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Joanne McDonald, staff | Nov 18, 2010 - 9:40 AM |

Journey to Success

Conference helps families with developmentally disabled adults create their future

A forward-thinking organization based in St. Catharines is helping young adults with developmental disabilities transition from school to build independence and relationships in their communities.

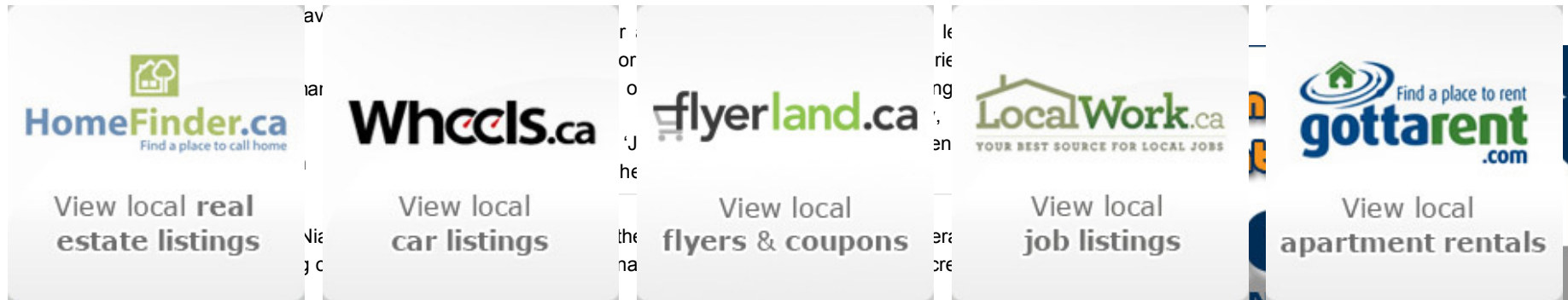
The hands of those young people, waving high across a conference room recently in response to a question of what they would like to do if there were no barriers, were a pretty good indication they share the



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“Independence is about choice, participation and taking responsibility,” parent, author, researcher and keynote speaker John Lord told the Journey to Success 2010 conference. For young adults with developmental disabilities, it’s one step at a time and with helping hands on the way to meet their goals.

“Independence does not mean you have to be able to do everything yourself in order to be able to choose to do it,” said Lord, citing strong relationships in the community as crucial to help people with developmental disabilities towards independence.

Historically, “We didn’t expect them to move ahead with their lives,” he said. And while some of those assumptions are still hanging on, “We’re learning how to make the change we need so we all have a good life in the community.”

Options Niagara has been unique from its inception in that it’s not centre-based, said Kevin Berswick, executive director of Mainstream. It’s about community, “About helping young adults transition to create the life they desire,” Berswick said.

A Foundation Initiative, Options Niagara assists young adults aged 18-28 with intellectual disabilities in making the transition from school to life in the community, with vocational training, life and social skill development, small group sessions, one-to-one instruction and personal goal setting and goal achievement. Mainstream celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Options Niagara will celebrate its 10th year this May.

“We’re not independent by ourselves,” Lord said, citing mentors, friends and neighbours as important for inclusion.

“You need a few people who can walk with you in your journey and you will be healthier as a result,” Lord said. “It’s hard to do it alone. Together we can think about this dream.”

Lord is the author of Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities; and Friends and Inclusion: Five Approaches to Building Relationships. Visit www.johnlord.net.

For more information about Mainstream programs visit www.mainstreamservices.com

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