

## **David Nickerson, *Onward Project Specialist – Strategic Initiatives***

The Strategic Initiatives team hosted 26 Engaging Everybody Sessions from late January to early April. These were opportunities to listen and to learn from various employee groups as well as Our Voices Matter Council self-advocates, and Community Advisory Networks. We shared a brief presentation, but spent most of the time listening to people share their unique perspectives on what we should prioritize in [our next 3-year strategic plan](#).

We believe in valuing every person across our organization. That means engaging with the people who use our services, as well as hearing from families and employees. We benefit from taking the time to hear from and valuing *everybody* – striving to get better at as we invest in co-design.

Our first of these 26 sessions took place in Cobourg on January 24, we connected with the Program Managers from Cobourg and Peterborough. Recently, I followed up with Tammy Smith, Priscilla Holden and Robin Hegadoren, who were part of that first engagement group. I wanted to hear what it meant to be asked for their perspective.

### **Sessions Well Received:**

The Program Managers said that the sessions were well-received because they were conducted in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. After Naima Samuel (Manager of Strategic Initiatives) gave a brief presentation, the Program Managers were then divided into 3 breakout sessions to discuss what needs, challenges and opportunities they saw for Karis. During the sessions, Naima documented what each group openly shared. Naima then facilitated open and honest discussion about all the topics that the participants had raised to gain clarity. The participants then collectively prioritized which things had the most urgency and impact.

The team expressed that the engagement was positive and open, allowing them to share concerns and input openly. Participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. They felt heard and accepted, sharing ideas that wouldn't have come up in a typical meeting context.

### **Eagerly Awaiting Next Steps:**

The team also shared that people are eagerly waiting to see the outcomes of the sessions and how the feedback will be implemented. There is a strong interest in working together toward tangible results based on the feedback from the sessions.

This makes sense and is something we take seriously. "When organizations ask for feedback and then do nothing with it, they erode trust faster than if they had never asked in the first place."<sup>1</sup> All our input is essential in co-designing our future work across the organization – working together to promote communities where everybody belongs.

Having attended almost all of the 26 sessions, it's encouraging for me to see how gifted, insightful, committed, and open everybody is! It was great to see common themes popping up across different groups, at times showing that what some teams hope for aligns nicely with what other teams already have in mind to do. There are opportunities to collaboratively identify our main themes and the specific details that vary for each group within those themes.

I'm excited to see how people supported, families, caregivers, partners, and our employees respond to being asked their priorities at the upcoming [Karis Connected Everybody Engages sessions](#). I hope you'll join us and have your voice heard!

### **Making the Connection**

- When someone asks your input, how do you know that the person is sincerely interested in your input?
- Think about when you last asked a person using Karis services about their input. Describe how the person shared their input both in words and actions and emotions? What actions did you take to give them confidence to share again?
- What are some ways you can continue to nurture a posture of listening and learning with your team?
- Share the opportunity to people supported, families and caregivers to be asked their opinion on what Karis can do better at the [Karis Connected Everybody Engages sessions](#)!

*Note that editing assistance for this Reflection was provided by Microsoft Co-Pilot and Keith Dow.*

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard Business Review, "[The Feedback Fallacy](#)"