



ONWARD Huddle: Equipping the Hillside Church Community by Shirley Griffin

The Organizational and Spiritual Life team equips Karis Disability Service and our communities to celebrate people with disabilities and value their involvement and contribution. Strategically, much of our focus in “Equipping Communities” through the work of Onward this year has been to foster belonging in churches and fostering belonging through faith-based camps. We are sustained by stories that promote our core values of valuing people, fostering belonging, serving others, and celebrating gifts—stories that remind us of the profound impact of shared purpose and community transformation. One of these stories comes from Karis’ Family Camp partnership with Hillside Church in London, Ontario. Thanks to Shirley Griffin (South Program Manager) for sharing with us!

A few years ago, Pastor Jared and the Hillside congregation dreamed of hosting an event with people with disabilities. Pastor Jared knew so many families in need. He understood the challenges of caregiving and accessing support, and how important it is to be with others going through similar things. Hillside wanted to be a place of support and respite for these families but recognized it would be a huge undertaking. As they looked for partners, a church member connected Hillside with Karis Disability Services.

Pastor Jared recalled volunteering at Karis’ Paisley Camp as a teenager. He described this experience of supporting people with disabilities as a formative, significant time in his life. Excited about this partnership opportunity, a weekend family camp started to take shape.

Hillside’s building is a renovated bowling alley; they have a “Statement of Inclusivity” and consider themselves an accessible church where everybody belongs. However, when planning for the camp, they realized their stage only had one means of access – stairs! The camp keynote speaker uses a wheelchair and wouldn’t be able to access the stage. Pastor Jared realized that their commitment to belonging was an ongoing journey. The stage would need to be made accessible. It took planning, time, effort, and expense, but the church installed a ramp to increase people’s experience of welcome for years to come.

In November 2023, “Camp Corban” (named lovingly after Corban Panth, son of Ian and Vanessa Panth who passed away in 2019) supported six families to have an accessible family camp experience where they could grow in faith and have a genuine respite/retreat experience. It’s amazing what can happen with God’s grace and a church that’s willing to follow His desire that *everybody* is included in the Body of Christ.

CONVERSATION:

We all have an impact and influence on one another as we work together.

1. Hillside Church identified a barrier to belonging with their stage and took action to address it. Can you think of a time when you or your team identified and resolved a barrier to belonging? What impact did it have?
2. Camp Corban brought together families, caregivers, and a faith community. How can partnerships between Karis and faith communities help educate and advocate for all spaces to be places of belonging?

TEAM CHALLENGE:

1. Take time today to discuss and celebrate the unique contributions of each team member. What specific actions or qualities have positively impacted your team or the people you support?
2. Between now and the next team meeting, brainstorm one action you or your team can take to create a more welcoming and accessible environment for everyone—whether in your workplace, your programs, or your physical spaces.

GOING DEEPER:

1. Share your reflections!
At your next team meeting, take time to discuss how your challenge activity went. What actions did your team take to foster inclusion or celebrate each other's contributions?
2. Spotlight stories of impact!
If you have stories of how your team created a welcoming environment or strengthened relationships, email Elizabeth at erobertson@karis.org or connect with the Social Media Champion in your district. Let's celebrate how our actions reflect our values and make a difference in the lives of those we support!



Valuing
People



Fostering
Belonging



Serving
Others



Celebrating
Gifts