

I The ICOF Model of Funding: Brief Descriptions of the Model And Perspectives On Its Benefits¹

I) An Overview of the ICOF Model of Funding:

In 1990, the Working Group on Community Living, established by the Minister of Family Services, made a recommendation to create a pilot project to test innovative approaches to community living in Manitoba. Its aim would be to improve the adequacy and flexibility of services used to support people with disabilities. A number of groups were consulted and as a result of the working group's discussions *In the Company of Friends* (ICOF) was developed.

ICOF is an option available to persons with intellectual disabilities who live in regions across Manitoba. To be eligible for the ICOF Model of Funding, the individual must be a "vulnerable person" under *The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act*.

Persons who participate in ICOF are empowered to make their own decisions, or minimally, meaningfully participate in the decision-making process:

- They are able to choose where they live and how they spend their time.
- The homes they choose are not subject to licensing requirements.
- Individuals become Employers, requiring business numbers, and hiring and paying staff directly.
- They are no longer seen as being on Income Assistance, and have basic rights such as having their own Health Insurance Number rather than using a medical card.
- They have flexibility in how they manage and spend their funding.

Community participation supports people to grow in their personal relationships and recognizes that:

- Family and friends are important in the lives of all people;
- People with intellectual disabilities are able to have meaningful reciprocal relationships;
- Support networks made up of family and friends can assist the individual in making decisions;
- Support networks can have significant and positive impacts on the quality of one's life; and
- Our support networks change and grow with our life experiences, interests, and participation in community life.

The program is delivered using two unique features:

- Funding that is provided to the person with a disability directly as opposed to the service agency;
- Facilitating the creation of support networks for each program participant to support, sustain, and enhance their autonomy.

The project is highly flexible with the following reporting requirements: Project staff must review and monitor the status of the budgets of funded individuals on a quarterly basis to ensure consistency with approved individual plans, for cost-sharing purposes, and to ensure the presence of an audit trail. There are two types of resources:

- Human resources in the form of project staff;
- Financial resources in the form of direct funding to individuals with a mental disability.

II) Benefits of the ICOF Model of Funding:

Employers received a range of important supports from the members of their support networks. These most often include, in ranked order:

1	Decision-making supports;
2	Friendship;
3	Healthcare supports;
4	Staffing supports;
5	Communication supports;
6	Supporting community connections;
7	Financial supports;
8	Skills development supports;
9	Nutritional supports;
10	Housekeeping supports; and
11	Employment supports.

¹The content for this synopsis is derived from the report: *A Global Evaluation of In the Company of Friends (ICOF) Model of Funding*. Please contact Patti Chiappetta at patti@icof-life.ca at *Innovative Life Options* for a copy of the full report.

Employers achieved a large number of objectives through their participation in ICOF, including:

- Being safe and secure at home and in the community;
- Making informed choices about key areas of his/her life;
- Being able to find and keep good quality staff supports;
- Developing friendships with network members;
- Being accompanied to community activities if needed;
- Having social supports if and when they are needed;
- Being able to develop and achieve their goals;
- Being able to use the same services available to everyone in society;
- Developing communication skills;
- Learning why it is important to eat health food; and
- Being meaningfully involved in the community;

Selected Positive Perceptions of the Employers who participated in this evaluation:²

"I hire my own staff with help from my support network and I like that... It helps a lot... It makes it better and... Like the staff helps if I do something wrong or if I have a hard day, I can talk [to them] if I get frustrated or I get upset, I can talk to them or I give them a hug, yeah."

"[My life before being part of ICOF] was different, I'll tell you that. I'd say, financially, it was a little different. I just didn't have as much money as I do now because I was living on a limited income. [Being part of ICOF] allows me to have more funding... I'm definitely happier [now]..."

"...I just like that I am an individual. So, when I hire staff, I just like the ability that I can be the person that interviews them, the person that hires them, the person that can let them go. I just like that it just gives people like independence and all that kinda stuff..."

"I like this program because I choose the people I want to keep around and I can choose my own diet and go see the doctor when I need to."

"Just being independent, learning my own skills. Maybe, having some opportunities for job interviews... Posting job at LIFE. Oh yes, I like being part of ICOF. I will be part of it until I die. Oh yeah, [my life] it's perfect!"

"I [like that I] get to go out of the house for a while. Because, with code red now [due to Covid-19] I can't do much. Before, I was going to [place] but now with code red, I can't do much of that. I like it [ICOF]. I don't wanna change anything."

"I like the people [in my network and in ICOF]. They are very friendly and nice."

What Employers' Key Support Network Members like most about the ICOF Model of Funding:

"[The] program is individualized to each Employer and they are able to make informed decisions in every aspect of their lives."

"Person-centered, not just family, network gives parents assurance that their child will be well cared for beyond the life of the parent, more people looking out for the Employer...."

"Person-centered. Individualized. Gives Employers more choices how to live, who to hire, opportunities to explore interests."

"The flexibility in the program to allow every Employer to be as involved as possible with their life decisions such as hiring of staff, activities, and choosing where they live."

"... She is well loved, has people to reach out to and has the flexibility within her budget to live the life that she chooses. She has a cat that she loves! She has travelled when her budget allows!...."

"That he...has opportunities to live the life he was supposed to, like any other adult. Be respected as an individual that has gifts and talents..."

"The Employer is able to make all her own decisions and decide what is important to her. Giving her... power has made a huge improvement in [reduced] frustration...."

"ICOF has been flexible in [meeting] the Employer's needs in both budgeting and living arrangements. As well we have an excellent and strong supportive Resource Counsellor."

"Very helpful. Without it life would be poor, he would have a poor quality of life. It's instrumental in providing him with financial support and a good quality of life."

²Content in this section reflect verbatim comments from Employers and their key network support members.

The Employer is able to stay in the home he loves with everything he cares about around him.

Self-motivation, independence, support in reaching and set goals and objectives.

[ICOF] allows...individuals to make choices about their lives, and when needed receive help doing so from family and friends that have their best interest in mind.

Employer has a lot independence. Allows Employer to live his life on his own, provides opportunity for personal growth; enhances self-image.

Gives the individual a chance to live away from home and make their own decisions.

Gives Employer a great chance to achieve self-dependence.

It gives individuals choices and independence to live there life with dignity and respect.

The Employers live their lives and make the choices they want with support from [the] Network.

Supporting the Employer to live their lives and achieve their dreams.

Strengths are that a number of people are available to help support the Employer. The Employer has a group of people that show love and care every day.

My friend lives a full, rich, rewarding life thanks to the ICOF model of support...

[Strength is] the balanced mandate that truly believes in self-determination supporting the Employer within their communities to strive for and reach their personal wishes, goals and BEST LIFE. (sic)

III) Related Conclusions:³

Conclusion Four:

It is apparent that family members play essential roles in Employers' Support Networks. Their commitment to their Employers is more likely to transcend a longer timeframe than other supports. This may identify gaps for Employers with no family members in close proximity, or those with only elderly or ill family members.

Conclusion Five:

From the data it appears that the ICOF Support Networks in this study are generally stable, and normally meet on what may be considered a sufficient basis. The frequency of meetings in general, and in the homes of network members, may be related to the involvement of Employers' family members.

Conclusion Eight:

It appears that all of the support networks in this study provided a positive range of supports for their

Employers. There are also indications that they were able to meet the specific needs and/or wishes of their Employers by introducing additional supports and services, as they were required.

Conclusion Nine:

Based on respondents' perceptions, many of the roles they and other support network members provide on behalf of their Employers are at least of some importance to the large majority, if not all, of their Employers.

Conclusion Ten:

Respondents were equally as likely to feel that many Employers achieved their objectives for participating in ICOF, while all of them felt that their Employers had benefited from their participation in it.

³Conclusion numbers correspond with those in the full report.