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## **Preface**

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Our understanding of the needs of individuals who have developmental disabilities and mental health needs (a dual diagnosis) is constantly changing and growing. New insights from research and the experience of families and professionals in the field have improved our provision of service to people with a dual diagnosis. It is essential that men and women who work in this field have access to the latest information and training so that they can provide the most effective service. This book is designed for that purpose.

For persons with a dual diagnosis, whether they live independently or with their families, educated workers can make a significant difference in their lives. If their mental health needs are not recognized, crises begin to develop. If no one understands the most effective intervention methods, the crises will deepen. Although much still needs to be understood about the nature of mental health issues in this population, we can do a much better job of delivering services with the knowledge we have today if staff receive the most current information and education.

The current level of ongoing education on this topic in the Province of Ontario is minimal. Education is received 'on the job' or in the occasional seminar. This is inadequate to train professionals who can recognize and help a person with a dual diagnosis. The complexity of mental health needs in this popu-

lation can only be addressed with ongoing and in-depth education on a wide range of related topics. This book is the foundation for an education programme that attempts to cover the most recent research and best practices in key areas. This is a start, but must be accompanied by a commitment at all levels to continually include new research, and to make this an ongoing quest to educate all those who can improve the quality of lives of our children.

Certain service providers show an unwillingness to serve someone with a dual diagnosis. Service providers are underfunded with unrealistic staff/client ratios. Providing service to someone with mental health needs in addition to his/her developmental disability is seen as time consuming, and may take resources away from other clients in need. Certainly, those with a dual diagnosis require more support, but a significant contributing factor is a lack of education. If the provider does not have trained staff to screen, assess, and plan interventions and integrated supports for the individual, then much more time is spent dealing with the inevitable crises that will develop. Of course, these crises will tend to emotionally affect the entire client base that is in contact with the person in crisis, creating even more requirements for staff interventions. Education can be very effective in alleviating these crises, and when the crisis is not preventable, in handling it in the most effective way possible.

There are many areas that cry out for more staff training. Offenders who have developmental disabilities, sexuality issues, substance-related disorders, and aging concerns are all areas in which the most recent research is made available to service providers through this education.

Having a child with a dual diagnosis creates immense pressures in the family. As the mental health issues emerge, sometimes later in life, the family is bewildered about how to help its family member. Stress and frustration affect everyone. Help seems fragmented and remote. Occasionally a professional will have the knowledge and training to really help the family member and also help the family better understand the issues and what techniques to best use. The difference these professionals can make is profound.

As a parent, I am excited by this collaborative effort between the Habilitative Mental Health Network, the Government of Ontario, and the many expert authors who contributed to this work. The ‘train the trainer’ approach will ensure that this information will be spread as widely as possible.

I trust that those who read this book will find that it assists them in helping persons with a dual diagnosis and their families, and that they will commit themselves to continuing their education as our knowledge of these subjects continues to develop.