

Opening the Lines of Communication: Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

The Commission was looking for input on the state of social assistance in Ontario. They had created a discussion paper with five issues around social assistance and three goals, and they had hoped to discuss the issues and achieve the goals. It was the perfect set of conditions to use AI, but they wanted to do all of this in two and a half hours. It was too much material for the time frame, so we decided to give people a chance to comment only on the sections they wanted to talk about. It allowed people to feel heard.

Bhavana Varma, President, United Way serving Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington

This was a collaborative project with three agencies involved. Christie met with all of us before the session to develop the agenda. The language she used in that meeting shaped the course of our day. She was very sensitive to our needs and to what we were trying to do.

On the day of the session, we got some really good insight and it was largely because of Christie's sensitivity. She was able to get the facilitators and scribes at the tables involved in the process. Her instructions allowed guidance and leadership.

We were working with a combination of service providers and people with lived experiences, so they were a diverse groups and it wasn't easy to manage. It could have gone very, very wrong, but Christie was clearly the right person for the job. She's very high-energy and she's also very patient. She never loses her cool.

I was really impressed by the language she used. Her language allowed people to feel valued. The focus of the day was to listen. Christie understood that and she made it clear in everything she said and did. People left feeling that they got a chance to speak. They felt heard.

We heard afterward from the commissioners that they got a lot of solutions and ideas for doing things differently. What distinguished our community was how positive the input was.