



Introduction

People with intellectual disabilities across Ontario are advocating for support to get online during times of social distancing.

“We need to see people’s faces on video calls. So many of us don’t get support to learn how to use computers or get on Zoom calls. Without the contact we are getting depressed and are too isolated” - Veronique, Respecting Rights self advocate.

During COVID-19 we have all seen wide-scale changes in how we communicate with others in our day-to-day lives. COVID-19 has also brought to light that many of those with intellectual disabilities are left out of online communications. In light of the ongoing physical distancing practices facing our communities, we call for change in order to ensure that people with disabilities can Get Connected.

Like many of our communities, people receiving developmental services have been disproportionately impacted by new rules and restrictions under COVID-19. The Passport program, funding which people receiving developmental services can use to help improve their independence and living in their community, can be spent on certain internet services and programs. However, Respecting Rights has learned from self advocates that it is not enough to get them connected. Because many in developmental services require support to learn how to use devices and get online, the gap is still there.

Now more than ever, internet access has become essential to contact and keep in touch with one’s loved ones. With many programs and services moving online, internet access is increasingly important for keeping connected with one’s community and accessing important resources. Many of our Respecting Rights members feel left behind or isolated as a result, and feel like their mental health and wellbeing is suffering as a result.

Even when it is affordable, people receiving developmental services still face barriers when trying to Get Connected. Some people with disabilities find it difficult to learn how to use these devices, or require physical assistance in operating them. Others can use their devices, but feel uncomfortable doing so because of a lack of privacy in their living situation. We need to ensure that all barriers to using the internet are removed.



Get Connected

Respecting Rights, a project of ARCH Disability Law Centre that is led by people with disabilities, is launching the Get Connected campaign to ensure that everybody receiving developmental services has access to community participation and contact with friends and family via internet. Internet access is essential during COVID-19 and beyond, in order to stay connected to one's loved ones, to participate in our communities, and to improve our mental health and wellbeing.

Respecting Rights asks that people who work at Developmental Services Agencies, make internet access for people who need it a priority. We ask that agencies provide opportunities for people to access the internet, and assist them in learning how to use their devices so that they can maintain their important connections.

If you are somebody who cares about making sure that people with disabilities are not left behind and are not further isolated during COVID-19 and beyond, make sure to contact Minister Todd Smith, Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and tell him you want to make sure that helping people with disabilities Get Connected is a priority for our government.

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Contact

For further information on the Get Connected Campaign, and to learn directly from people with disabilities who are affected by this, please contact Respecting Rights:

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