

MONTHLY REFLECTION

My Life in Lockdown

*This month's Organizational Reflection originated with a blog post on the Disability and Faith Forum by **Ray Ellis**, a member of the Christian Horizons Advisory Council and his local Our Voices Matter. Ray lives in Ottawa, Ontario. He was assisted by **Chantal Huinink**, Coordinator of Organizational and Spiritual Life to write this account. We encourage you to read the full post at disabilityandfaith.org/my-life-in-lockdown/.*

I was born with cerebral palsy which makes it challenging for me to speak or use my arms and legs. I use a power wheelchair and Direct Support Professionals help me with personal care. It is difficult for me to express my thoughts and ideas to people who do not know me very well because many do not understand the way I talk or type. This takes patience and practice.

Living with the risks and restrictions of the pandemic is harder than normal for everyone. I have worried about my support staff coming down with coronavirus or coming down with it myself and causing those who support me to become very sick since my personal support needs do not stop just because the province goes into lockdown. I have also worried about what will happen if I get very sick and I am not able to advocate for medical treatment. My Christian faith helps me remain calm through this time. Psalm 46:10 says "be still and know." One of the things that I know is that God leads us, people who trust Him, out of trouble.

Due to my challenges you might think that I am not very active in my community but my challenges motivate me to advocate for myself and other people with disabilities. I am at high risk of coronavirus so I must be careful but it doesn't stop me from virtual connection with *Our Voices Matter*: a group of self advocates with disabilities. We keep informed of issues and challenges facing the disability community. We also work with allies in order to raise greater awareness of these issues and challenges.

Ray goes on to express his concerns with Bill C7, an amendment to Canada's Medical Assistance in Dying legislation. Many disability rights activists share similar concerns with the expansion of MAiD. You can learn more about this topic through the latest updates from Inclusion Canada at inclusioncanada.ca

[Bill C-7] suggests that people with disabilities do not have as much of a reason to live as those without disabilities or that they would rather die than live as long as possible. More Canadians with disabilities who could lead long lives might choose MAiD because they

don't want to be a burden to their families or be on long waiting lists for support services they need.

The quality of life for Canadians with disabilities might improve a lot if health care workers and lawmakers would focus on making it easier for Canadians with disabilities to live, rather than making it easier for us to die. In the meantime, I want my support workers, my doctors, my family and my friends to know that as hard as my life may seem I have a purpose; I lead a full life and I do not want to die earlier than necessary. If you have disabilities and you feel the same way you might want to let others know that too.

I hope that my story may encourage others to keep going, even if they face challenges. If I can do it then you can do it too because all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26). Trusting in God helps me to have a sense of peace about the future, no matter what happens. God prompts me to pray about issues that are important to me instead of worrying about them.

Ray finishes by sharing a song by Israel Houghton that has brought him comfort through the pandemic. You can read the full post here for the lyrics or listen to the song on YouTube: youtu.be/c4qH3PfyTlo

Making the Connection

- Ray's story is one of thousands – stories of people with disabilities who have been impacted by the pandemic in Canada. What stories have you heard from the disabled community that have given you new perspectives on life during COVID-19?
- Who else has a story or a unique perspective that should be shared more broadly? Let us know at communications@christian-horizons.org
- Ray continues to be active with *Our Voices Matter* and is involved virtually with his church community. What are some other avenues people with developmental disabilities can pursue to have their voices heard?