



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS,
CREATING FUTURES

Abilities Centre is a not-for-profit facility in Whitby, Ontario that offers programs in arts, life-skills, pre-employment training and fitness /recreation. The Abilities Centre was conceived and constructed to serve the needs of a growing number of vulnerable groups in Canada.

Our vision is to:

- Educate and inform people through, research and development, on the need to celebrate the diverse backgrounds and conditions from which we all come;
- Provide an environment of equality and understanding, thus enhancing the lives of people of all ages and abilities, and setting the standard to which all future facilities will be held;
- Serve as a Canadian Centre of Excellence in providing a framework for changing the social fabric of Canada and the way in which we view the integration of people of all ages and abilities.

We believe that following three groups are among the most vulnerable Canadians when we look at quality of life issues and positive life outcomes.

1. Children & Youth – Ages 6-14

Some of the issues faced by this group include inactivity, early onset of obesity which leads to social isolation and bullying, as well as both physical and mental health issues. A multitude of research would indicate that physical activity activates the brain for learning and yet many of these young people spend all day sitting at their desks in classrooms. After school programs such as those offered at the Abilities Centre in a supportive environment have been effective in engaging students. Group play and team activities provide a social situation that builds self-confidence as well as having the opportunity to make new friends.

Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities' overarching goal is to promote healthier Canadians through sport and recreation, and to ensure greater accessibility and opportunities for Canadians with disabilities.

2. Young Adults – Age 21+

Young people age out of secondary school at 21. If they have a disability or special needs, they often 'graduate' from the security of the school environment with no immediate destination (post-secondary or employment). When they leave high school a number of issues emerge – loss of peer group, social isolation, and an



immediate need for a full-time care giver. This caregiver is usually a parent or close family member that is trusted by the young adult resulting in the caregiver exiting the workforce.

Abilities Centre developed a program called Thrive which has been delivered for the past three years with great success. Young people now have a place to go where they are engaged in meaningful activities with a supportive staff and peer group. Many of these young people could be employable with extra support and training. Abilities Centre does not currently have the capacity to provide this training beyond an introductory Employability Skills program but sees a desperate need. Additionally, the Thrive program is one that has tremendous potential to address the gap that is now created with the closing of sheltered workshops in Ontario. This program could be rolled out across the country with appropriate funding and Abilities Centre is prepared to take the lead.

Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour's overarching goal is to help Canadians get the skills they need for good quality jobs.

Minister of Families, Children and Social Developments' overarching goal is to increase Canadians' economic and social security. All Canadian children deserve a real and fair chance to succeed, and all Canadians should be able to live with dignity.

3. Seniors

The fastest growing demographic in our area is seniors. As people acquire functional disabilities as the result of aging and the development of chronic health conditions such as COPD, diabetes, and osteoarthritis, there are significant additional pressures put on the health care system. Programs such as Cardiac & Respiratory Maintenance for people following respiratory or cardiac rehabilitation programs or TIME for people with neurologic conditions such as acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis, or following a stroke, are currently offered at Abilities Centre to provide opportunities for individuals to engage in exercise and physical activity in a supervised setting and connect with other experiencing similar conditions. These programs are fundamental to improving overall health and quality of life and they lead to decreased need for access of the health care system. Abilities Centre is able to offer a dedicated program to members at a significantly reduced cost but even



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these programs will require some additional funding to continue to grow. It would be wise for the federal government to invest in these efficient and cost effective programs at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Canada's most vulnerable. Each of the issues raised speak directly to a better quality of life for Canadians and a better outcome for our economy.