

COMMUNITY LIVING
Parry Sound *Respecting Abilities, Inspiring Possibilities*



Recover, Reconnect, Rebuild.

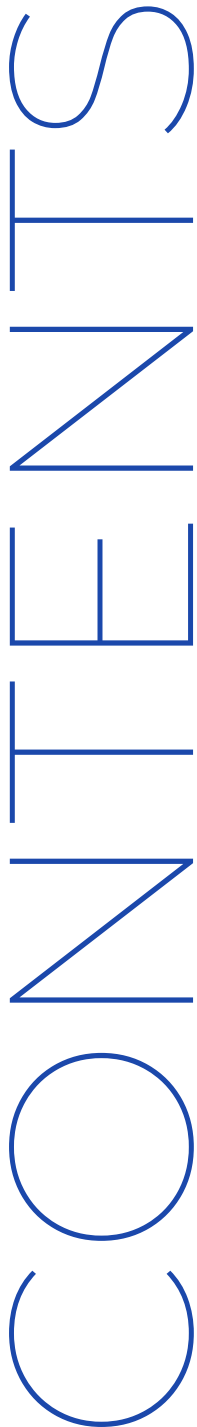
Project Summary



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3RS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Community Living Parry Sound extends its gratitude and sincerest thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Community Living Parry Sound (CLPS) owes its ability to take on innovative and forward-thinking projects to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF).

Over the past two years, CLPS has been a recipient of OTF's Resilient Communities Fund. The most recent grant of \$142,000 supports the development of the organization's leadership team and expands the role that technology plays in the lives of the people we support to learn, communicate, and socialize.

It is through this support from OTF that our agency is recovering from the impact of COVID-19 stronger, more resilient and with new services that future-proof the organization.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Living Parry Sound (CLPS) spent the past two years building systems and capacity to hybridize our support services in response to the isolation and restrictions that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. The fruit of this labour was an online community for the people we support and their support staff; an app (Community Connect) that housed a great variety of virtual content, events, and resources created to bring people together during a time of separation. This year, however, as the larger community began to see some normalcy in everyday life, staff and leaders at CLPS quickly realized that it would be some time before we could return to what we once considered "normal".

Enter the Recover, Reconnect, and Rebuild (3Rs) Project – thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) and the Resilient Communities Fund, CLPS has taken a three-pronged approach to our post-pandemic resiliency journey; the 3Rs Project has allowed us to make great strides because of the \$142,000 grant received in early 2022.

The greatest effort to date has been placed on the first R – *Recover* – as we felt it was best to heal our foundation by fostering resiliency and supporting staff and leaders to recover from change fatigue and burnout. This process has taken shape in the form of training opportunities – for individuals, leaders, team building and coaching – with external consultants who specialize in non-profit optimization. The progress is evident in inter-team collaboration and communication, as well as lower staff turnover.

The *Reconnect* and *Rebuild* efforts are a continuation of the work that began in the years before with the hybridization of our services – namely, creating an online community that serves as a way to connect people to their interests and allows them to explore new ones. We recognize that the way of the world is changing, and with that, the funding model for the Developmental Services sector. Resources will eventually go directly to individuals rather than organizations, giving people more choice in how they wish to spend their funding. The work being done here is a way to future-proof our service delivery both in reaffirming our place as the agency of choice - the organization people choose to receive services from - and providing people with the choice of how they wish to receive services (virtually, in-person, or hybrid). Progress has been made here through the creation of a new service called The Bridge that seeks to connect people to each other, to technology, and to their community.

The greatest lesson learned so far is that everything we do is connected. We cannot provide the best possible support to the people receiving our services if those who are providing the services are burnt out and uninspired. Professional coaching to build the capacity and skills of staff and leaders will ensure that our foundation is strong. With a galvanized workforce, CLPS is ready to rebuild with reinspired individualized support services that connect people to their community. Our journey to post-pandemic resiliency is a lengthy one and full of challenges, but because our staff and leaders are united by a common goal of providing the best support to people with disabilities, it's one we're set to accomplish.

ABOUT THE 3RS PROJECT

The purpose of the 3Rs Project is to increase the agency's capacity to heal from the traumatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project has three pillars, each born from a distinct need:

01

RECOVER

To support our leaders and staff in recovering from the change fatigue and burnout that is widely experienced.

02

RECONNECT

To redefine the concept of 'community' and pivot to both realize and incorporate the power and potential of online communities.

03

REBUILD

To develop a hybrid model of service delivery, one that future-proofs our agency and offers people supported choice in how they receive support.

Though the entire report seeks to summarize each aspect of the organization's post-pandemic growth and recovery journey, the reader will note the disproportionate focus on the third goal, *REBUILD*. This is because we have come to think of it as a cumulation of the *RECOVER* and *RECONNECT* goals; it is where we have witnessed the most evolution and deviation from the original plan.

RECOVER AND RECONNECT

A brief update

RECOVER - Building Resilience

Staff wellness is the motivation behind this goal. Just as one cannot pour from an empty cup, one cannot provide the best possible support to another if they themselves need support. We have been fostering staff resilience through a series of skills development and team-building workshops led by two organizational development consultants **Tina de los Santos and Lianne Picot**. The consultants tailored workshops to meet the unique needs of each team. Supervisors participated in a *Leading from the Middle* session on June 22nd and October 7th. The Coordinator team participated in a leadership skill development session on June 23rd, and the Residential teams met separately on July 28th and October 6th for team and trust-building sessions.

By focusing our efforts on repairing the foundation of our organization - the workforce - the payoff has been evident in inter-team communication and collaboration, and subsequently, lower staff turnover.

RECONNECT - Building Community

This goal is a continuation of the work we started in 2021 after redefining our understanding of 'community' when we built the *Community Connect* app for the people we support. In April 2022, the team member that was responsible for managing the app took on the role of Community Activator. In this new role, using both the organization's planning and facilitation process and their pre-established rapport with people supported through *Community Connect*, they effectively began to oversee the progression of this goal.

Through *Reconnect*, we create both new opportunities and links to existing resources that not only support people to lead more connected lives but also to have choice in the matter. The following is the process map used by the Community Activator in the provision of choice-directed support:



REBUILD

A comprehensive look at service delivery

REBUILD - Building Capacity

The final goal of the 3Rs Project was born from the understanding that, for better or for worse, the COVID-19 pandemic has permanently altered what it means to be a human services provider. For context, the impetus for the shift towards offering *choice* in support, at least for the Developmental Services sector, came just before the pandemic when a significant change in the funding model was announced. Rather than organizations receiving funding, individuals and families will be allocated their own budgets to ultimately decide how and from whom they wish to receive support (read: where they spend their funding). As we navigated the first few weeks of the pandemic, we quickly realized that our ability to be the 'Agency of Choice' - the organization people choose to receive services from - was challenged by our inflexible model of service delivery. To ensure the continuity of care and support for the members of our community most vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, we needed to adapt and re-imagine the support we offer.

With *Rebuild*, we seek to modernize and future-proof our services – both in reaffirming our place as the 'Agency of Choice' and in providing people with choices in how they wish to receive support.



“
[Virtual support] was really important. A connection was created and some people really thrived on it.
-Project Participant



When we combine the staff resilience that was fostered during our *Recover* efforts and the new approach to the concept of 'community' that was explored in *Reconnect*, we created a galvanized workforce that is ready to provide individualized, choice-directed support to people who want to find belonging. This readiness, unfortunately, did not coincide with the implementation of our first swing at virtual service delivery - also known as the *Community Connect* app. A valuable lesson that we had to learn was that we cannot provide the best possible support to the people receiving our services if those who are providing the support are burnt out and uninspired.

The app, our solution to the widespread isolation and lack of connection, was a safe space for people to explore interests, attend virtual events, and connect with other community members. In theory, *Community Connect* was the perfect vehicle to deliver virtual services to the people that CLPS supports. It did tick all the boxes for a small group - roughly 15 people were regular participants in the online community - sharing pictures and personal updates, accessing courses, and attending virtual events. However, for the majority of potential members, the app fell short of expectations and its implementation and use were met with an underwhelming response (quotes from staff below).

"The glitches with technology are frustrating for staff and the people we support. It's hard to teach tech when you have to use tech to teach."

"I don't see that people want us to use technology in 1:1 services. They want to get out into the community. Tech and social media should be an aide to delivery only."

We commissioned an external evaluation of our virtual services one year after launching *Community Connect*. The evaluation ascertained what had and hadn't worked in our provision of virtual services and involved 14 individual interviews with leaders, coordinators, and direct support staff. In line with the recommendations of the 29-page report, the organization made the difficult decision to pivot and close down the app in early 2023.

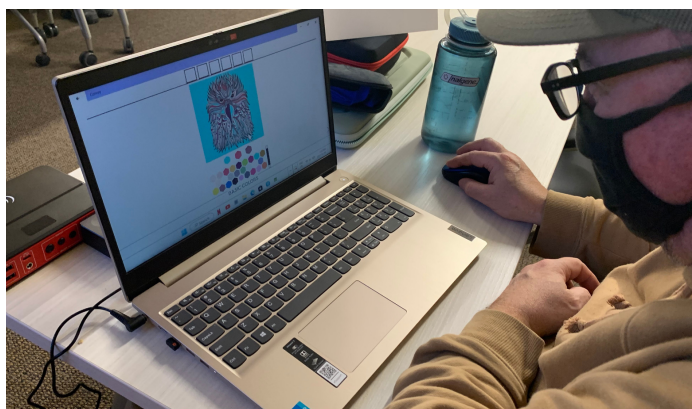
<u>Goal</u>	<u>Benefit</u>	<u>Challenge(s)</u>
Build confidence and competency to explore the digital world	Safe, exclusive online community	Too many steps for some to access easily (without support)
Learn the norms and expectations of online communication	Opportunities for social interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations for integration of adaptive/accessibility features • Not many active members
Having an innovative method of service delivery in place	A space for community information, resources and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative perception of its purpose • Lack of staff buy-in • Lack of capacity to train and support with app on an ongoing basis

After communicating the plan to close the app with its most dedicated members, we realized that a transition plan was needed – that continuity of the type of support people received while using the app would ensure that the connections made there were not in vain. Born out of this need to maintain connections (and to support people to build new ones) is a service aptly named *The Bridge*. The service launched in January 2023 and supports up to 12 participants every Wednesday afternoon. The two-hour sessions take a three-pronged approach to supporting people to build connections to their community. First in creating a safe space for people to hone their social skills, next in exploring technology and its many adaptations and benefits, and finally in learning about all the ways to become involved and ultimately find a sense of belonging in the community.

Because the most active members of *Community Connect* were given priority in registering for this new service, the facilitators have ensured that *The Bridge* is a continuation of the support that made the app as impactful as it was. Additionally, we ensured that direct support staff were on board with what we hoped to achieve and that it was understood that *The Bridge* is complimentary to their typical support, not a replacement for it. With this in mind, one cannot help but feel excited and hopeful for the future inclusivity and vibrancy of our community as participants hone their skills, gain confidence, and build meaningful connections.

Creating Connections to the Community

- GET TOGETHER**
Socialize, share your interests, and discover all that our community has to offer you.
- LEARN TOGETHER**
Explore technology and learn how it can benefit your life.
- BELONG TOGETHER**
Find fun things to do and cool places to go with just the right amount of support.



NEXT STEPS

Three things that CLPS continues to work on as the 3Rs Project wraps up:

Family Support Group

Creating an online community for CLPS's Family Support Network that allows families to build connections and reduce isolation.

- Share experiences
- Build advocacy skills
- Access community resources and supports



Offering Choice

Continuing to offer choice and flexibility for people in terms of communication preferences and in the delivery of support.

- In-person
- Phone/FaceTime/Text message/email
- Zoom

1:1 Tech Support

People AND staff are encouraged to book 1:1 appointments in our in-house tech lab, made possible by OTF funding.

- Increase tech literacy
- Explore/trial new devices
- Troubleshoot problems and build confidence



Community Living Parry Sound extends its gratitude and sincerest thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for allowing us to make incredible progress on our journey to post-pandemic resiliency. The lengthy journey continues past the conclusion of the 3Rs Project, but because staff and leaders are united and galvanized by a common goal, it's one we're set to accomplish.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The staff at CLPS work diligently and tirelessly to support people with developmental disabilities and their families to build better lives in their community. We collectively share a vision of a community where all people have the power and freedom to determine the life they want. Thank you to the staff at CLPS for never giving up on our mission and our vision.

Thanks to the steadfast leadership of our prior Executive Director Jo-Anne Demick and current Executive Director Brad Horne who shared the ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of this project. Jo-Anne spearheaded the initial direction and Brad provided operational oversight to complete the project.

To Leigh Armstrong and Bobbi Hanna, we acknowledge the pioneering of a new era in Family Support Services after an intense period of isolation has been slow and steady. Thank you for your commitment to reconnecting families in both your support and in the creation of the Family Support Group.

Danielle Monroe accepted the role of Community Activator for the 3Rs project. In this position, Danielle curated and created content for the Community Connect App, courageously modelling how anyone can learn new technology with support and patiently supported people with disabilities to engage with iPads, cell phones and laptops. Connecting people to places in the community, both online and in-person, has been life-enhancing for the people Danielle has supported. Thank you.

We acknowledge the work and support that Emma Monk, Communications and IT Coordinator, has offered to the 3Rs Project team. Emma researched and collected data to complete a communications audit, supported the communication needs of the project, and is currently co-facilitating *The Bridge*.

3Rs was shaped in all aspects by the professional guidance of our consultants, Lianne Picot of Blue Morpho and Tina de los Santos of Lure Communications. Thank you for your support and expertise.

Finally, we acknowledge the strength and commitment of the 3Rs Project lead, Tricia Bain. Tricia's visionary way of approaching challenges and project management has resulted in a certain vibrancy that can be felt organization-wide. Her efforts have been instrumental in CLPS's journey to post-pandemic resiliency and for that, we thank her.

Thank you for your contributions and your support.

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