COMMUNITY LIVING
Ajax-Pickering and Whitby
Inspiring Possibilities

Your Guide to Adult Developmental Services

Information, Tips and Tools for Individuals and Families

Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby | Inspiring Possibilities

Welcome

Finding and accessing supports for an adult with a developmental disability can be complicated. Families may be unsure where to begin, what services are available, how funding decisions are made or what to do when their circumstances change.

At Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby (CLAPW), we recognize that families are often navigating this system while also managing significant caregiving responsibilities.

We have developed this guide to help individuals and families understand Ontario's adult developmental services system, prepare for assessments, explore support options and plan for the future.

You do not need to have all the answers to get started. Understanding the process, asking questions and keeping information up to date are important first steps.

1. Understanding Developmental Services Ontario (DSO)

Developmental Services Ontario is the access point for adult developmental services funded by Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS).

DSO is responsible for confirming eligibility, completing assessments, identifying support needs, maintaining applicant information and helping connect eligible individuals with funded services as they become available.

The DSO process at a glance

1. **Contact DSO:** Begin the process at age 16 or later.
2. **Confirm eligibility:** Provide required documentation.
3. **Complete assessments:** Explain the individual's goals and support needs.
4. **Identify services:** Discuss housing, community participation, respite and other supports.
5. **Stay connected:** Report changes and explore available resources while waiting.
6. **Consider opportunities:** Review suitable services as vacancies or funding become available.

Eligibility does not guarantee immediate access to services. Waiting periods vary, and service opportunities are influenced by assessed needs, urgency, available funding and whether a particular service can meet the individual's needs.

2. Start planning early

Families can begin the DSO eligibility process when their family member turns 16. Ministry-funded adult developmental services generally begin at age 18.

Starting early is particularly important for young people who will be leaving school or transitioning from children's services.

We encourage families to consider what a meaningful adult life might look like, including employment, friendships, community activities, housing and support with everyday living.

Families should also explore other programs that may be relevant, such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and understand that its application and eligibility requirements are separate from DSO.

3. Preparing for the DSO assessment

Once eligibility is confirmed, a DSO assessor will arrange meetings to complete the Application for Developmental Services and Supports (ADSS) and the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS).

The assessment process is designed to develop a clear understanding of the individual's abilities, goals and support requirements.

DSO currently advises that the process generally involves two meetings of approximately three hours each, with at least two people who know the individual well participating.

Tips for a successful assessment

Describe everyday life accurately. Explain what the person can do independently, what they can do with assistance and what requires continuous support or supervision.

Discuss difficult days as well as typical days. Explain how often challenging situations occur, how serious they can become and what assistance is needed to maintain safety and well-being.

Do not underestimate unpaid caregiving. Families sometimes overlook how much support they provide because it has become part of their daily routine. Describe that support in detail.

Identify future needs. Consider what may change as the individual and their caregivers get older.

Include people who know the individual well. With appropriate consent, this may include family members, support staff, teachers or other important people.

Be specific. Instead of saying, "He needs help with daily living," explain exactly what assistance is needed, how often it is required and what happens when that assistance is unavailable.

4. Understanding available supports

Depending on eligibility, assessed needs and availability, individuals may seek:

- **Supported living:** Group living, supported independent living, host family arrangements and other housing-related supports.
- **Community participation:** Day supports, recreation, life skills, volunteering and employment-related activities.
- **Passport funding:** Funding for eligible community participation activities, support workers, skill development and caregiver respite.
- **Respite:** Opportunities for unpaid primary caregivers to take a break.
- **Service coordination:** Assistance navigating available resources and planning supports, where available.
- **Adult Protective Service Worker supports:** Assistance for eligible adults living in the community to strengthen independence and access resources.
- **Urgent response:** Time-limited assistance when serious circumstances threaten an individual's safety, well-being or living arrangement.

Some services may have different access processes or require completed assessments. Ask DSO what is available while you are waiting for the full application process.

5. Understanding waiting lists and vacancies

One of the most frustrating realities for families is that access to services can take considerable time.

Funded service opportunities are not necessarily offered in the order that people apply. Prioritization considers assessed support needs, urgency, caregiver capacity and other circumstances.

When a vacancy becomes available, the service provider must also determine whether it can safely and appropriately meet the individual's needs.

Before accepting a placement, families and individuals should have an opportunity to discuss the support offered, visit the setting where appropriate, ask questions and participate in transition planning.

A good match matters. The goal is not simply to secure a vacancy, but to establish a supportive environment where the individual can thrive.

6. Keep DSO informed when circumstances change

This is one of the most important messages in this guide.

An assessment completed several years ago may no longer reflect an individual's needs or the family's ability to provide care.

Contact DSO when:

- A caregiver develops health problems or experiences declining ability to provide support.
- The individual develops additional medical, behavioural, mental health or safety needs.
- School, employment, day programming or another essential support ends.
- The family experiences a death, separation or other significant change.
- Housing becomes unstable or homelessness is a possibility.
- A caregiver is experiencing significant exhaustion or is no longer able to maintain the current arrangement.
- The individual is approaching a crisis or their current living arrangement is at risk of breaking down.

Explain the change, when it occurred, how it affects daily life and what support is now required. Ask DSO to confirm that the new information has been recorded and whether a reassessment or urgent response referral is appropriate.

Do not assume that DSO knows your circumstances have changed. You need to tell them.

7. Planning for aging caregivers and the future

Many adults with developmental disabilities continue living with their parents or other family members well into adulthood. These arrangements may work successfully for many years, but they can become increasingly difficult as caregivers age.

Planning ahead is not about giving up a caregiving role. It is about ensuring that the individual will continue to be supported, safe and connected to their community when circumstances change.

Important conversations to have now

Future living arrangements: Where would the individual like to live? What type of support would they need? Are there housing options that could be explored gradually?

Caregiver capacity: Are parents or caregivers experiencing health concerns, mobility limitations or increasing difficulty meeting daily support needs?

Emergency planning: Who could provide temporary assistance if the primary caregiver were hospitalized or suddenly unavailable?

Financial and legal planning: Have families considered wills, trusts, estate planning, the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP), and appropriate decision-making or legal arrangements? Professional advice may be helpful.

Relationships and support networks: Who knows the individual well? Who could help advocate for their preferences and maintain important relationships in the future?

Communication with DSO: Does the individual's current DSO record accurately reflect the caregiver's age, health, capacity and concerns about the future?

A question every family should consider

If I could no longer provide care tomorrow, what would happen to my family member?

If there is no clear answer, it is time to begin developing a plan. You do not have to wait until a crisis occurs.

8. Understanding Passport Funding

Passport provides funding to eligible adults with developmental disabilities for community participation, daily living skills, person-directed planning and caregiver respite.

Ontario currently provides a minimum annual allocation of $5,665 for eligible recipients. Additional funding may be available based on assessed needs and funding availability.

Families may manage funding themselves or choose agency-supported administration. Some agencies charge administrative fees.

Passport operates primarily as a reimbursement program, so it is important to retain receipts, understand eligible expenses and submit claims within the required timelines.

Beginning March 31, 2027, new claim deadlines apply. Families should review the current rules with their Passport agency.

Read Ontario's Passport Program Guidelines

9. What to do when a crisis is developing

Sometimes circumstances change rapidly, and existing support arrangements become unsafe or unsustainable.

Examples include a caregiver becoming seriously ill, an individual facing homelessness or significant changes in behaviour or support needs that place their well-being at risk.

If this happens, contact DSO and clearly explain the urgency. Ask about urgent response, temporary assistance and other available resources.

Where possible, contact DSO before the situation becomes an emergency.

Urgent response services may help stabilize circumstances and coordinate short-term supports, but they do not guarantee an immediate permanent housing placement.

For immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911.

10. Understanding the role of Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby

Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby provides a range of supports and services for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Our work includes supported living, community participation, employment-related supports, transitional programming and other services that help individuals live meaningful and inclusive lives.

We can provide information about our programs and help families understand the services we offer.

However, **CLAPW does not determine eligibility for ministry-funded adult developmental services or independently control access to funded vacancies.** These processes are managed through DSO and established provincial and regional access arrangements.

Families seeking ministry-funded adult developmental services should begin by contacting DSO.

11. Helpful resources and contacts

Developmental Services Ontario — Central East Region

1-855-277-2121

dsocentraleast@yssn.ca

Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

DSO Central East contact information

Additional resources

DSO Housing Toolkit
Ontario Passport Program
DSO application and eligibility information
Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby

A final message to families

Navigating adult developmental services can require patience, persistence and considerable planning.

You know your family member best. Your experience, knowledge and advocacy are important in helping others understand their needs and aspirations.

Stay connected, ask questions, keep records and plan for the future.

Above all, remember that accessing services is not simply about finding a program or a place to live. It is about helping someone build a life that reflects their choices, relationships, interests and goals.

At Community Living Ajax, Pickering and Whitby, we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to live a full, meaningful and inclusive life.

Family Toolkit: Four Practical Resources

These worksheets can be offered as printable downloads beneath the website guide. Families can complete them before appointments, use them when contacting DSO and update them as circumstances change.

Tool 1: DSO Assessment Preparation Checklist

Before your assessment

0/10 ready

I have gathered eligibility documents and relevant professional reports.
I can explain the individual's strengths, interests and goals.
I have identified daily activities requiring assistance or supervision.
I can describe both typical days and challenging days, including how often challenges occur.
I have documented medical, behavioural, communication and safety needs.
I can explain the amount of support provided by family and unpaid caregivers.
I have identified current supports that may end or become unavailable.
I have considered housing, community participation, respite and future support needs.
I have arranged for people who know the individual well to participate, with appropriate consent.
I have prepared questions for the assessor.
Copy assessment checklist

Tool 2: Caregiver Change-of-Circumstances Worksheet

Use this worksheet when notifying DSO about a significant change in the individual's needs or the family's caregiving situation. It is a family preparation tool, not an official DSO form.

Individual's name
When did the change occur?
Type of changeSelect the main concern
What has changed?
How does this affect daily support or caregiving?
What could happen without additional support?
What help are you requesting?
Copy completed worksheetKeep a copy for your records. Contact DSO directly to report the change, and do not send sensitive personal information through an unsecured channel.

Tool 3: DSO Contact and Follow-Up Log

Keeping a record of conversations helps families remember what was discussed, who they spoke with and what needs to happen next.

Contact 1

Date
Person contacted
What was discussed?
Next steps and follow-up date
Add another contact Copy contact log

Tool 4: Questions to Ask DSO

Families can use these questions when first applying, waiting for an assessment, requesting additional supports or updating their information.

Select the questions relevant to your situation.

Has eligibility been confirmed, and are any documents missing?
When can we expect the assessment process to begin?
Are all the services we are requesting documented in the file?
Are there supports we can access before the full assessment is completed?
Is our information current, including caregiver circumstances?
How are service opportunities and vacancies prioritized?
What happens if our caregiving arrangement becomes unsustainable?
How can we explore future housing options?
Who should we contact about Passport funding?
When should we follow up, and who is our contact person?
Copy selected questions

COMMUNITY LIVING AJAX, PICKERING AND WHITBY

Navigating Adult Developmental Services

Practical information to help you understand the system, explore services and plan for the future.

Family Guide

Understanding DSO, assessments, funding, waiting lists and planning ahead

Family Toolkit

Four practical worksheets and checklists

Helpful Contacts and Resources

Direct links to DSO, Passport and housing information

This guide is provided for general information and planning purposes. Program eligibility, funding amounts, service availability and provincial policies may change. Please contact Developmental Services Ontario or the relevant program administrator for current information. Last reviewed: November 2026.