

**JULIE KINGSTONE SPEAKING NOTES
ON OUR OWN TOGETHER II LAUNCH
FEBRUARY 6, 2004**

I'd like to welcome everyone and ask that you find a seat, as we are ready to begin. I know that many of you are looking forward to taking part in the Goofy Olympics Family Fun Night, but first we are fortunate to have some very special guests tonight, and lots of exciting news to share.

As you can see, we are not using a microphone, so it will be very important that everyone please focus your attention towards our speakers and welcome them respectfully to the LiveWorkPlay environment.

Speaking of which, this is not our normal environment, and I would like to thank Greg Szymborski from DanceStudios.ca for loaning us the use of his facility tonight. Every scrap of space at Heartwood House is now accounted for, so we are very lucky to have a neighbour like Greg to help us out in our time of need. Thank you Greg!

I also want to thank the parents of our program participants, who are here in force tonight. After last summer's housing project I had more than one parent tell me that they felt the experience was as important for them as it was for their children. I believe this has to do with the environment of respect and trust that we have all built together at LiveWorkPlay, and it has truly been a team effort.

I would also like to recognize Dale Kerr and Fran Childs, who along with Keenan Wellar and myself form the entirety of the LiveWorkPlay regular staff team. For a short while Keenan and I had a hard time convincing people that Dale and Fran were much more than employees hired to fill a job description, but by now I think most anyone associated with the organization understands that they are vital and dedicated individuals who have taken on enormous responsibilities and delivered above and beyond the call of duty.

Our volunteer team must also be recognized. In addition to supporting events like family fun night, many of our volunteers also took time to contribute to last year's housing project, which helped to further develop the sense of community experienced by the participants.

Our main purpose tonight is to launch the preliminary stages of the On Our Own Together II housing project and to thank those who are helping make it possible. This is also an opportunity to thank some other partners, new and old, who have helped LiveWorkPlay grow into what it is today, and who will hopefully be around in the years to come as we continue to build on our successes.

Before we enlist our guest MC to make the necessary introductions, I'm going to provide a brief update on LiveWorkPlay housing initiatives, including On Our Own Together II.

It will be three years ago this June since LiveWorkPlay first received a strong mandate from participants and families to get involved in the housing issue. This began with an investigation of existing options, which were discussed at the LiveWorkPlay visioning day in June 2001.

We looked at traditional group homes, supported independent living, and various other options, and this evolved into a discussion about needs and abilities.

There could be only a limited benefit to discussing available housing options if we did not have a clear understanding of what is needed and why.

Throughout the winter and spring of 2002 this became a continuous dialogue with participants of SMILE, our daily circle of supports for adults with intellectual disabilities. We simply started asking questions. Where do you see yourself living in the future? Who do you see yourself living with? What do you see yourself doing?

Through this dialogue, some basic concepts started to fall into place. In plain language, it started to sound like a combination of private and public space, in an environment where the individual is choosing to be with other individuals with whom they are comfortable. It turned out that this fit with a housing movement most commonly known as co-housing.

Co-housing started in Denmark, and it has nothing in particular to do with people with disabilities, it is a concept that can be utilized by any group of people looking to share private and public space and certain common interests.

By the time of visioning day 2003, we were all getting pretty excited about this idea, but also starting to realize that there were certain challenges. For example, although we had all been talking about what was needed and what people might or might not be able to do, it was all speculation.

If our needs assessment proved to be incorrect, then any and all work we might put into developing a particular housing model would be misguided.

By the fall of 2003, an interesting idea was taking root: what if we could find a place to practice!

Within what seemed like mere minutes, we were putting together an inventory of possibilities, which were quickly narrowed down to a university residence, and eventually further narrowed down to the Leeds Residence at Carleton University.

The unique layout of Leeds provides for individual bedrooms with a common kitchen and living room shared between four people. These four-person units then connect via a hallway to other four-person units and a common lounge.

Things were moving very fast, with potential participants and their families getting a notice in the mail at the end of December, attending a meeting at Carleton in the first week of the New Year, and then making a decision about whether or not they would participate. Ten brave souls and their parents decided to take the plunge, and the first On Our Own Together experiment was born.

To make a long story short, OOOT1 was very successful. Everyone made it through the month, and many interesting challenges were overcome along the way. One of the most interesting developments was that overnight support, although provided throughout the project, was never accessed once in the month.

Many participants and parents have told us that On Our Own Together has forever changed their lives for the better, but of course, it also meant the creation of new sets of challenges.

We learned that the participants were entirely capable of doing their laundry, making a lunch, and getting themselves out the door in the morning. But what we need to know more about is their ability to solve problems, to rely on themselves, and to benefit from what their peers have to offer.

In learning more about the problem-solving abilities of On Our Own Together II participants we will then be in a position to more accurately determine the level of support that is needed, which will offer guidance as we pursue our vision of a housing solution that is non-institutional, is driven by the community of persons who live there, and functions through a peer support model, instead of top-down staff-centered model.

That's what we are trying to find out this May and June, and the implications go way beyond the brave young adults who are taking part in On Our Own Together II.

With support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the research team at the University of Ottawa, and the department of Housing and Conference Services at Carleton University, we are hoping to develop a model that will be of interest to future generations in communities throughout the Ottawa area and beyond.

That is why, concurrent with the On Our Own Together process, LiveWorkPlay is also working on how to take these experiences, ideas, and concepts, and reflect them through – no pun intended – a concrete model.

We are being aided in this process through a grant from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the services of David S. McRobie Architects.

We are going to learn more about these wonderful partners shortly, but first I would like to ask Keenan Wellar to come up and introduce our guest MC, who will complete the introductions of the large group that we have up here at the front of the room.

Thank you all for coming, and I hope you will enjoy the rest of the presentations.