

## ONWARD Huddle: Engaging Stakeholders

### **HUDDLE TOPIC: SELF-ADVOCATES AND STAFF FIND COMMON GROUND**

By Jasmine Duckworth, Community Development Manager,  
in partnership with Our Voices Matter Ottawa

“Engaging Stakeholders” is one of our Onward strategic projects. Its current focus is to support people who use our services as advocates. Regular meetings between the Our Voices Matter Council and representatives from many of the communities where we serve is part of this work. Ray represents the Ottawa Our Voices Matter group at council meetings.

At a recent Our Voices Matter Kingston and Ottawa meeting, the self-advocates invited their new executive director, Stefan Thomas, to attend. The hope was to get to know one another better. Stefan answered many questions that evening, including whether he had pets (he does, a dog named Apollo and a cat named Pikachu!) and why he wanted to move to this area (it felt like coming home because he grew up nearby).

At one point, Ray asked, “what are your plans for Ottawa and Kingston?” Stefan replied that he will spend time listening and learning before making firm plans. He has three main priorities, though:

- 1) Recruitment and retention of employees,
- 2) Continuing to work with Our Voices Matter self-advocates and other people using services while building similar connections with families and community partners, and
- 3) Advocacy with government partners for increased funding and better service design.

Ray was encouraged by Stefan’s answer. The group realized that their priorities are similar:

- 1) Getting and keeping staff is a concern for self-advocates in Ottawa and Kingston. They are affected directly by gaps in support. The advocates have been sending emails and letters about staffing needs and have been helping to train new employees.
- 2) They have plans to run an information session so that family members and others can understand and support Our Voices Matter.
- 3) They have been writing emails and sending letters to their MPPs asking for an increase in funding to the sector.

It was then Stefan’s turn to hear from the advocates. His first question was, “what do I need to know to be a good executive director?” Our Voices Matter had two very clear answers: A good executive director will *listen* and will *be respectful*.

This meeting was a good start in the right direction for both Stefan and the self-advocates.

## CONVERSATION:

1. This month's huddle reminds us that we often share priorities with other people, especially with people who use our services. Our Voices Matter hadn't written down their priorities, but it was clear what was important to them.
  - a. Looking at how you spend your time at work, what are some of your priorities?
  - b. How would you describe the connection between your work and the strategic priority of "engaging stakeholders?"
2. Listen and pay attention to the people you serve. What are their priorities? How do their actions demonstrate what's important to them? What similarities do you see to the answers you gave in the previous question?

## TEAM CHALLENGE:

- Today, as a team, take action! Find out more about Our Voices Matter at this link: [christianhorizons.org/ourvoicesmatter/](https://christianhorizons.org/ourvoicesmatter/) Are people you support involved in OVM? If not, would they like to be involved? Talk to them to find out. They could email [ovmcouncil@karis.org](mailto:ovmcouncil@karis.org) to find a group meeting in their area.
- When considering who can be a self-advocate, keep an open mind. **Advocacy is for everyone**, and it is each person's decision whether they want to participate. Start the conversation and follow their lead.

## GOING DEEPER:

1. Everybody checks in at the **next team meeting!** How did we do with initiating conversations about self-advocacy and Our Voices Matter? Review the following slide show, created by self-advocates to show how to support advocates: [How To Support Self-Advocates \(by Self-Advocates\)](#)
2. **Celebrate** growth this month! Stories of self-determination and self-advocacy by people who use our services are encouraging stories to share with others if the person is willing. With their consent, email [socialmedia@karis.org](mailto:socialmedia@karis.org) or the social media Champion in your district so we can celebrate their gifts together!



Valuing  
People



Fostering  
Belonging



Serving  
Others



Celebrating  
Gifts