



Reena Ready Homes: Building an Inclusive Community-Based Housing Strategy

Our Ask

Reena is calling on the Federal Government to fulfill its affordable housing commitments by developing a National Housing Strategy (NHS) that incorporates the needs of people with disabilities and supports the construction of new affordable housing for people with disabilities. This can be achieved by dedicating 5% of any funds flowing through the National Housing Strategy for people with developmental disabilities (DD), and making it a requirement for provincial housing programs.

In particular, Reena, in cooperation with a consortium of four other agencies, is seeking support for the development of five affordable housing projects for mixed use across Ontario. Reena is seeking a two-third combined federal/provincial grant of \$66 million to implement the project. Reena and its partners commit to raising one-third of funding through private donors and lenders.

Building Homes for Canada's Most Vulnerable

Our Proposal

Reena envisions a community that completely and successfully integrates people with DD into all aspects of society. Over our past 43 years, we have been working to build a climate in which respect, equity and positive recognition of differences are cultivated, and the social and institutional response to a disability poses no barrier to community life. Notwithstanding, today there is an urgent need for affordable, accessible and supportive housing that redirects some of the most vulnerable in our community out of basements, hospitals, prisons and long-term care facilities back into our communities.

The efforts across Canada to deinstitutionalize and support community housing for people with DD has been tremendously successful, increasing efforts to create community housing that build independence and choice are being sought after by the sector. The federal government has had in place for a decade a target of 10% for the physically disabled. The target supported by provinces has created many new opportunities for the disabled but amongst that community the developmentally disabled have been overlooked. The implementation at the municipal level prioritizes almost all other needs above the developmentally disabled not with purpose but through benign neglect built into the process. We need to correct this historic error and take progressive action for the most vulnerable by securing a place for them in our affordable housing efforts

Together with our partners, we are proposing to build five housing projects modeled on our successful work at the Reena Community Residence. Each partnership will serve local needs as defined by local disabilities service partners, March of Dimes Canada, and the Local Health Integration Network, and will involve an expanded planning process with local municipal

leadership, relevant agencies and self-advocates. In each case, Reena will provide the core design and service plan with the lead agencies and work to define additional needs that can be accommodated within the facility.

A feasibility study, funded by the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, is currently being conducted, based on Reena's and its partners' developmental disability and housing expertise.

Reena is seeking a two-thirds combined federal/provincial grant of \$66 million for five affordable housing projects. These projects can be done quickly within three years of funding approval. Each local partnership will secure one-third of funding through private donors and lenders. Reena is currently ready to implement two projects and has acquired the lands to do so.

Federal Government's Commitments

Reena's proposal is directly aligned with several of the Federal Government's commitments including developing a NHS, supporting persons with disabilities, a focus on aging and building strong communities.

Reena has decades of experience in developing affordable housing. We look forward to sharing our expertise and participating in the development of a NHS that supports persons with disabilities.

Recent announcements commit significant funding for affordable housing:

Federal Budget 2016 and Fed./Prov. Commitments

- Federal Budget 2016 invested \$3.4 billion over five years to social infrastructure, \$2.2 billion of which is allocated to affordable housing over two years across the country
- Ontario Government announced more than \$640 million in new joint federal and provincial funding for affordable housing initiatives

The Prime Minister's mandate letters to his Cabinet ministers made clear that affordable housing is a top priority for the government:

Infrastructure and Communities

- Develop a 10-year plan to deliver significant new funding to provinces, territories and municipalities, including a focus on affordable housing

Families, Children and Social Development

- Develop a NHS to re-establish the Federal Government's role in supporting affordable housing.
- Prioritize infrastructure investments in the construction of new affordable housing

Additionally, the Federal Government's forthcoming *Canadians with Disabilities Act* must incorporate measures to expand the availability of affordable housing for Canadians with disabilities as this would represent a major step in eliminating systemic barriers.

The Time is Now to Support Affordable Housing

The supply of affordable, accessible, supportive housing for people with disabilities remains far less than the need. Being part of the community and living as independently as possible are among the most important values and goals shared by people with disabilities, their families, and advocates. A home of one's own is the cornerstone of independence for people with disabilities. Reena can deliver on the Federal Government's commitment to build strong communities and help vulnerable Canadians obtain a home.

Barriers to Housing for People with Developmental Disabilities

Canadians with disabilities, including those with autism, complex physical needs and people with severe intellectual disabilities, are increasingly being forced into environments that may be risky, unsafe or costly. The supply of appropriate housing options has not kept pace. Some individuals with DD are living in facilities designated for seniors and others are living in various other residential care facilities.

There is no business incentive for private developers to include 3+ bedroom units for affordable rentals and affordable ownership. This impacts people with DD living independently, as larger units enable agencies to share and cluster supports for those who need it most, and to provide opportunities for inclusion and skills building.

- For recent affordable housing builds, the affordable rental rates for 3-bedroom units are mostly reserved for families, with less priority given to scenarios such as three people with disabilities who are not related. This impedes the ability to effectively support vulnerable people who are living independently.
- It is financially challenging for agencies to dedicate supports for people with an intellectual disability who require accessible apartments and 24/7 supports.
- Getting in on new builds is critical – by having access to many units of different sizes in the same building, agencies are able to redirect the necessary supports so that people can live more independently with support available in the building.

People with DD who are currently enrolled in the Ontario Disability Support Program, and are transitioning to Old Age Security, will see their incomes negatively impacted. The loss of benefits and higher claw-backs may mean less money left over after paying rent because coverage for disability-related expenses is lost; 90% of individuals with DD rely on income support (ODSP) and therefore cannot afford market rent.

A discussion paper co-authored by Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services, released as a report by the Joint Developmental Services Sector Partnership Table (2004) said,

Government continues to spend more and more money to provide support to people who have a developmental disability...The available supports are still inadequate to enable families and individuals to cope with the challenges that they face every day of their lives (p. 1)

....The current support system is under extraordinary stress. Demands for services continue to grow, as do waiting lists, and funding for wages and other costs have not kept pace with inflation (p. 14)

The ability to effectively support adults with DD will become increasingly important as the demand for community living arrangements rises. Demographic factors contributing to this demand include: increased prevalence of people with DD from the baby boom generation who are currently cared for by elderly parents; increased life expectancy and lower mortality rates and increased survival rates of young people with severe and complex disabilities. (Emerson 1999)

Employment Training: Maximizing the Value of Reena's Affordable Housing Projects

Reena's affordable housing residents will have access to a wide range of employment training services. These programs include skill assessments, work skills training onsite, social skills training and communication skills, travel training, job search and outreach to employers, job coaching, interviewing/resume skills, supported employment, volunteer work placements, job retention support, employer education and community outreach and awareness. See Appendix A for a description of each program.

How Reena can Make a Difference

Across Canada, we have a network of charitable and non-profit organizations dedicated to supporting people with DD. These agencies work on the ground in their communities and are well positioned to implement solutions.

We are asking the Federal Government to dedicate 5% of any funds flowing through the NHS for people with DD, and make this a requirement for provincial housing programs. We recommend that the funding model continue to be a combined two-third federal/provincial matching program, and allow non-profit organizations to find the matching funds through private support.

Reena is requesting a combined federal/provincial grant of \$66 million in support of five affordable housing projects for mixed use. Several partner communities have expressed early interest in developing these housing projects with Reena, and other non-profits, including York Region, Ottawa, Hamilton, Peterborough, and Kitchener- Waterloo.

Reena: A Leader in Community Based Social Services

Reena is a non-profit social service agency dedicated to helping children, adults and senior citizens with DD realize their full potential and become fully integrated into mainstream society.

Since its inception in 1973, Reena has been a pioneer in the field, implementing new and creative ways of fostering inclusiveness and ensuring the rights of people with DD. Its responsiveness to both the community and government has enabled the agency to grow to serve 1000 individuals and their families, each according to their needs, through a variety of programs – residential services, day programs, family respite and social programs, counselling and advocacy as well as training and professional development for staff and volunteers.

Reena today manages an annual budget of \$37 million dollars, \$42 million in capital assets reflecting 26 locations across the Greater Toronto Area.

Reena's history of success has made a profound and meaningful impact on the lives of people with DD:

- The Toby and Henry Battle Developmental Centre, opened in 1999, provides day and evening programs for children and adults with DD. The building provides a wellness and health centre, sports centre, creative arts workshop, computer lab, greenhouse and library.
- The Reena Community Residence, opened in September 2012 in the heart of the Lebovic Jewish Community Campus in Vaughan, provides apartments for 84 adults with developmental, cognitive, physical or mental health needs. The Residence is designed as an Intentional Community for individuals with special needs. The Residence received federal and provincial funding, and is an example of a successful partnership between government and Reena.

As a Jewish agency, Reena provides opportunities for individuals of the Jewish faith to connect to their heritage. Reena welcomes individuals of all faiths and, as a faith based community agency, understands the importance of enabling people to access their spirituality.

For further information, please contact:

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Appendix A: Employment Training Programs

The Summer Employment Transitions (SET) program provides seasonal job coaches for students in special education classes, grades 9 to 11 to augment the skills that students have acquired throughout their school year. Coaches train, assess skills, evaluate readiness, and match participants with opportunities. They assist in the job search, as well as setting up and assisting with interviews with the potential employer.

Channels Day Program is a community-based day program for independent young adults with DD who have completed secondary school. The program supports the development of life and vocational skills. Activities include media literacy, active discussions, budgeting, volunteering, recreational outings and guest speakers (including nutritionists, public health personnel and law enforcement officials). Once participants have successfully mastered workplace skills, opportunities to obtain a paid position are explored.

Enterprise Program is a job support program for recent graduates from special education classes, to age 27. This group is supported by Job Coaches that assist the individual to find employment, and to build natural supports within the workplace so that the support of the Job Coach can be eliminated by the end of the six-week program.

The **Endeavor Program** will support individuals that have been out of school and without work for a prolonged period. This program will face additional challenges because participants have never experienced the satisfaction of paid employment, or may not be as motivated to find and keep employment. The full six-month program will provide both the participant and the Job Coach with the additional time needed to acclimate to the workplace and to build in natural supports.