



# INTEGRATION ACTION FOR INCLUSION EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY (ONTARIO)

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[www.integration-inclusion.com](http://www.integration-inclusion.com)

## CEO Report for 2017

4 December 2017

2017 has been a year of hard work, growth, and learning for IAI!

We have continued our **outreach to school boards and educators** with professional learning on inclusive practices. As CEO, I have spoken about inclusive values and teaching strategies, at conferences and workshops, to audiences of childcare workers, educators, unionized support staff, family support workers, and administrators. The City of Toronto has been a hotbed of professional learning around inclusion. (*Who knew we could ever say that about Toronto?*)

**IAI is growing.** This year, we have been contacted by a record number of communities seeking to form a chapter of IAI. The reasons for this are many, and are often worrisome. Across Ontario, our veteran inclusion pioneers are concerned by school boards cutting inclusive supports and creating more separate programs. In some communities, families have organized to demand more separate placements. School board leaders have asked us to ally with them to explain to families why inclusive education is an important commitment. The Ministry of Education even attempted to develop a planning framework for students with complex needs that presumes that these students cannot access the regular curriculum and should have entirely separate programming, reinforcing the idea that the regular classroom is not appropriate for these students. **The need for IAI as a voice and leader for inclusion is also growing.**

The Board of Directors of IAI held a **strategic planning retreat** in September to plan how to better support the formation of new IAI chapters, the regeneration of old chapters, and the development of new inclusion leaders across Ontario. IAI has expanded, with new leadership from parents of younger children, to bolster the work of our veteran parent leaders.

In 2017, we held more **family workshops** than ever before. We have talked with families across southern Ontario, from Windsor to Brockville, about what is most important to them for their son or daughter. We have heard so much consensus that families want their son or daughter to have a good life in the community once school ends. They want opportunities and support for employment, continued education, meaningful volunteer work, real choice and security in housing, and close reciprocal friendships. The problem is that many families are frustrated that their local school does not seem prepared to help them achieve this future. Families explain that they have advocated for more specialized and separate programming after so-called “inclusive” placements appeared to have failed.

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**Ontario is at a crossroads with school inclusion.**

**IAI is leading the way forward.**

We will continue to influence school boards and educators, but **our work needs to focus on supporting families**. We have scoured Canada and the US for best practices to help families develop a strong vision for their son or daughter's adult life, and then plan the support to make that good life happen. This fall, we continued our own professional learning, and brought a family leader from the University of Missouri Kansas City to share the free, exceptional Charting the LifeCourse tools and resources they have created for families. We dug into the rich experience right here in Ontario, in communities like Windsor, to learn from our veterans of family support like the tireless Windsor Essex Family Network, to identify what needs to be adapted in these tools to make them the most helpful to families in Ontario.

Through the fall of 2017, we partnered with allies like Community Living associations in Windsor and Kingston, with Extend-A-Family Toronto, BDACI, the Windsor Essex Family Network, and even some school boards to pilot workshops to support effective support for **planning with families**. In the New Year, we will expand on these projects. In memory of the **pioneer social inclusion activist Gabe West**, son of Martha Eleen, we will launch our first workshop series in Toronto. Gabe's greatest legacy is in the lives he impacted through deep reciprocal relationships. Our work with families will grow that legacy. Over six months, we will work with families to develop a broad vision for their son or daughter, then dig deeper into tools and strategies to strengthen friendships and relationships, pursue employment and post-secondary education, and strengthen citizenship, advocacy, and autonomy in areas like housing and communication.

**IAI is rising to meet the challenge of inclusive education and inclusive lives in Ontario.**

Watch, in the new year, for a completely new website and many more online resources. Thank you for your support of our grassroots movement! Your generous donations help us make all this happen. Renew your membership! Become involved with IAI, in your local chapter, or as a SEAC representative. We will work with you to find the partners and resources to support families and school systems in your area.

Sincerely,

Erin Sheldon, M Ed  
Chief Executive Officer