

COMMUNITY LIVING CHATHAM-KENT

1955 - 2006



Discovering Dreams . . . Connecting Lives

Community Living Chatham-Kent: A Brief History

1955 - 2006

Community Living Chatham-Kent is a charitable, non-profit organization that provides services and supports for people with developmental disabilities. The agency was founded in 1955 as the Chatham-Kent and District Association for Retarded Children, by a group of concerned parents who recognized the need for better educational opportunities for their children.

Through extensive fund-raising and political campaigning, the first program was started - the first of its kind in Kent County. Children now had access to an educational facility that had not existed before. Classes were slated to start on October 3, 1955, but with plans still underway, classes were held for two hours daily in the Arts Building of the Chatham Memorial Community Centre. The first teacher, Mrs. Gordon Lowes, was assisted by many volunteers when the school opened to eleven students.

By May 1956, local media were calling the program a success. Members of the executive were congratulated on an unusual record of accomplishment in the first year of operation, but the finances required to continue the program were desperately lacking. In June 1956, the agency made a public appeal for support for the \$6,000 needed to operate for the next year alone, with transportation of students to and from the school being the largest expense. To address this lack of funds, the agency's first major fund-raising campaign was held in June 1956: *Tag Days*.

In 1957, a new location for the school program was needed and the agency had already chosen a name for the school, *The Lord Tweedsmuir School*. By the end of the year, a decision was made that a school must be built to accommodate the growing number of students. The agency set its goal at \$15,000, and began the drive to raise the funds. According to the media, it was an uphill battle at first, with very little public support.

However, over the next two years, the people of Kent County seemed to rally and funds started coming in. The local Sertoma Club was a major fund-raiser in these early years, holding raffles on items such as a "stereophonic hi-fidelity set" and an automobile. During the later 1950's, Kleenex Tissue Week was a popular fund-raiser, with Sertoma donating the proceeds to the agency. In June 1959, a benefit dance was held at the Kinsmen Auditorium, featuring the music of the Guy Lombardo Orchestra with more than 2,000 people in attendance. Other local organizations that were very generous were the Chatham B'nai B'rith, Kinsmen and Kinettes, Moose Lodge, Zonta Club, Chatham Police Association, Rotary Club, and the Masonic Lodge.

In October 1958, ground was finally broken for the new Lord Tweedsmuir School, to be built on a section of ground on Stewart Street in Chatham. Finally, on April 25, 1960, the Lord Tweedsmuir School officially opened its doors with 32 students in attendance. At the time, the school was heralded as one of the best built and best equipped in the Province of Ontario. The Chatham Sertoma Club donated a sixth bus to the agency to help reduce transportation costs.

In 1963, the Board of Education donated a hut to be located at the Lord Tweedsmuir School for training adults, known as the Adult Rehabilitation Centre. Space was also used for adult training at the Community Centre, and in 1965, the adult training was relocated to Thames Theatre. 1965 also saw the first annual *Flowers of Hope* campaign which ran successfully until 1995 as a major fund-raiser.

The Board of Education assumed the operation of Lord Tweedsmuir School in 1968. Also this year, the Adult Rehabilitation Centre, by now known as ARC Industries, moved from Stewart Street to the Oriole Parkway School on the corner of Bloomfield Road and Park Avenue, and all aspects of the Association operated out of this location.

In 1972, plans were initiated for a nursery school for children ages 2-6, and in September 1972, the first Developmental Day Program opened at the former St. Anthony's School on the Bloomfield Road in Raleigh Township, with six children in attendance.

The agency voted to change its name to **Chatham-Kent and District Association for the Mentally Retarded** in 1973.

By 1974, plans were already in motion for moving the Developmental Day Program to a larger location in the city. In September 1976, the Developmental Day Centre moved to 20 Crystal Drive, and offered a full-day program to children aged 2-18 years. The new facility could accommodate more children, and offered housekeeping areas and a gym for older children. Kitchen facilities allowed for the preparation of noon meals and snacks.

The Adult Training Home at 122 Talbot Street in Blenheim opened with six residents in 1977. In 1978, the Group Home opened on Grand Avenue in Chatham, with eight residents. However, it closed in 1980 and some residents moved to 49 Taylor Avenue. In 1979, the Apartment Living Program was developed to assist adults who lived in their own apartments. The Weekend Parent Relief Program for children began operating out of Crystal Drive, with a capacity for five children.

In 1978, ARC Industries on Bloomfield Road underwent major renovations including an addition. Client capacity at this time was 45 clients; in 1979, the capacity had grown to 65 people and by 1983, a move was made to 995 Richmond Street with a capacity of 85 people. Today's capacity is 55 vocational, 65 pre-vocational, and 40 in supported employment in the community.

The Parkfield Restaurant and Gift Shop started out in 1979 as a coffee shop with six stools. By 1982, it had expanded to twelve seats, and by 1983 was a full-fledged restaurant and gift shop, sporting a seating capacity of 25! After an expansion in 1985, the restaurant had a capacity to seat a maximum of 65 patrons, and now serves more than 20,000 customers annually. Recent (1999) renovations at the Parkfield streamlined the check out area and gift shop displays, and in 2003, an accessible entrance was constructed. However, in December 2004 the Board of Directors of Community Living Chatham-Kent made the very difficult decision to close the Gift Shop on March 31, 2005, due to declining sales and deficits. On the positive side, this allowed the agency to expand the restaurant, which now includes a private meeting room used by many community groups.

With fate against us, the agency offices located at Park Avenue suffered major damages in a fire in December 1980. In December 1982, the Woodworking Shop at the same location suffered damages from a fire that was contained to that area.

Nineteen eighty-two saw the opening of the first children's residence at 35 Siskind Court, known as The Jean Thompson Children's Residence. Also in that year, the Administration Offices moved from 1099 Park Avenue to 390 Wellington Street. A Pre-Vocational Program began operating out of the Park Avenue location, with five people. It was moved in 1984 to 101 Stewart Street, the site of our original school in 1955. Currently, the location at Stewart Street supports 65 people.

In 1983, ARC Industries expanded with the leasing of 995 Richmond Street location, and has since grown to its current capacity of 95 workers. Goose Green Woodcrafters was founded in 1985 in the old woodworking facilities on Park Avenue. The Goose Green Seamers were set into motion in 1985, creating hand-sewn dolls that were sold at the Parkfield Gift Shop.

Also in 1983, separate funding for programs under the Homes for Retarded Persons Act were replaced by the Supported Independent Living Program, and in 1984, ten people relocated from Southwestern Regional Centre to the Supported Independent Living Program at Campus Parkway and Park Avenue. A second children's residence opened at 66 Houston Street.

In 1985, the Developmental Day Centre began to see changes due to the inception of Bill 82, which called for the integration of children over six years of age into the public school system. In January 1987, a DDC satellite program was started in Wallaceburg, and this program was integrated into the Wallaceburg Day Nursery in

December 1989. The DDC also saw a gradual integration of its students over 1987-1988, and finally in 1989, the Developmental Day Care became Pre-School Services, offering half-day preschool to children ages 2-6.

The Queen Street duplex opened in 1986, providing short-term care, and Supported Independent Living for three people. That year, the Adult Developmental Program began operation at Stewart Street, and in the fall of 1989, they began *High Flyers*, a balloon service.

The years 1989 to 1993 saw many changes and expansions in Residential Services to meet the needs of people who were part of the depopulation of institutions such as the Southwestern Regional Centre and Oxford Regional Centre. The Houston Street residence was purchased in 1991. Further expansions occurred in 1994, when a new location (St. Anthony's) opened, and an additional short-term care bed was added, for a total of two beds for adults and three beds for children.

In 1990, Pre-School Services was divested and amalgamated with the AIRS Program of the Kent County Children's Treatment Centre (pre-school) and the Infant Program of the Kent County Health Unit, to become Heritage Children's Centre of Kent County. Vocational Employment Services began with 12 people employed in businesses throughout the city, which has grown to 44 people in the year 2004. In addition, we currently support an average of 22 students with summer employment, and 11 people with the ODSP Employment Supports program. In cooperation with Wallaceburg Community Living, we support 15 students in the OPTIONS program.

A major change was made to the agency's name in 1990. In keeping with the purpose of a special General Membership meeting held on May 14, 1990, a vote was held to rename the agency **The Chatham and District Association for Community Living (CDACL)**. This change was seen as having a positive influence on the promotion of community living for people we serve, and being a reflection of the values and objectives of our agency.

In 1992, the Administration Offices moved from 390 Wellington Street West to 240 Grand Avenue West, necessitated by increased staffing and a need for accessibility. With the growth of our agency, there was a total of 184 staff; services were provided in various programs to 301 people. In 2004, the agency employs over 200 staff and serves more than 400 people.

The Executive Director, Bill Christian, retired on October 31, 1992, and Lu-Ann Cowell was the successful applicant for the position.

1993-94 was a year that goes down in history for the agency as a year of success under pressure! Premier Bob Ray announced the Social Contract, leaving the agency with a decrease in operating budgets over the next three years. With innovative approaches, we were able to meet this challenge for 1993-94; however, ensuing years would prove to be more difficult.

Because of moves from Brantwood and Woodstock institutions, we were able to address the needs of two individuals on the residential waiting list, as well as expand our Adult Developmental Program. The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) provided a one-time capital grant to address a portion of the cost of a wheelchair accessible van, and the funds to construct an accessible duplex. Through the efforts of the Fund-raising Committee, the ARC Service Club, and MCSS, the cost of the van was covered.

In 1994, in an effort to start to address our ever-increasing waiting list, a strategic planning process was started. As a result, our Goal, Vision, Commitment and Guiding Principles were redefined.

It was 1995, and the agency celebrated its 40th Anniversary! Over this year, some restructuring occurred, resulting in the development of Family and Community Supports, which encompasses Vocational Employment Services, Community Living Supports (Independent Living), and the capacity to assist families in connecting to community-based volunteer supports. A Supported Employment Program for teenagers was also a success.

Further restructuring and the movement of people to the St. Anthony Street and Baxter Street supported accommodations resulted in an expansion of Respite Services, with no additional funding.

In 1995-96, the government announced a 1% reduction in subsidies. In July of this same year, an additional reduction of 2.5% for the year was announced, along with a 2.5% reduction for 1996-97. This translated into actual dollars of close to \$300,000. In an effort to reduce the impact on the people we support, the agency made several changes to the service system to accommodate these reductions. Restructuring of the Supported Independent Living Program took place, which generated savings to address those waiting for residential support. Several more people moved to live independently, with supports in place, resulting in much increased self-esteem.

One of the biggest changes occurring in the plan to address cutbacks was the closure of the Richmond Street operation. Amazingly, this was done without reducing services to the people supported in the programs. Renovations took place at the Park Avenue location to accommodate this closure. The Calais Court residence opened in 1997, with two women moving from the Southwestern Regional Centre.

This year also included a new approach to the annual fund-raising campaign. Instead of the *Flowers of Hope* mailing, a door-to-door campaign, *Opening Doors - Community Support for Community Living*, was implemented. The campaign was successful not only in terms of monetary donations, but also in raising community awareness about the Association and the contributions of people for whom we provide supports. The volunteer support for this project was overwhelming! In 1997, it was replaced by the *Everybody Campaign*.

In June 1997, the Ministry of Community and Social Services released a document, *Making Services Work for People*. It called for sweeping changes in the delivery of services for children and for people with a developmental disability. Many families and individuals gave willingly of their time in the community consultation process. The Restructuring Committee, developed under Ministry guidelines, developed recommendations including the need to share information, have a system of joint access to services, and develop services from the Southwestern Regional Centre Community Team. The Ministry also released the *Individual Support Agreement*, an accountability document that would have major impact on our agency and the people we support. By March 2000, every person receiving support through this agency would have an *Individual Support Agreement*.

The *Heart of Change* document contained the recommendations developed by the local Restructuring Committee. The committee implemented some of the recommendations that dealt with access to services. The Coordinated Access to Developmental Services Committee (CADS) developed a single application form and complete information kit. This committee was created through a collaborative effort with our community partners, to ensure that families and individuals would not have to go from agency to agency to try to obtain supports, and that crisis situations will receive immediate response in our community.

During 1998-99, ten more people moved home from the institutions. The school-to-work program *SUCCESS* was a success and during the summer of 1998, the students were supported by the CDAFL in their own business, the Snack Attack, a snack stand on the St. Clair College soccer field. Several grants were received during 1998-99, giving the Association the resources for additional trips and community excursions for Respite Services. Another grant gave funds to the Self Advocacy Group, which the agency proudly supports.

Over 1998-99, a project to develop our capacity to support people with developmental disabilities in Blenheim and Ridgeway proved to be a great success. The *People Make A Community* committees in these two towns flourished with the help of volunteers and agency staff. This project is currently being developed in Tilbury.

Year 2000 - and we escaped the Y2K bug! Our preparations for any eventuality ensured that we have a very comprehensive emergency plan, and with Ministry funds, we were able to purchase generators for several locations.

Children and adults who use Respite Services experienced several marvellous trips, thanks to a grant received from the Harry Foster Foundation. In addition, some teenagers were able to attend the Thames Academy Summer Program through an Operation Red Nose grant. The Snack Attack expanded to two operations and had another successful summer run, providing great jobs for teens, thanks to a United Way grant.

Fund-raising efforts have also paid off this year. We developed a new partnership with CIBC, holding a walk-a-thon; our families ran a successful *Everybody Campaign*, a Penny Drive, a Tootsie Roll Sale, and a skating show helped round out this year's new events. People in Chatham-Kent were starting to recognize our name - **The Chatham and District Association for Community Living!**

September 2000 saw the opening of a new Adult Respite at 269 Forest Street, featuring accessible space for five adults, and a training apartment for up to two people. Several more residents of Southwestern Regional Centre were welcomed back into the community.

The extension of the day program at Crystal Drive and Fun Fridays at Stewart Street provided additional respite for aging families whose sons and daughters continue to live at home.

The year 2000 wound to an end with a celebration of 45 years of **Community Living . . . It Works!**

In 2001, a most rewarding partnership was established with the Municipal Library and our agency. Community Living opened a café in the main library, serving snacks, coffee and juices to library patrons. This proved to be and continues to be an excellent job opportunity for several young people.

In terms of community development, a curriculum package was developed for grade four classes throughout Chatham-Kent. The package is intended to raise awareness about disabilities and promote inclusion. Provincially, Community Living saw the inception of the "**Finally Got**" advertising campaign.

During the year, Community Living received funding for a project aimed at transitional-aged youth (18-21 years). **Making It Happen!** provides planning and connections for young people as they move into adulthood.

The biggest project of the year 2002 was the relocation of the administrative offices, the collapse and combining of other offices, and the relocation of the Stewart Street Day Program and of the Community Supports Program. Central administration moved to 650 Riverview Drive to offices that easily accommodated the residential program administration from Crystal Drive. The Stewart Street Day Program also moved to expanded quarters at Riverview Drive. These include a computer lab, music and fitness room, and a huge kitchen. Other rooms allow for contract completion and numerous other activities.

Community Supports moved to the renovated Stewart Street location—a very welcome relief for staff who did incredible work in very cramped quarters. This move also provided a plethora of opportunities for the people who receive service.

Once again, our agency was involved in the Provincial Communications Strategy, with the theme "*Living life, Living proof.*" across the province.

A most significant accomplishment in 2002 was our name change. On April 3, 2002, the agency's membership voted to change our name to **Community Living Chatham-Kent**. This was in response to the Provincial Communication Strategy to make Community Living a more recognizable name and to highlight the work we do. This necessitated a review by the Board of Directors of policies and by-laws of the Corporation. The by-laws were presented and approved by the membership at its Annual General Meeting held June 12, 2003.

A great deal of time and effort was spent changing our Vision, Mission and Belief Statements, and developing a four-year plan to address areas to improve the agency and service delivery. Every employee had input into the decisions.

In 2004, the Board of Directors was very involved in a number of policy changes and the development of leadership principles and skills to guide the work of the agency. During this year, we developed many internal, employee-driven committees to develop strategies to improve our organization. The work continues and we remain committed to empowering our employees to be creative and share their ideas in a respectful risk-free environment.

In October 2004, construction began on a new duplex residence on our Woods Street property, with occupancy expected by the end of February 2005. The six residents of Siskind Court and Bristol Drive would be the occupants of this new dwelling.

On October 29, 2005, we marked our 50th anniversary at a celebration at Club Lentinas, which included a dinner and dance, and live and silent auctions, and included keynote speaker, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, then Minister of Community and Social Services.

In 2005, we commenced planning for people moving to Chatham-Kent from Southwestern Regional Centre. Four women made Chatham their home in December 2005, and in 2006, a new duplex was constructed on Lacroix Street for six ladies from the Regional Centre. The year 2005 also saw our agency move into a partnership with the Chatham-Kent Children's Services to operate their cafeteria, a huge success for the diners but also for people supported by Community Living who work in the cafeteria.

During 2006, through community grant approvals, the agency has focused on more training in the areas of nutrition and physical fitness.

Community Living Chatham-Kent continues to thrive and adapt to challenges while keeping the needs of people at the forefront.

COMMUNITY LIVING PRESIDENTS
1955 - 2006

Anne Blackburn
George Thorpe
Donna Armes
Hazel McCracken
Jack Ford
Sue Paulucci
John Koning
Vera Begg
Carl McCracken
Edith Rumble
Leighton Rumble
Orville Howard
J. C. Sawyers
Tom Kerr
Jerry Grabec
William McConnachie
Jerry Hind
James McLandress
Carol Bailey
Ann Goudie
Doug Jackson
James McLandress
Stephen Repuski
Robert Birnie
Gary Collier
Dorothy Cook
Erin Ryan, Current President