supporting; truly a word that describes inclusion. A community feast was organized – a culturally appropriate event that helped raise awareness of the issue of inclusion and got community members talking and asking questions about disability supports and services. The entire community pitched in to help...through cooking, baking and donations. Over 90 people showed up for the Feast which is a tremendous turnout in a small community like Rankin Inlet. Given that many residents, particularly the Elders, are unilingual in either Inuktitut or Innuinaktun, initial efforts focused on establishing personal ties with individuals, families and particularly the Elders, and in translating promotional and awareness materials. One of the highlights of early efforts was supporting several women to leave a group home and move into the community.

### Partnering in and with Community – Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador CI projects successfully advanced inclusion efforts through the development and sustaining of partnerships at the local community level. The Provincial Advisory Committee comprised the provincial ACL and People First organizations, and was supplemented by the direct involvement and participation of six provincial community-based organizations and representatives from five provincial and federal government departments. In 2004, as an example, CI projects were implemented in 12 communities, with more than 40 government departments and agencies, and 55 community members including organizations, self advocates and families represented on 12 local partnership groups. Projects addressed community issues such as the development of friendships, literacy, recreation, deinstitutionalization, workplace and educational inclusion, inclusion in community service organizations and alternatives to day programs for people with intellectual disabilities. Many communities subsequently moved beyond the project stage and continued their inclusion efforts by broadening their partnerships with other disability, advocacy, youth and seniors groups.

### Yellowknife ACL – Creating Capacity in the Northwest Territories

In 2002 the Yellowknife ACL formed a working partnership with families and the NWT Council of Persons with Disabilities. The *Families Can Do It* Project addressed the need for respite services. A Family Coordinator provided support to this partnership and necessary research was conducted to determine what models of respite services were available across Canada. Discussions were then held with families to determine an appropriate service model for Yellowknife. Government and other community agencies were invited to join the Project to design a respite service. Additional funding was obtained from Health and Social Services and focus group sessions were held so the partnership could obtain further input from families. In August 2003, as a direct result of the efforts of this partnership and the ongoing leadership from families, funding was approved for a pilot respite program in Yellowknife. For the first time in NWT a respite program was available and being delivered to families, policies and procedures were in place, respite workers were trained, and families were receiving up to six hours a week of respite. Today, the program is still in place and has expanded to other communities throughout NWT.

leadership was conceived to operate at multiple levels in order to promote community level leadership in response to local needs.

To achieve this vision, national and P/T Steering Committees were formed. A national Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all the national partners, met on a regular basis. This committee was critical during the formative years of project delivery, ensuring that design and delivery issues were addressed and resolved, and further reinforced a sense of collective and collaborative leadership. Steering Committees were created for each P/T project. While typically chaired by an ACL, these committees comprised representatives from participating community and government organizations. Each committee was required to have a self advocate member. These committees played an integral role in the successful development and delivery of P/T projects by ensuring ongoing management of projects and affirming new and existing partnerships. By creating the capacity for input from a wide variety of stakeholders into the content and priority of P/T projects, the committees created a sense of joint ownership of the Initiative. One of the leadership roles exercised by CACL was hosting a variety of national and regional events – Sector Forums, National Partners Meetings, Focus Groups, and Policy Roundtables – all of which were designed to enable local and PT projects (and partners) to inform and shape the overall intent and content of the larger national Initiative.

**Capacity Building.** The Initiative observed changes to capacity at a number of different levels and across different sectors. The Initiative saw changes to capacity in the social sector (e.g, family networks, consumer advisory committees, seniors, youth, self-advocates, etc.), the economic sector (e.g., employment related supports and services), the government sector (e.g., collaborative projects in areas of Health, Justice, Social Services, Child Welfare, etc.), and the political sector (e.g, new audiences and relationships with public representatives). The capacity of the ACL Federation, People First of Canada, and the community living movement in general has grown as result of the Initiative, via family networks, partnerships, and greater public dialogue on issues of inclusion and diversity.

**Community Inclusion for Individuals and Families.** During the 1997-2005 period, the Initiative reached thousands of families and persons with intellectual disabilities every year. Hundreds of communities were affected by numerous projects in the identified theme areas. The impacts for individuals and families are extensive, but some important examples can be summarized here.

- Individuals and families joined community networks and coalitions concerned with inclusion.
- New employment opportunities were created for individuals.
- Communities were reached through websites, public service announcements, newsletters and other media.
- Increased access to disability supports in education, employment, recreation, and other sectors.
- Individual engagement in personal and practical skill development.

## 2006 to 2010: A Transition to Systems Change

By 2005, much had been accomplished by the Community Inclusion Initiative. At this juncture the partners reflected on the learnings to date and a very important observation was made – despite a tremendous reach and the obvious impacts of the Initiative, it was apparent that many individuals and families remained isolated from community living, meaningful citizenship, and full economic participation *because barriers to inclusion remained deeply rooted in community and government systems, in legislation, and in organizational policies and practices.*

The partnership agreed that great advances to community inclusion had been made, but there was a sense that the Initiative was falling short of what could be accomplished if there were not fundamental changes to systems that function to exclude. For every individual that experienced citizenship and inclusion because of the CI Initiative, there were many many more who were left behind due to systemic barriers in education, employment and income, disability supports, and community and social participation. Furthermore, many jurisdictions in Canada were still operating large institutions, cutting individuals off from family, friends and communities.

How did the Initiative come to this conclusion? As community inclusion projects were proposed, developed, and implemented, it became clear that the value of inclusion could not be promoted in all areas of community life without fundamental, collaborative involvement of others – the broader community, government, organizations, and so on. Indeed, this recognition grew as partnerships with other groups and sectors evolved, as described previously. Attempts at improving inclusion naturally lead to attempts at changing systems. The CI partners felt it was time to take their extensive learning about what is necessary for full inclusion and citizenship and apply it in a strategic manner on *systems change.*





## Building a New Framework for Systems Change

The Initiative defined “community systems” to mean:

...the way in which communities have organized themselves to meet the needs of community members, and enable their participation in community. These systems include the various programs and services that are available within our communities (and our provinces/territories) and the sets of rules (e.g. policy, legislation, and practice) that determine what these programs and services provide, how they will be delivered, and who will use them.

The Initiative then defined “innovation in community systems” as a way to understand systems change:

...the process of changing values, policies, and practices in these systems so they enable the full inclusion of all people including people with intellectual disabilities. Change may be needed and possible at the local community program level but often times changing local systems may also involve creating change at other levels, for example at a municipal, regional, provincial/territorial, and/or the federal level. Innovation in community systems means that we do not just assist a person to become more included but that we change the rules so that all persons can be included.

These two definitions framed the goals of the “Transition Year, 2005-2006”. In that year, the partners came together to build a framework to help guide the activities, goals, and rationale of the Initiative with a renewed focus on changing systems to support inclusion. This included a phase of activities called “Sharing the Learning” which was designed to allow partners to consolidate the experiences of Community Inclusion over the life of the Initiative by examining Participatory Action Research findings and reflecting on how the projects linked to systems. Concurrently, a phase called “Engaging Communities” involved reaching out to communities in each jurisdiction to gather information regarding local needs and priorities and to communicate the new shift to systems-level thinking.

With assistance from the Centre for Community Based Research, the partners compiled this information to set priorities for new systems-focused interventions and to build an updated guiding framework. The new framework established, in simple terms, the long-term vision or goal of Community Inclusion as “Local Communities are fully inclusive of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.”

Details of the full framework are discussed at length elsewhere, but two main pieces are important to discuss here. The Framework:

- specified five central **Priority Areas** of the Initiative. All P/T ACLs build their work around at least one of these five priority areas.
- described five central systems change **Mechanisms**. These are general strategies that are considered effective ways to change and improve systems.

## The Priority Areas of Community Inclusion

The Community Inclusion Initiative identified five priority areas of concern to the partners. An “inclusion goal” was developed for each area.

1. **Deinstitutionalization and Housing.** To assist in development of policies and practices that provide the necessary supports for all people to live in community and that ensure that all supported living environments for persons with intellectual disabilities are designed and bound by the principles of choice, self-determination and individualized funding.
2. **Income and Employment.** To facilitate development of policies and practices that ensure the right to be free from discrimination in access to employment and income support programs; and that all people with intellectual disabilities, who want to work, have access to paid employment, and necessary supports to attain such.
3. **Education.** To assist in the development of policies and practices that ensure all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.
4. **Family and Disability Supports.** To improve access to and funding for disability supports and services that assist Canadians with disabilities to participate in early learning and childcare, to get an education, become employed, look after their families and enjoy the opportunities non-disabled Canadians expect as a right of citizenship. Disability supports are defined as any good, service, or environmental adaptation that assists persons with disabilities and their families to overcome limitations that people with disabilities



face in carrying out daily living activities at each stage of their lives and in participating and being recognized as full citizens, in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community.

5. **Community Associational Life and Capacity.** To assist in the development of policies and practices that ensure that Canadians with disabilities are welcomed and supported in their neighbourhoods to fully participate in all aspects of community.



## Mechanisms of Systems Change

Based on the activities of the Transition Year, the partners identified five “promising practices”, called *mechanisms*, of systems change. These mechanisms evolved over time, as the partnership reflected and learned from systems change initiatives.

1. **Strategic Partnerships<sup>1</sup>.** Refers to activities that focus on creating new connections, structures, relationships, and community leadership among key actors and organizations within systems.
2. **Organizational Training<sup>1</sup>.** Refers to activities that focus on training initiatives delivered to a range of stakeholders (such as teachers, principals, employers, etc.) from different sectors and systems.
3. **Family Networking and Development.** Refers to community development efforts to engage families in issues surrounding disabilities and inclusion and to support organized groups of families to advocate for more inclusive communities.
4. **Policy Engagement and Political Leadership.** Refers to activities that focus on analysis of and responses to existing policy, and development of new policy or policy alternatives, in the sector of interest. This includes creating policy position or recommendation papers based on research and policy reviews, and engaging in political forums and other political advocacy efforts.
5. **Research and Knowledge Networking.** Refers to activities that focus on strategically gathering, analyzing, and using new and/or existing information relevant to policy and practice. It also includes active and strategic sharing of knowledge and information between key actors and stakeholders in the sector (e.g., published reports, media, community forums, etc.) and public awareness raising among communities more generally.

It is crucial to note that these mechanisms are highly interrelated. For example, creating a policy position paper may be derived from research activities; and that policy position may be actively promoted in knowledge networking. This is exactly what we found in practice. When examining the work of the ACLs (regardless of the sector in question), the main mechanisms for systems change only very rarely appeared in isolation. It was almost always the case the mechanisms

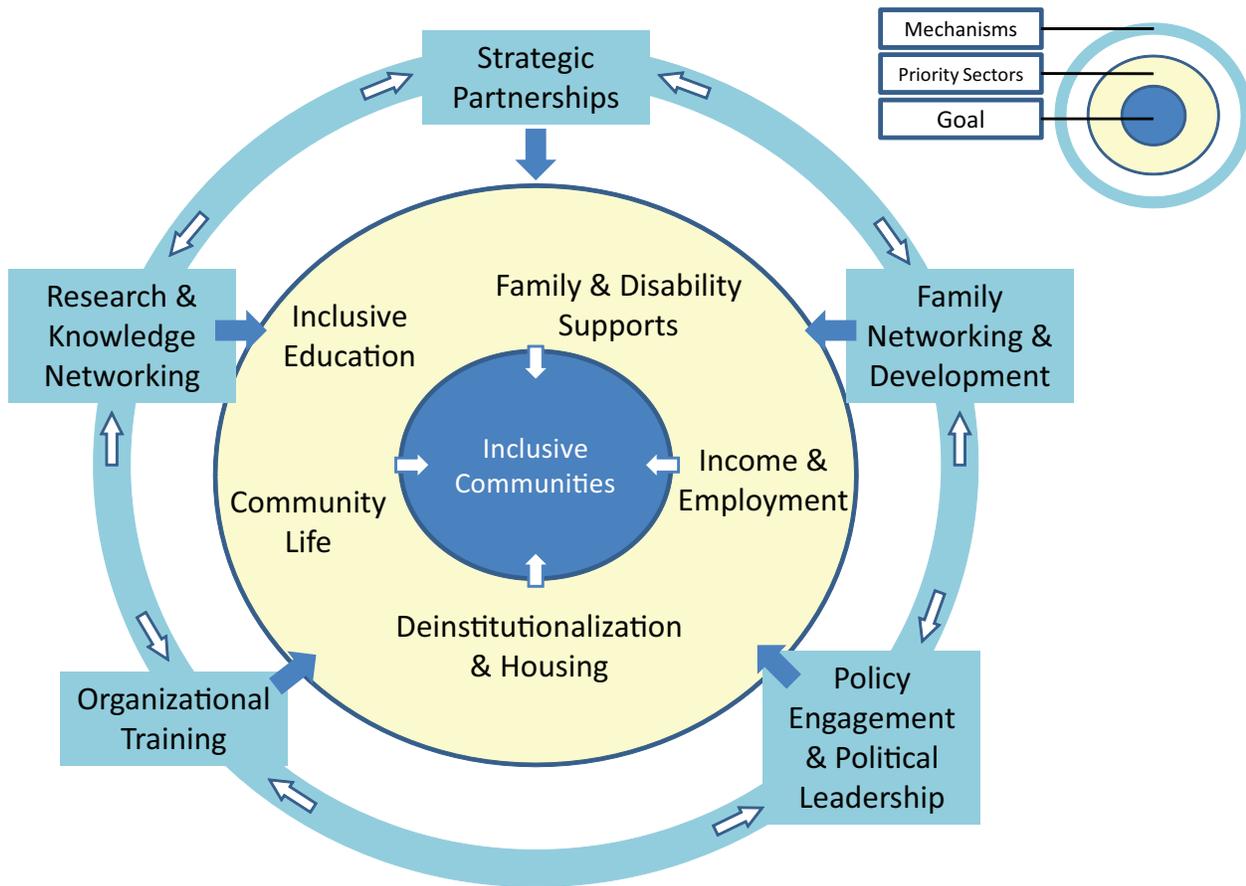


<sup>1</sup> Strategic Partnerships and Organizational Training were separated out from a broader mechanism originally called “Community Capacity Building”.

were combined and strategically linked in innovative ways. In fact, it was clear that the strategic combination of these mechanisms was necessary for systems to improve.

A detailed framework, as mentioned, was developed to guide the Initiative. A simplified version is presented here in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Simplified diagram of the Community Inclusion Systems Change Framework



The innermost circle represents the Initiative goal, abridged here as “Inclusive Communities”. The middle circle represents the priority sectors that were identified by the partners as the most important areas for systems change improvement. Finally, the outermost circle contains the mechanisms of systems change strategically adopted by the partners. These mechanisms reflect the ways in which CI projects create system improvements to the five sectors, in turn leading to more inclusive environments and communities. The arrows in the outer circle also represent the fact that the five mechanisms are linked to one another in strategic ways.

## PART II: Stories of Systems Change

Since the beginning of the Transition Year (2005-06), the Initiative has been developing and refining the guiding framework while building the evaluation capacity of the ACLs and People First of Canada. Informed by the framework and the mechanisms of change, the partners have developed provincial/territorial “logic models” that help track and evaluate systems change activities in each of the priority sectors. Building evaluation capacity has not only aided planning and accountability of the Community Inclusion projects, it has also allowed for a national exchange of promising practices of systems change.

The Centre for Community Based Research worked with the partners to synthesize systems-focused interventions across the Community Inclusion projects. Over a four-year period, much has been learned about how to impact the sectors of education, income and employment, disability and family supports, deinstitutionalization, housing and community life in order to create more inclusive communities. In the sections that follow, we describe these systems change learnings and provide a snapshot of several project examples to illustrate. These stories of systems change represent only a fraction of the tremendous amount of innovative work that is represented by the Community Inclusion Initiative.



## SACL: A Grassroots Coalition for Disability Income Support

**Saskatchewan ACL** led the development of a grassroots coalition of 36 disability advocacy organizations and individuals with disabilities and their families called the **Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC)**. Working in the *Income and Employment* sector of Community Inclusion, the mandate of DISC has been to advocate for a distinct and separate income support system for people with disabilities in the province that provides an adequate baseline income and a user-friendly process to meet financial needs. DISC represents effective use of the CI mechanism **Strategic Partnerships**. **Multiple stakeholders** are represented, accounting for over 80% of people receiving social assistance. This reflects a powerful **cross-disability consensus** (“One Voice”) on the coalition’s goals – goals that benefit thousands of individuals and families across the province. The coalition built the capacity to conduct **social research** on issues of income support, to engage in **knowledge networking** and **community awareness**, and to gain audience with provincial **policy makers**. DISC joined the joint Government-Community Task Team to recommend design options for a new disability specific income program. Representing the power of true grassroots innovation, **concrete policy change** is beginning to follow. All 50 recommendations of the Task Team were accepted by the Government and the new program (“SAID, the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability”) is under development.

## I. Strategic Partnerships

In issues of community and social development, the role of “partnerships” is absolutely central. Without partnerships – groups of people or organizations working towards common objectives – social change is difficult to accomplish. The CI Initiative critically examined what was meant by “partnerships” and the circumstances under which they tended to work and tended to fail. This yielded very useful information – interesting ideas about effective partnerships that are represented in day-to-day practice of projects.

It is not necessarily the case that bigger partnerships are better. Of greater importance is the extent to which the **members are leaders and represent different aspects and levels of the system**. These members can leverage different parts of the system to produce meaningful change. This usually requires members who have **institutional connections**. The reach of the partnership grows via the multiple connections the members already have. Members should be well **connected to other organizations** outside the partnership.

### KEY LEARNING:

We have found that strategic partnerships are successful when members are from diverse organizations and sectors who have power over different parts of the system; and when actions are based on evidence and are supportive of mutually beneficial goals.

Forming partnerships based on “values alone” is often insufficient, although it’s particularly important to ensure there is a **degree of consensus on what those values are**. Partnerships have energy and purpose where there is **practical benefit to all member organizations**. Partnerships may falter if they are not **action-oriented and functional**, with direct actions resulting from member decisions.

It has also been a goal of CI to **“lead without owning”** and **“pass the torch”** – which is to suggest that CI projects must be instrumental in forming and moving forward a partnership; however, to be sustainable other partners must begin to move into central leadership roles. Finally, partnership actions and decisions should be driven, where possible, by **available evidence and information**. This enhances the credibility and accountability of the partnership while promoting reasoned and potentially more effective decisions.

## AACL: Partnerships in Multiculturalism & Children's Services

The Alberta Association for Community Living (ACL) recognized that child protection issues were becoming more prevalent for families who were recent immigrants/refugees and who had children with intellectual disabilities. AAACL developed an effective three-way **cross-sector partnership** with Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB) – which provides multicultural health and advocacy support – and Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), a provincial service delivered by Alberta's Child and Youth Services. All three organizations brought **different knowledge, skills, and influence to the partnership**. AAACL/FSCD staff receive cultural competence training from MCHB. In return AAACL delivers training to MCHB on disabilities and the history of the movement, social justice issues related to disabilities, and the principles and values of inclusion. The aim of these training programs is **mutually reinforcing** in improving subsequent support to families – AAACL and FSCD are better able to respond to diverse cultural perspectives and needs and MCHB is better able to respond to disability needs. On their own, each organization would be far less effective in systemically changing child protection practices. In partnership, **each organization can leverage different parts of the system** to help families. AAACL staff assess family needs, hold family meetings with MCHB, consult with FSCD on protection issues, provide information and education, and generate practical solutions and actions. This partnership also assists AAACL in providing ethnocultural diverse families with **grassroots family leadership opportunities**.

### KEY LEARNING:

We have found that organizational training (with teachers, service providers, other professionals) works best when there is a shared consensus of values, when people with intellectual disabilities participate and share their stories, and when practical resources and strategies that translate values to practice are provided.



## BCACL: Partnerships in the Employment Sector

The British Columbia Association for Community Living (BCACL) has concentrated on **cross-sector partnership building** in the employment sector for several years of the CI Initiative. Partnerships have been formed with government, disability groups and employment coalitions, employers, and others to promote the value of “real work for real pay” for people with intellectual disabilities. More recently, BCACL has partnered with Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) (an agency under the provincial Ministry of Housing and Social Development) in a consortium of 10 organizations to develop **community-driven policies** and practices that support “a pathway to inclusive employment”. In this partnership, CLBC has adopted the language of BCACL regarding inclusion, demonstrating a **consensus of values**. The “real work for real pay” initiative is also viewed as a labor market initiative with **training supports** to employers and disability support providers and policy development, rather than merely a rights-based initiative. This represents **mutually beneficial goals** for people with disabilities, government, and employers. BCACL has reflected on this partnership with the 10 organizations as a vehicle towards **greater power and leverage** over the political, governmental, and job market sectors at the community level.

## NBACL: Teacher Training in Inclusive Education

Community Inclusion has witnessed an important shift in the area of inclusive education. Historically, ACLs have advocated with individual families for full inclusion of children with disabilities. More recently, a systems change approach has led to the development of partnerships with school boards, schools, principals, and teachers in an effort to provide concrete strategies to support inclusion. In many jurisdictions across the country, ACLs are engaging in **professional development of teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals** in an effort to translate the **values of inclusion into school and classroom level practice**. For example, New Brunswick ACL has learned that training is effective when it is **place-based** (i.e., delivered at a school during regular school time) and when it targets a number of **teachers from the same school** rather than individual teachers from different schools. Working with many teachers in one school not only impacts the individual knowledge and skills of participants, but also facilitates a **change in organizational capacity**, resource sharing, and “**inclusive teaching culture**”, since the training is shared collegially. The New Brunswick experience was also facilitated by conducting a pre-training assessment of teacher’s needs and building strong relationships with – and gaining the **institutional endorsement** of – the Provincial Department of Education and District School Boards. Over 320 educators were reached by the training.

## II. Organizational Training

As part of systems change activities, Community Inclusion partners design and deliver organizational level training. This often reflects the success of partnership building, wherein ACLs are coordinating with other organizations to teach or train in relation to disability related issues.

Many of the learnings regarding organizational training come from the experiences of the Community Inclusion Initiative in relation to the inclusive education sector. For example, it was observed that teacher training was more effective when groups of teachers from the same school could participate. In this context, there is a greater chance of school-wide support for inclusive practices in a school, because there will be more teachers trying out new ideas and sharing information together, rather than isolated teachers attempting to use the new strategies they learned. The general lesson is that an organization is more likely to change practices when there is **greater representation of individuals** from that organization in training.

Since training is often predicated on organizational partnerships, it is not surprising that **consensus building** is also a key component of training. When policies and practices within a system are challenged, a challenge to values and principles is strongly implicated. **Values clarification** is very important in order to understand (and sometimes correct) assumptions. Community Inclusion projects have also experienced the benefits of promoting **diversity rather than disability as the lens** for change. Training projects that target diversity in a

### People First of Canada: Core Values Community Training

People First of Canada (PFC) has developed the Core Values Tool, which is a guided set of public presentations written by People First members to describe the values of the organization, the experiences of being labeled with a disability, and ways in which professionals and other community members can accommodate and sensitively support people with intellectual disabilities. The targets of this **training** are PF advisors (individuals who support members) and individuals in the health care, law, financial, education, business, and government sectors. The training not only **builds the capacity of the organization** in communicating its mandate, but it also gives members an opportunity to take **leadership roles and build personal skills** in presenting the tool to others. Most importantly, it demonstrates a key CI learning in organizational training – training is more impactful when the **voices and experiences of labeled people** are directly heard. PFC is continuing this initiative by **partnering with professional and community groups** in order to deliver the training across Canada.

general sense are better able to promote the ideal of inclusion and are less likely to be seen as a “special interest” narrowly targetting disabilities.

Training is also enhanced when there is greater **institutional buy-in at multiple levels**. This demonstrates the crucial importance of **partnerships** that lead to training opportunities. High level endorsement of training goals (e.g., principals, school boards, government, boards of directors of organizations) creates greater opportunities for training resources, greater participation, and the potential for more systemic changes to policies and practices.

Training is also enhanced by the **presence of voices of those with intellectual disabilities**. First-hand accounts of personal experiences that are incorporated into training can be very powerful for listeners and can make the issues concrete. Finally, perhaps the most important learning is the need for organizational training to **translate values to practice**. Historically, ACLs and People First of Canada have played a strong advocacy role for families by communicating a rights-based platform and the values of inclusion to organizations and other community members. More recently in the Community Inclusion Project ACLs have been providing more concrete and targeted strategies for others to promote and support inclusion. Instead of saying “you *should* be more inclusive”, the CI partners are now saying “this is *how* to be inclusive”.

### Community Living Ontario & Inclusive School Cultures

Community Living Ontario developed *Inclusive School Cultures* (ISC), a comprehensive initiative designed to enhance inclusive education. The Initiative is multi-faceted and combines system- and school-level partnerships with strategic resource creation, teacher training, student engagement, evaluation and dissemination. An in-depth pilot of ISC began with a partnership with Kawartha-Pines District School Board and many schools in the district. ISC focuses on several different change strategies at once, but most notably **partnership building** and **organizational training**. ISC gains **institutional buy-in** by obtaining school board endorsement and individual school participation. School-level buy-in is enhanced by a customized “profiling” of inclusion in their home school. This can be followed by a “reprofiling” to understand change in school practice and culture. This reflects a **participatory research emphasis**. Training of educators emphasizes **value clarification and consensus**, coupled with resources and strategies that are designed to **translate the values of inclusion into concrete practice** in the classroom. Furthermore, ISC is not narrowly concerned with inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities but all students. The focus is on **diversity and inclusion, not merely disability**.

### AQIS: Organizational Training on Self-Determination

L'Association du Québec pour l'Intégration Sociale (AQIS) provides training to people with intellectual disabilities, parents, educators, justice officials, health care providers, advocates, and others about the self-determination of people with intellectual disabilities. In addition, a **practical resource guide** and **professional-specific tools kits** have been developed giving practical advice to community members and professionals about the various consequences of independent decision-making of people with intellectual disabilities and strategies to manage these consequences. This project was borne out of an identified need by families and individuals that it was difficult to **translate the values of empowerment and self-determination to actual practical advice and decision-making**. In the health care sector, AQIS began by **conducting research** that surveyed people with intellectual disabilities, families, caregivers, general physicians, dental hygienists, speech therapists, and health professionals. The research not only improved the quality of resources and training but the credibility of the Initiative, as it was driven by feedback from relevant stakeholder groups. AQIS uses a **train-the-trainer model** wherein a person with a disability, a parent, and a care provider/advocate is trained to provide educational workshops to professionals and community members. A train-the-trainer approach was identified in order to **increase the scope and reach of training while building the sustainability** of the Initiative.

## Community Living Manitoba: Family Networking

Families lie at the centre of all that is done in the Community Inclusive Initiative. This mandate is shared across the country and is fundamental to the work of all ACLs. There are many examples. To illustrate, CL Manitoba has established a **family network** with over 600 families in the province to share information, provide training and resources, and connect families together. This includes **collecting, publishing, and disseminating “Family Stories”**. These stories reflect on many different areas of life, including understanding the implications of having a child with a disability, accessing support and information, practicing options, obtaining respite, and understanding legislation, policies, and rights as they pertain to disabilities. **Family training** is often delivered in the context of the wider system. Outreach to families has included development of **local, family-led options** to create improved respite. CL Manitoba also **links families to resources and information** regarding policy that affects their lives. For example, in **partnership** with the Children’s Coalition (a cross-disability group of eight disability organizations), a guide has been developed and families have been trained on the application of Bill 13, which specifies the conditions under which families can engage in dispute resolution regarding inclusion in the education system. This is an example of **practical policy testing**; i.e., new legislation actually being used effectively by the people it affects.

## III. Family Networking and Development

Community Inclusion begins and ends within the communities in which people live. The role of families in moving forward an agenda of inclusion is central and essential. Much of the work of CI partners is focused on providing families with the skills, tools, and information they need and/or connecting families together for mutual support and collective action. This represents the grassroots family mandate of ACLs, and the need to continue to build local and regional constituencies of families as a driver of systems change. Family groups, coalitions, and networks represent important vehicles to bringing about change and a central goal of all P/T ACLs is to nurture family networking and leadership.

### KEY LEARNING:

We have found that family networking and development supports system change because it builds a constituency to draw information and support from. We have also found that system change is advanced when families are supported to understand and “test” new policies and when family participation is linked to the goals of larger community initiatives.

There has been some debate about the relative worth of “family training” as a component of a systems change mandate, since it is individually focused and does little to impact the root problems in systems. The experience of CI projects has led to two fundamental points. First, a range of support and information is provided (variously called training, information sessions, workshops, etc.) because it is desperately needed by some families. Second, much of what is considered “family training” on the surface is in fact linked to a broader systems change agenda.

P/T ACLs’ mandate is to represent and connect to families. Often the best way to make initial connections is to address a range of family needs. Workshops and information sessions are **an effective way to access isolated families**, but also to connect them together in order to begin **building family networks**. Family networks and the events that sustain them (workshops, information sessions, mutual support) are **a prerequisite to political action**. If ACLs are to respond to the policy arena, it is crucial that a constituency of families is available and active in order to **gather information regarding their needs and experiences**. The collection and sharing of **family stories and experiences** is a central driver of network building.

Family networking and development can also bridge the gap between the creation of new policies and their actual use. Very often policy change is mistaken for systems change – a new policy is quite meaningless if people do not know about it or do not know how to use it to their advantage. ACLs often provide resources, workshops, and information sessions to **help families navigate and “test” new policies or practices**. Obviously, the benefits of a new policy cannot be ascertained without its actual application.

### CACL: National Family Leadership

One of the foundational aspects of the CI Initiative has been the **central involvement of family members** in all aspects of the Initiative. PT projects revitalized the active participation of families and CI has led to a very strong reaffirmation of the central role families have, and must have, within the CACL federation. Families, both within and outside the formal ACL structure, indicated a desire to have influence within the movement, and for the federation to demonstrate increased relevance to their needs. In response, CACL embarked on a series of efforts to re-establish itself as a family-led organization and to facilitate and nurture the emergence of family leadership. These efforts culminated in the **establishment of a committee on Family Leadership and Grassroots Engagement**. In addition, a **National Network of Family Leaders** was formed. These efforts, with support from P/T ACLs, enabled the Committee and the National Network to come together, to hold **national strategy sessions**, to meet with the Council of the Federation and to have **direct input into the ongoing development of this national strategy**. A quarterly newsletter, *Coming Together*, is now produced and shared with families across the country. Projects at the local level have encouraged and facilitated the **development and sustaining of family networks**. National and PTACL conferences have adopted a family focus. Efforts are ongoing at all levels to both engage and sustain family involvement, with agreement across the Initiative that all projects must now **ensure inclusion of a family leadership component**.

### AACL: Grassroots Family Leadership Development

The Alberta Association for Community Living (ACL) has many years experience in **developing and sustaining family networks** across the province. Their annual **Family Conference**, the largest and longest standing of its kind in Canada, is designed to **share knowledge, skills, resources, and stories** to inspire collective family action on inclusion in all areas of life. Participants at the conference share how families, with AACL's support and through their vision and passion, are changing lives and changing communities locally, nationally and internationally. AACL also focuses on **family leadership development**. Each year, 25 to 30 families meet for five weekend sessions to explore value based leadership, inclusion across the life span, strategic networking, advocacy, analysis of social policy, and actions. Former participants are invited to establish **mentoring relationships** with new participants and there is a shared expectation that new leaders link back to families in their home communities to further develop **grassroots family networks and engagement**. AACL has conducted **participatory evaluation research** to fully understand the process of leadership development in this area.



## NLACL: Community Policy Engagement in Inclusive Education

Systems change learnings in CI suggest that successful **policy development** and influence is greatly enhanced when **other change mechanisms** are involved. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living (NLACL) set about a policy change initiative in inclusive education that exemplifies this point. NLACL's **cross-stakeholder working group** on inclusive education created **four regional partnerships** in the province and conducted province-wide **focus groups to collect policy-relevant experiences from families and educators** regarding inclusive education. Based on the findings from the focus groups, a **policy position paper** (a "Vision of Inclusive Education") was prepared and **circulated to NLACL's networks**. An additional document, a "national review" of inclusive education policy, complemented the provincial policy document, and was similarly distributed to NLACL's networks. This process lent strong credibility to the policy development process while also **mobilizing families and educators** around the issue, securing interest and participation. Policy recommendations were presented at a **cross-stakeholder forum** attended by parents, educators, school board representatives, students, and community organizations. The prominence of the forum, and the credibility of the policy engagement process, led to an **audience with the provincial government** to address relevant inclusive education issues.

## IV. Policy Engagement and Political Leadership

Impacting policy is particularly difficult work. It requires a commitment of policy makers, government, and other organizations to make significant changes to policy and practice, and therefore to many different aspects of a system. Resistance and avoidance is common. As well, other forces exist in the system that draw attention away from the policy domain in question and/or affect it in incompatible ways. Strategies to impact policy – be it organizational, local, provincial, or federal – are very often underdeveloped. For example, the creation of a policy paper as an activity expressly designed to change policy does not explain how and why policy should be expected to change.

### KEY LEARNING:

We have found that policy engagement is more effective when it is locally grounded in people's experiences, comes from meaningful community input, and involves the participation of diverse people and organizations across sectors. New policies are also more likely to move forward if they are shared with stakeholders for review and broad endorsement.

In practice, the Community Inclusion partners have recognized this limitation and have often added a series of stages and supporting activities to the policy engagement process. These reflect a more developed and purposeful approach to policy change. Below are some of the assumptions of practice – represented as rough stages in a policy engagement process – as reflected by the experience of the CI partners.

1. ***Incorporate local context.*** If policy is not linked to local conditions then it is less credible. Policy positions that draw on policies in other jurisdictions and the literature are strengthened by considering local conditions and perspectives. This requires local survey research, gathering the lived experiences of citizens, and/or population analysis.
2. ***Meaningful input and broad application.*** Policy development must include meaningful input of diverse stakeholders and policy positions. Recommendations must be compatible with or considerate of multiple groups and organizations. This is crucial for a number of reasons. First, broad participation and endorsement of

multiple stakeholder groups promotes a degree of balance and credibility while making it more difficult for others to dismiss policy positions as “special interest”. Second, broad participation raises awareness about an issue, gives it momentum, and makes policy engagement action focused. ACLs have come to understand that they do not exclusively “own” policy positions – policy positions are best shared by a broader constituency.

3. **Active dialogue on policy implications.** Policy work is less effective when it stops at the creation of a paper or position. ACLs have promoted active dialogue about policy implications with stakeholders. This sustains momentum of the issue, allows people to “work with the policy”, and further establishes broad ownership of the issue. It is also clear that the previous stages (1 and 2 above) make this stage easier. In fact, if an organization creates a policy position in isolation and then brings it to other stakeholders, there may be a backlash because they were left out of the development process.

### CACL and People First of Canada: Deinstitutionalization

Deinstitutionalization is perhaps the issue of greatest common concern to CACL and PFC. In 2001, representatives from both organizations held a press conference in opposition to an announcement by the government of Nova Scotia to build a new institution. That collective reaction was the genesis for the **CACL PFC Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization**. This Task Force, comprising CACL, PFC and PT representatives, has since been instrumental in repositioning deinstitutionalization as a major issue of concern and priority within the federation. The Task Force has accomplished this by producing a **quarterly newsletter**, *Institution Watch*, which focuses attention on the need to close the remaining institutions in Canada, and a document that is **distributed to all MPs and MLAs** across the country. A website, [www.institutionwatch.ca](http://www.institutionwatch.ca), was created. A Declaration of Support for Community Living was drafted (and can be signed on-line) – the Declaration now has more than 7,600 signatures. Each year the Task Force hosts and/or participates in **conference sessions, forums, and public dialogues** on the issue of deinstitutionalization in order to maintain high visibility and profile for this issue. The Task Force has **authored a definition of an institution** that has gained international recognition, including official adoption by the European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL). The Task Force has **authored several position and policy papers on deinstitutionalization** and have presented and discussed these with senior politicians and bureaucrats in those provinces that still operate institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities.

### Community Inclusion and “Small Wins” in Policy Change

One of the CI lessons learned in the arena of **policy engagement and political leadership** is that small, incremental “wins” can sometimes be more effective routes to systems change, than are larger demands for fundamental change. For example, PEI ACL has been an active proponent of a “No New Admissions” policy to prevent the institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. Working in partnership with the new Disability Action Council (launched as a result of a provincial disability services review), PEI ACL is in discussions with provincial government to establish this policy. Other provinces are also advocating this policy position. Another example is CACL’s role (in partnership with the Council for Canadians with Disabilities) in advocating for the refundability of the Federal Disability Tax Credit, so that the poorest of Canadians with disabilities can also benefit. This does not represent an overhaul of income support programs for people with disabilities in Canada, but represents a small and concrete policy change (**endorsed by a cross-disability collective of Canadians**) that can be of significant help to people living in poverty. Recent and influential government reports are recommending this change.

4. **Access policy makers.** Policy recommendations are inert if they do not reach an audience that has the power to enact them. Past experience from ACLs suggests that mere dissemination (e.g., of a position paper) is often not sufficient to make a real impact. Policy engagement requires community mobilization and awareness raising around the issue. It is also more effective when the position is coming from a broad power base – cross-sectoral stakeholders in positions of leadership and representing different aspects of the issue. Under these circumstances, there is a greater chance of “getting the ear” of policy makers.



## V. Research and Knowledge Networking

Research and knowledge networking relies on and contributes to all the other mechanisms. Impacting systems in no small part involves strategic use and exchange of credible and relevant information. As discussed already, policy engagement is effective when relevant information supports the policy position. Partnerships are more credible and focused when useful information is available to inform decisions. Training programs are thought to be effective because they have previously been evaluated regarding their efficacy. In some ways research and knowledge networking is a driver of all the mechanisms discussed so far.

### KEY LEARNING:

We have found that research and knowledge networking is supportive of our work when it is aligned with our values, participatory, “owned” by multiple stakeholders, and is composed of multiple perspectives and types of information. We also found that knowledge exchange is effective when using a range of media and forums.

CI partners conduct research in a variety of forms to inform other aspects of their work. We examined the circumstances under which research appeared to make a difference – when research created attention, sparked dialogue, and/or helped move an agenda. There were a variety of lessons learned and they seemed to reflect the principles of community based research more broadly.

Research is more relevant when it is **grounded in the needs, experiences, and questions of the community members** that are living the issue. Research should be **participatory**, with community members guiding the questions, the purpose, and the use of the information. The credibility, reach, and profile of a research project is expanded when **multiple organizations endorse and contribute to the research**. This often provides more opportunities for use and action.

The relevance, breadth, and impact of research findings are enhanced when there is some balance between **reporting on the lived experiences of individuals** while providing data and information that can be readily **generalized** to others. This often requires a mix of qualitative information that provides a human face and quantitative data that describes groups and communities.

## NSACL: Research on Deinstitutionalization

Movement toward deinstitutionalization has been slow in Nova Scotia, and in some cases has regressed. The Nova Scotia Association for Community Living (NSACL) has recognized that advocacy efforts to challenge the myths and out-dated policy positions regarding deinstitutionalization can be aided by concrete **research information**. Partnering with People First of NS and the Disability Rights Coalition, NSACL is collecting information on policies and practices of aversive control in institutions and data regarding circumstances of institutionalization. For example, this research is examining the number of admissions, discharges, and deaths; “classifications” of disability admissions (intellectual, physical, psychiatric); circumstances and destination of discharge; average length of stay in institutions, and other information. This information will be used to critique policy that currently supports reinvestment in institutions over a community supports model. Alongside this work, NSACL is bringing the issue to Nova Scotians through **provincial-wide community forums** for feedback and for new advocacy initiatives.





### People First of Canada: *The Freedom Tour* Documentary

Community Inclusion has pursued innovative strategies of **knowledge networking and public awareness**. People First of Canada in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada wrote and produced a powerful documentary called *The Freedom Tour*. This documentary follows People First members as they travel across western Canada interviewing labeled individuals who have survived living in large institutions. The film has been screened in communities and at film festivals across the country and has been viewed by up to a million people. Over 4000 DVD copies have been distributed and will continue to be available through public libraries, community organizations, universities and colleges, and the National Film Board. This innovative, artful, and powerful film reflects a **highly effective vehicle for knowledge networking and exchange**, with the potential to influence **community attitudes and public policy**.

**Knowledge networking** refers to purposeful efforts to exchange and mobilize information. The Community Inclusion partners have vast experience in communicating information on issues, policies, research findings, and experiences to a wide range of audiences. **Multiple forms of media** have been utilized in the CI Initiative, including research reports, policy position papers, newsletters, online communication, community forums, photos, stories, theatre, music, video, and professional documentaries.

While knowledge networking represents a core activity within many of the Community Inclusion projects, the **movement up to the national partnership level** is equally important. The partners routinely share project findings and information via national meetings, forums, newsletters, and other organized partnership events.

Community forums are a common vehicle for knowledge exchange, as the partners have found that **face to face community engagement is a prerequisite to action**. Forums tend to have more impact when they are

### Yukon ACL: Inclusion and the Arts Community



The Yukon Association for Community Living (YACL) has approached community inclusion by investing in arts and recreation as a medium for **knowledge networking and public awareness**. In partnership with the Nakai Theatre, the “Ynklude

Performance Troupe” was created, which includes individuals with disabilities, their family members and supporters, and professional performance artists. YACL has contributed to performance workshops that showcase music, theatre, dance, and avant-garde productions that provide a message of inclusion. The **arts-based partnerships** and the productions themselves demonstrate **models and values of inclusion** to community members and participating organizations and institutions in the arts, recreation, and education sectors. Importantly, the **message of inclusion in the productions is experienced directly** by those involved – members of the Ynklude Performance Troupe have found the experience extremely rewarding. This story emphasizes the importance of **strong committed partnerships** as a mechanism to support knowledge networking and public awareness. YACL has become fully integrated into the arts community and it is the presence of **multiple stakeholders** (community groups, funders, the community) that makes such an initiative sustainable.

**strongly linked to other community inclusion activities, promote concrete actions, and are attended by a diverse range of relevant stakeholders** in the sector of interest. This means that other connections and partnerships are mobilized before forums happen (e.g., a multi-stakeholder research project on the issue to be addressed at the forum). Information generated at forums is then strategically used afterward. Community inclusion partners have used forums as vehicles to get cross-stakeholder input and facilitate planning in relation to community needs, project development, research, and policy positions.

Finally, policy recommendations, project development, and funding designed to support inclusion focused activities are often strengthened when they are **attached to findings of demonstration projects**. Demonstration projects – social interventions whose impact is carefully researched – are solution-focused and can lead to the description of best practices relevant to policy development.





## Conclusion: The Future of the Community Inclusion Journey

For more than 10 years, the National Community Inclusion Initiative has embarked on an inspiring journey. A journey led by the Canadian Association for Community Living and People First of Canada, and sustained and nurtured by the efforts of families, individuals with intellectual disabilities and a host of community and government partners within every Canadian province and territory. This document only begins to scratch the surface of the many incredible community development efforts that have promoted and championed inclusion within hundreds of Canadian communities. The inclusion agenda has enabled real advances to be achieved in sectors such as education, income and employment, family and disability supports, deinstitutionalization, and community living. More importantly, efforts toward systems change have resulted in positive impacts on the lives of thousands of Canadians with intellectual disabilities and their families.

From a social development perspective, Community Inclusion has been truly innovative and unique. Supporting local flexibility in community projects, while at the same time linking them together within a common national vision and framework, has led to great strides in advancing an inclusion agenda. Local flexibility has translated into greater responsiveness to the real and prioritized needs of individuals and families at the local community level. A national framework and strategic partnership has facilitated pan-Canadian knowledge exchange, growth and learning on how change happens. This national partnership has led to greater capacity to address systems-level barriers to full inclusion and citizenship, while promoting the central role of “on the ground” participation of real Canadian families who are living these issues.

This unique model of social change has also been beneficial due to the willingness of the partnership to reflect and change over time. An intentional effort to understand community impact led the partnership to adopt an organizational and systems lens when looking at exclusion – the observation that the practices and policies of organizations and systems can function to exclude. It followed that “changing the rules” of policies and practices would be a more effective way to advance

inclusion and thus a shift toward a more systems level focus was introduced.

This change in emphasis was a unified response, again resulting from a common effort and dialogue to understand what works and what does not. The Initiative has subsequently generated a wealth of learning about the systems change process – including a set of identified strategies that appear particularly important, especially in combination: *partnership building, organizational training, family networking and development, research and knowledge networking, and policy engagement and political leadership.*

Looking ahead, Community Inclusion is well-positioned in terms of skills and knowledge on how to effectively undertake and sustain this type of community development work. The Initiative has developed the necessary social capital (i.e. multiple cross-sector partnerships, a broad constituency of families and communities, internal leadership and capacity) to make real change possible and achievable.

The Community Inclusion Initiative has demonstrated that with organizational capacity, committed leadership, a common goal and purpose, strong diverse community partnerships, and a vision vested in individuals with disabilities and their families, it is indeed possible to create the capacity that communities require to successfully include people with intellectual disabilities. To include them in a way that promotes their roles as full citizens in society. The Initiative has reframed “inclusion” from an issue seen originally as being owned by the “community living movement” to one that more correctly speaks to issues of full citizenship, human rights and equal participation for all people.

CI has demonstrated that it is possible to change communities! It has demonstrated that through dialogue, sharing of experience, development of new understandings, and creation of networks and partnerships it is indeed possible to change exclusionary attitudes, laws, policies, and practices. It has demonstrated that inclusion does not have to be restricted to a philosophy and vision for communities in Canada, but that inclusion can become their new reality.





*50 years*

Canadian  
Association for  
Community Living

Diversity includes.

**PEOPLE  
FIRST  
OF CANADA**



**PERSONNES  
D'ABORD  
DU CANADA**