

# M.A.D. Adventures

(Mainstream's Accreditation Dream)

## How we do our work is as important as the work we do

### Privacy and Confidentiality

Several policies have been updated over the past two weeks and, once they make it through the approval process, they will make their way out to all of the programs. The latest policies to be updated or created have dealt with topics such as obtaining consent, photo releases, sharing information, and research. All of these topics fall under the larger umbrellas of privacy and confidentiality.

While researching policies that other agencies have developed, it became clear that defining privacy and confidentiality would be a sensible place to start. The two words are often used interchangeably but they are actually quite different.

Privacy has to do with a person and their desire to control who and when others have access to them. In other words, it's about knocking before entering someone's bedroom, respecting someone's personal belongings or keeping the door closed when someone is bathing.

Confidentiality has to do with data and information and how it is obtained, shared and stored. That means ensuring that files are kept in a locked location,

computers are password protected and conversations about people take place in a quiet location away from others.

Respecting a person's privacy and protecting their confidential information is, of course, of utmost importance. People using services have the right to expect that their confidential information is secure and will not be shared without their permission. As a service provider, we are the guardians of this information and must take that responsibility seriously. People also have the right to expect that their privacy will be respected and we must take the extra time to ensure that we do our best to do that.

These are some of the reasons why we will be updating our privacy and confidentiality policies and formalizing how we obtain consent to share confidential information, use photographs and allow research to be conducted within the agency.

If research is conducted at Mainstream, we are responsible for ensuring that it is being conducted ethically.

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### FOCUS on Options Niagara

In the last newsletter, we celebrated SIL and all of the hard work they've been doing to meet accreditation standards. This newsletter, it's Options Niagara's turn to be in the spotlight. As Mainstream's newest program, Options met many of FOCUS' standards from the outset. The program was developed with outcome measurement in mind. From their inception, they used Quality of Life as part of their person centered planning process. They also used outcomes as a way to demonstrate the progress that a person makes on their goals. The program focused on building community connections to increase social capital. Overall, Options was well on its way to meeting all of FOCUS' standards.

Despite the fact that they already met many standards, Options facilitators have not been resting on their laurels. Due to the nature of the program, they are often required to work independently. This can make it difficult for them to share community resources and knowledge with each other. Working in isolation also means that there is a greater potential for staff to begin to do things differently such as paperwork, goal planning, or teaching life skills.

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## Privacy and Confidentiality

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The most recent example of research is the 3Rs project. It is a research project being done by Brock University and Community Living Welland Pelham. Any research that is conducted by an academic institution such as Brock must first be approved by an Ethics Review Committee to ensure that everything from how they obtain consent, to how they collect data to how they share the results meets the standard set out by the Ethics Review Committee. It is our responsibility to ensure that any future research that might be conducted at Mainstream also meets acceptable ethical standards.

Obtaining informed consent is something that, until now, has been done differently by each program at Mainstream. Some programs ask a person to sign a Release of Information for each individual or agency that is involved in their lives when they first start using services.

Other programs ask that each person sign annual Release of Information Forms. To ensure consistency across the agency, each person using services will be asked to sign annual Release of Information forms.

A signed Release of Information does not give license to share any and all confidential information. Discretion should always be used and, when possible, ask the person before sharing any confidential information about them.

Privacy and confidentiality are two extremely important themes that should be regularly revisited across the agency to ensure that we are doing our best. After all, we would we want our privacy respected and our confidential information protected.

## FOCUS on Options Niagara

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In an effort to ensure consistency across the program, Options has focused on developing ways of sharing information and resources.

Information about community classes and other resources have been organized in files at 91 Pelham Road for anyone to access. This alone is a great tool but they have taken it one step further. In order to ensure that staff working offsite have access to information, Options now uses [www.delicious.com](http://www.delicious.com) to keep track of useful websites. All staff are able to log in and access this information from any computer.

As part of succession planning, it is important that new employees know what is expected of them when they teach classes or work with people on individual life skills. Years ago, Options developed a list of outcomes for each goal or class that they might teach. To help

new facilitators and to serve as a reminder for current facilitators, they have recently added an information sheet to their outcomes package. For example, a bus training information sheet would explain how to teach someone to take the city bus, things to remember when in the community and what is expected from them as a support person.

These innovative solutions to geographical challenges all help us in our never ending quest to provide the best possible service to the people we support. Great job Options!

