



For Immediate Release  
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## **New Directions and RM of Springfield find success by working together**

Zoning and human rights were at the centre of a successful Manitoba Human Rights Commission mediated settlement. The minor hurdle left is the final court approval of the settlement.

“We’re pleased to announce that through human rights mediation, New Directions and the Rural Municipality of Springfield have worked together to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities can live in a community, with choices equal to others,” says Azim Jiwa Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

New Directions provides residential options for individuals with developmental disabilities in a 24-hour shift staffed setting. Individuals in the program are able to live and work in the community.

A human rights complaint was filed against the RM of Springfield after attempts were made to establish a home for up to three adults with intellectual disabilities. The RM of Springfield denied the request stating that it would require New Directions to apply for re-zoning from “Rural Residential” to “Institutional.” The municipality considered the residence to be a group home, whereas New Directions said it was a home for three individuals living together.

Also at issue was whether or not municipal by-laws can be challenged by human rights commissions as well as whether or not the particular by-law in question was discriminatory.

After an investigation, the Human Rights Board of Commissioners determined that the complaint should go to a public hearing. The parties were also given an opportunity to meet with a human rights mediator to find a possible resolution.

“Some of our greatest successes come from mediation, where parties that often have divergent points of view work together and move forward,” says Mr. Jiwa.

The human rights settlement agreement includes a requirement to bring forward a proposed amendment to the residential zoning by-law within eighteen months; until then the RM will ensure the current by-law will not be interpreted in a discriminatory way.

There is also an education component to the settlement. Current RM staff will attend human rights programs offered by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. As well, a policy will be implemented recommending that the current and future Reeve and councillors also attend such programs.

The municipality will ensure that internal policies and procedures are compliant with The Human Rights Code and that job descriptions for the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Human Resources Director positions are revised to include a requirement that the individuals occupying those positions have knowledge of The Human Rights Code (Manitoba).

And finally the parties will continue to work together. The CAO will provide input to New Directions on a toolkit currently under development by a committee on community inclusiveness for municipalities and service providers. The committee is composed of members of provincial government departments and service providers who work with children in care and adults with intellectual disabilities. This Committee is chaired by Dr. Jennifer Frain, New Directions Chief Executive Officer

According to Scott Smith the present Chief Administrative Officer of Springfield, the decision to go public with this settlement was not a difficult one. "When there is a public interest and a human rights component, it is important to pass on to other municipalities what we have learned through this process."

Dr. Frain says that making this settlement public is one way of showing how municipalities can work towards removing the housing barriers faced by people with intellectual disabilities. "New Directions is very pleased to have reached a resolution with the RM of Springfield so that their community will become an inclusive one; welcoming persons with intellectual disabilities to live, as others do, in this municipality."

Similar issues concerning zoning and barriers have been reported across Canada. Both parties hope the toolkit addressing discrimination will be used by other municipalities.

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