

# A Chat about Inglis House's Present and Future with President and CEO Gavin Kerr

Emily Stiebel 09 June 2011

Inglis Foundation consists of several unique entities with the collective mission to “provide programs and services designed to enable people with physical disabilities to enjoy life with the greatest amount of independence and mobility” (Inglis Foundation). Services include an adult day program, affordable and wheelchair-accessible housing, care management, community employment, specialty nursing care and the Drink-Aide® adaptive water bottle. Inglis House is one of the facilities where Inglis consumers can live and thrive in an environment where independence and growth are encouraged and supported.

Emily Stiebel, Fels Institute of Government, student interviewer: What inspired you to become a leader at Inglis House?

Gavin Kerr, President of Inglis House: My my son became disabled as a result of cancer. He talked about how frustrating it was to have a healthy 16 year old mind and a body that would not do what he

wanted it to do. Witnessing first-hand what life was like for a physically disabled person inspired me to join Inglis House and to help people with disabilities live great lives.

How have you adapted your leadership style over time at Inglis House?

I look to spend my time as effectively as possible. I would say that about 20 percent of my time is spent in our community, engaging and interacting with staff and clients. About 30 percent of my time is spent working with our board and senior team on strategic initiatives, 20% on culture and people development, 10% on operations and about 20 percent of my time is spent in the community with government funders, partners, and donors.

How are responsibilities divided at Inglis?

I am lucky to have a wonderful staff of people that I work with at Inglis. Timothy Murphy is the Vice President of Inglis Living Operations. Cheryl Whitfield is the Vice President of Human Resources. Lea Frontino is the Vice President of Innovation & Information; she leads our information systems projects and will head up our process innovation team. Tracie Butler Giles is the Vice President & Chief Integrity Officer. Tracie is an attorney and manages the compliance programs and social responsibility program. Kevin S. Kelly is our Chief Financial Officer and leads housing operations. Betty Marmon, as the Vice President of Development & External Affairs,

heads up advocacy work and external affairs and marketing. We have a unionized staff, we are very committed to working closely and effectively with our unions. Each of our operations groups - Inglis House, Housing and Community Services – has its own operating priorities, staff and P&L. There is a 15-person Board of Directors that oversees the organization's mission and delivery of services.

What challenges do you face as a manager?

There are a number of challenges in my job, including external forces such as the current status of the healthcare crisis, and the challenge of under funding from Medicaid and Medicare programs—the economics of these programs really don't work. Internally, there are challenges that arise out of our dependency on workers who do amazing work and who have limited educational background and limited resources. We must do a good job of hiring staff members. We have had situations in the past that arose when staff members were put into management positions on the floor, when these staff members were not ready or willing to be managers. There are also cultural tensions among staff members that we must be aware of and deal with. I find that the best way to deal with internal challenges is to communicate effectively and to problem solve with our staff. Good communication is vital!

What does the future hold for Inglis?

The mission of the organization is to enable people

with disabilities, and those who care for them, to achieve their goals and live life to the fullest. From this, we have created a new vision, and by 2020 Inglis seeks to be a recognized innovator in serving people with physical disabilities, a national catalyst for best practice diffusion, and a high-performing, financially self-sustaining organization. Our strategy for achieving this mission is to reinvent Inglis by creating more homes and more home-life living and programs and services that foster independence and create opportunities for meaning and purpose in their lives.

How will you finance such a large undertaking?

A carefully planned out combination of fundraising, government grants debt and funding from our endowment.

This project will mark a period of great change for Inglis House. Could you put into words your theory of change?

Change—my basic theory is that change is tough. Human beings by definition hate change. As a result it takes tremendous leadership to achieve a successful change. This includes creating a compelling vision for the change, building a compelling reason to leave the current state behind, engaging others in the planning process to get it right and to gain buy-in, and then working relentlessly to make it come to life. On top of all that, communicate, communicate, communicate!

How do you measure social impact, and if you have had a positive return on investment?

I think of it as a combination of return on mission and return on investment. For Inglis, we measure improvements in quality of care and quality of life for consumers, growth in the number of lives we touch, and employee metrics including jobs, employee engagement improvement, turnover, etc. The return on investment piece is easy ... as the Sisters of Mercy say, "No margin, no mission."

## References

Inglis Foundation, Who We

Are. <http://inglis.org/whoweare.jsp> (accessed April 24, 2011).