

Reaching Out To Our Rural Region

Our respite services need to be innovative, especially when funds are limited and respite has to reach families across an expansive geographic area. For years, Wesway has offered respite services to the families in the city of Thunder Bay. Our reputation in respite drew many requests from families in our outlying district. However, there were no funds made available for us to duplicate our service model in this area of the region. We struggled with the knowledge of this unmet need. We also struggled with the question of how best to serve these isolated families who were scattered over such a large area.

As much as our organization was concerned by the needs of district families, we were also cognizant of the effort and resources it takes to provide quality respite. We knew that we needed to be creative and flexible if we were going to successfully respond to the many challenges that were inherent in serving families in sparsely populated areas. The area of our outlying district alone is comparable to the size of half of Ireland. The distance factor creates a challenge when it comes to basic elements of respite delivery including communication, meetings, and accessible staff and volunteers. Our service delivery plan needed to be fluid so that we could shape it and modify it as needed in response to our learning along the way. Thankfully, Wesway has a history of moulding our services in response to family feedback.

Two years ago, Wesway was successful in securing some respite funds to address the respite needs of our district families. This funding was earmarked for serving not only children and adults but seniors as well. The funding was limited and very few service dollars were set aside for administrative costs. We were also committed to making every effort to ensure that we maximized the dollars in terms of actual service delivery since we knew that the families involved were incredibly under-supported due to their limited access to service supports. Wesway believes that there is a positive outcome to this service challenge story and we are open to sharing how it unfolded along with some of our setbacks along the way.