

Co-Design In Action!

**Designing services for people with
disabilities, enabled by digital and
technology**

*Discover how co-design can
transform disability services:
when lived experience and
well-designed digital or
technology solutions
come together.*

DS Tech Showcase – June 11, 2026
Karis Disability Services

karis 
Disability Services

Today's Presenters

- Dzidra Halar: Co-design Consultant and Self Advocate **DH**
- David Nickerson: Strategic Projects Specialist **DN**
- Jeff Ham: Director, Digital, Technology and Innovation **JH**
- Christian Otte: VP, Digital, Technology and Innovation **CO**

Topics we'll cover



Introductions and About Karis & DTI

1. **What is co-design and why it matters**

- Types of co-design
- Guiding Principles
- Method and process

2. **Co-design at Karis**

- Our practical co-design journey
- Co-design in action through innovation projects: Karis Support App

3. **Benefits and impact of co-design for everyone**

- Lessons we've learned along the way, and common pitfalls to avoid

4. **“How to” co-design plus preview of research and upcoming guide [QR code]**

Discussion and Questions & Answers

karis

Disability Services

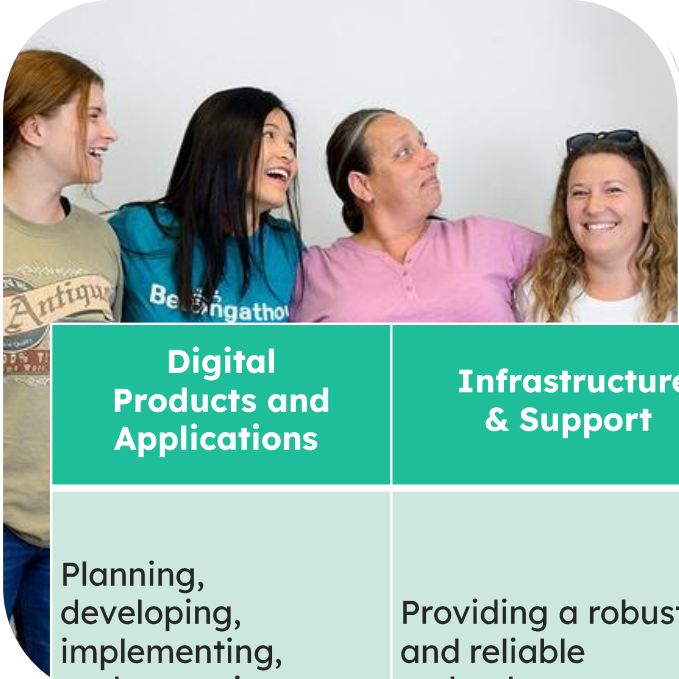
Formerly Christian Horizons



Who we are

- Values-driven disability services provider
- Government-funded, non-profit, faith-based organization founded in 1965
- Largest in Canada:
 - >\$200M in annual funding
 - >3500 employees
 - >300 locations
- Supporting people with developmental disabilities in 5 different service models
- Spanning the majority of communities across Ontario and Saskatchewan

Digital, Technology and Innovation: About Our Team



| Digital Products and Applications | Infrastructure & Support | Business Intelligence | Cyber Security | Agile Project delivery |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Planning, developing, implementing, and operating our digital technology platforms and systems | Providing a robust and reliable technology environment, and helpdesk support | Enabling better outcomes for the organization and people using our services through “data driven decision making” | Protecting our systems and keeping data and infrastructure safe and secure from security threats | Facilitating innovation & transformational change by improving processes, implementing projects and managing Agile teams. (e.g., AlayaCare) |



We all have a gift to bring.

Our Values



01

Valuing People

02

Fostering Belonging

03

Serving Others

04

Celebrating Gifts

What we'll be doing today

By the end of this session you will:

1) **Discover what co-design is** and how it can transform disability services!

2) **Hear about two projects** where. . .

lived experience and

well-designed digital or technology solutions

. . . came together to make services better.

3) Get what you need to **start applying co-design to your work!**

What Is Co-Design?

Co-design is a participatory approach where the people who will use a product or service are actively involved throughout its creation — not just as service users, but as design partners.

In developmental services, this means designing with people, not just for them.



Co-design

What it means to me

- I help to co-design services at Karis for the people supported and have been hired by Karis to help design the user portal.
- I also helped select our partners at Davis Pier for helping us co-design our next strategic plan.
- I helped develop the Service User Participation Model that has been implemented across Karis.
- I was the first self-advocate to be a board representative.
- Co-design means working together to make it better across the sector.
- It means learning together as well. I learned that it takes a lot of work to make technical changes. Karis is learning about co-design too.



Me speaking at the rebranding of Karis

Examples of co-design

1. Co-designing a **new or existing service.**
2. Co-designing **engagement and input to shape priorities.**
3. Co-designing a **person's support.**



What makes good co-design

- 1. People listen**
- 2. What's important to me happens**
- 3. When my voice matters**
- 4. When what I know and say is valued (and my time is paid for)**

What makes good co-design

- **Elevating Lived Experience**
- **Building Relationships**
- **Enabling Real Contribution**

Karis' practical co-design journey



Where we started

Dzidra as self-advocate champion; Our Voices Matter Council; July 2024
Dzidra started with DTI as a part time consultant

What we've accomplished

14 local OVM Groups with staff supporters; Input to Strategic plan;
Co-Research; PARN; DTI cultural leadership

What's happening now

Karis User App; Person-Directed Services Small Launch

What's next?

Continue testing including with family members and Person
Directed Services Small launch; Co-Design Resource publish pending

See co-design in action through two innovation projects:

1. How co-design applies to software and technology used by staff or people supported/families



Karis Support App

2. Co-designing a new type of support service for people with disabilities

✓ **Assistive/Enabling
Technology Service**

Co-designing the Karis Support App: What is Karis doing?

- **Karis is preparing an app** for people who use services and their family members.
- **We are co-designing:** Co-creating the app with people who use services, starting with their priorities and needs.
- We worked with **partners:**



Introducing the Karis Support App!

People who use services or family/caregivers can access the Karis Support App from a computer or using the mobile app on a phone or tablet.

The app gives people supported/families easy access to their information and has other useful features.

The screenshot displays the Karis Support App Client Portal for Lisa Smith. The interface includes a dark blue sidebar with navigation options: Home, Schedule, Care, Records, Profile, Settings, Français, and Log Out. The main content area shows the user's name and title, followed by a Notifications section with two upcoming visits: one on Mar. 27, 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM, and another on Mar. 25, 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM. Below the notifications are buttons for 'View All' and 'Get Alerts'. The 'Last Visit' section shows a visit on Thursday, Mar 27, 2025, from 09:00 to 10:00, with details for Asghar Naqvi, SIL, and Home, and a 'View Visit' button. The 'Next Visit' section shows a visit on Friday, Mar 28, 2025, from 09:00 to 10:00, with details for Asghar Naqvi, SIL, and Home, and buttons for 'Request Change' and 'View Visit'. On the right side, there are sections for 'Care team' and 'Active SIL'.

What have we done so far?

1. We hired Dzidra!

2. We asked and listened to people using services, including working closely with people supported:

- Focus groups with ~20 people supported and family members
- 1:1 interviews with family members

3. We created a first version of the app based on the feedback from the focus group

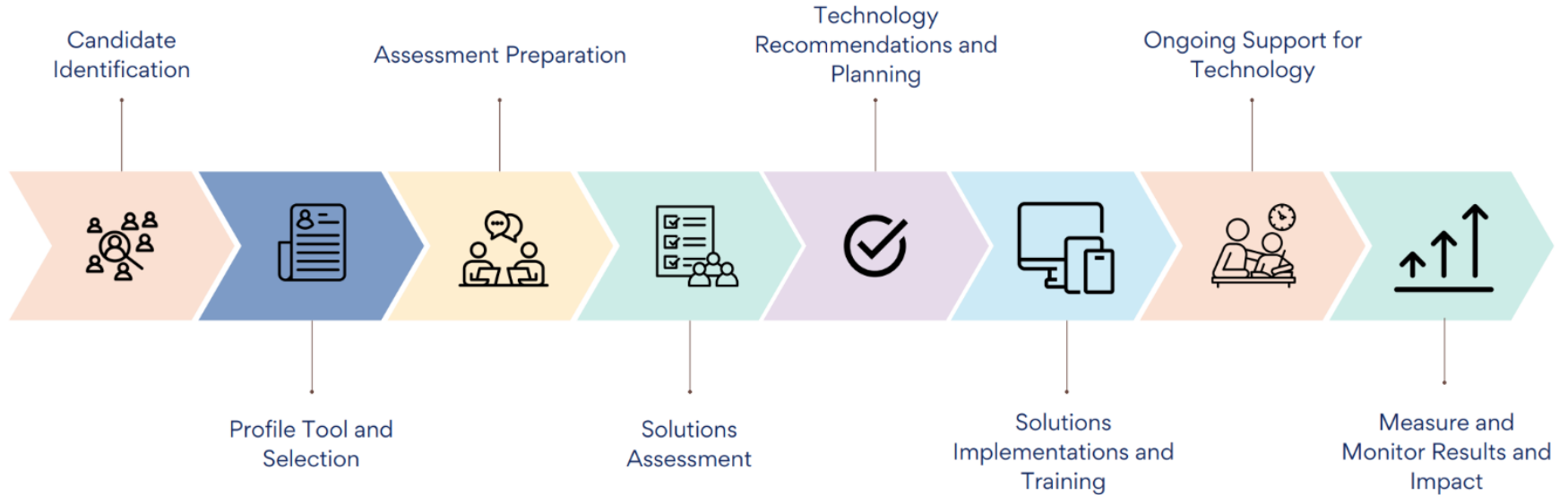
4. We demonstrated the App with the focus group and support teams to further clarify the support processes

5. We launched the app with a small number of people to test and provide feedback

What have I done as a co-designer?

1. Voiced needs
2. Prioritized what mattered to me
3. Chose the words we use for the app (e.g., My Support Schedule)
4. Tried the app and tested it out
5. Recorded demonstration videos and reviewed training material
6. Named the app!

AT Service Design - Steps



What are the benefits and impact of co-design?

1. Better, more relevant support services/solutions!
2. Increase advocacy and impact of voices and experience – it matters!
3. Strengthen relationships and trust + align with real needs and avoid mistakes

What lessons have we've learned along the way?

1. It takes effort and iteration to do well, often saving time in the long
2. We create more value and impact when services are co-designed
3. It takes a mix of ingredients to work well: trust, role clarity, relationship, etc.

Getting Started!

1

Does co-design fit the need, priority, and readiness?

Assess readiness and priority. Will co-design improve this? Can we resource this well?

2

Build the Method First

Define objectives and methods. Start: understand the problem. Methods: interviews, focus groups, photo voice, demos, etc.

3

Start Small, Learn Fast

Pilot co-design in one area at a small scale (e.g., in one service location). Evaluate what works.

4

Embed in Your Process

Make co-design a standard practice, not a one-off exercise. Document it; socialize it; celebrate it.

5

Share & Iterate

Open-source your learnings. Help others on the same journey. Co-design your co-design!

Recap: Today we've introduced co-design and shared concrete examples of how we've used it.

Our challenge to you: Where can you apply co-design to your work?

Bonus! A sneak peek at co-design research and a guide Karis is developing to help teams get started.

Co-design guide coming this summer!

[Our Co-Design Journey |
Karis Disability Services](#)



Let's Design Together

Great design happens when everyone has a seat at the table.

Questions & Discussion

Thank You!

