

Victoria Gravesande, Content Writer & Storytelling Coordinator

Last month at Karis Connected Conference in Toronto, Dzidra Halar, a founder of Our Voices Matter, sat in front of one of the breakout rooms. Next to Dzidra was Brianne Taggart, who is supported by Community Living Essex and president of New Day, a group of self-advocates in the Essex, Ontario area.



Together, Dzidra and Brianne led an interactive session on accessible and inclusive meetings, explaining how leaders can reach their audience by being clear and engaging.

“It’s important because we need to find ways to communicate and share,” said Brianne, “So everybody is included and no one is left out.”

Dzidra and Brianne both serve on the Community Living Ontario (CLO) Council. This council is made up of self-advocates from across the province. As elected members of this council, Dzidra and Brianne combine their shared knowledge to educate others and influence change in their communities and in Ontario.

“I can use my voice to help make the world a better place and also stand up for others and help them have a voice too,” said Brianne.

The CLO Council has been advocating to the Ontario government for an increase to Passport funding. Passport is a reimbursement program for adults with developmental disabilities. It helps people pay for community participation supports and resources, and respite. The CLO Council also advocates for the 53,000 people on waitlists for government-funded disability services in Ontario, through a campaign called “Waiting2Belong.”

“It’s important for Karis and Community Living to work together,” Brianne said. “To build connections with each other and to come up with ideas. We could help each other.”

When we work together, we can create more opportunities for self-advocates to lead, share ideas, and influence real change across many cities and even provinces. Organizations like Karis and Community Living Ontario are working toward a common goal of awareness for the urgent needs of people with developmental disabilities, and an increase for self-directed funding, and

funding to the sector. This work is mirrored in Saskatchewan through advocacy efforts by Our Voices Matter, and collaboration with the Ministry of Social Services.

Over the next three years, Karis is focused on strengthening our partnerships within communities, including other developmental services agencies, our government, and churches.

We can accomplish so much more when we work together!

“Christ has put each part of the church in its right place. Each part helps other parts. This is what is needed to keep the whole body together. In this way, the whole body grows strong in love.”
(Ephesians 4:16, NLV)

MAKING THE CONNECTION:

- Our theme verse talks about each part helping other parts. We often think about this with people helping each other, but how have you seen this work with other organizations, government representatives, and churches?
- What barriers might prevent others from partnering well with Karis Disability Services? How can we help overcome these barriers?

NEXT STEPS:

- Ontario residents can learn more about the “Waiting2Belong” campaign and sign the petition [here](#).
- Stories of how people partner with us are encouraging to share with others. With the person’s consent, email communications@karis.org or the social media Champion in your district so we can celebrate!



Valuing
People



Fostering
Belonging



Serving
Others



Celebrating
Gifts