

# institution watch

PEOPLE  
FIRST  
OF CANADA



PERSONNES  
D'ABORD  
DU CANADA



50 years

Canadian  
Association for  
Community Living

Diversity includes.

SPRING 2009 ● VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1

Monitoring the progress toward a vision of full community living for *all* persons with intellectual disabilities.

***“An institution is any place in which people who have been labeled as having an intellectual disability are isolated, segregated and/or congregated. An institution is any place in which people do not have, or are not allowed to exercise control over their lives and their day to day decisions. An institution is not defined merely by its size.”***

*Deinstitutionalization Task Force*

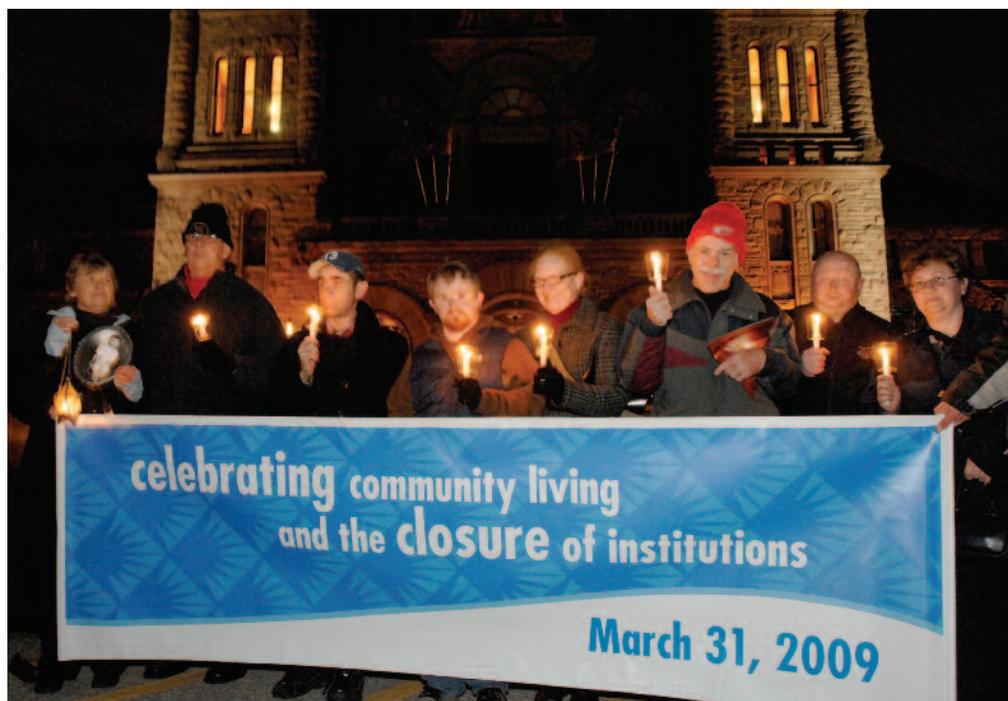


Photo: Gary Beechey, BDS Studios

This is a newsletter written and produced by the People First of Canada-CACL Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization. For more information, contact Don Gallant at (416) 661-9611 or Shelley Rattai at (866) 854-8915.

On March 31, 2009, the last of the large government operated institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities in Ontario — Huronia Regional Centre, Rideau Regional Centre and Southwestern Regional Centre — finally and officially closed. These closures signal a new era in Ontario — an era in which people of all abilities can contribute and participate fully in community. A day to celebrate — an era to embrace.

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## COMMENTARY BY CATHERINE FRAZEE

Professor of Distinction, School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University

*As reflection and response to the Freedom Tour film and the closure of Ontario's Institutions, March 31, 2009*



WHAT CAN YOU SAY at a time like this? What can you say in a moment that is heavy with the honour and fierce conviction of the men and women who have brought us this mighty film? What can you say when you are breathless from what you have just witnessed, not breathless from the crimes and degradations of these dark and ugly places, but breathless from the sheer force of so much survival, so much resistance, so much humanity. What can we say except thank you, thank you to each and every person who contributed to the making of this monumental film. Thank you for your fearless tellings of truth, for your fearless singing of strength, for your fearless knowing of right from wrong. Thank you for the grace of your showing us what it means to be People, First.

What can you say when you share a stage with such a mother as Joe Dickey, and such a brother as Justin Clark? You represent two generations of rock stars in our long march to freedom!

What can we say except that we roll out before you the deep red carpet of our esteem and appreciation. What can we say except that we are proud to stand in your company, proud to follow the bold moves that you took so many years ago, proud to step onto the trail that you have blazed in the spirit of community living.

What can you say when the steel doors close on a dark era, when you are safely outside but your history is in shards, when the bleeding stops but the pain does not, when the buildings that housed this ugly history stand, finally, empty and silent. What can you say except never again, never again will our people be warehoused, never again abandoned, never again humiliated on such a massive scale.

What can we say except that never again will we turn away, for we have learned that the indifference of many is precisely what permits the ravages of institutional abuse. What can we say except that we know better, and we demand better.

What can we say except that we will not rest until the promise of decent lives in real communities is made real for each and every disabled Canadian.

## MESSAGE FROM DIANNE GARRELS-MUNRO

President, Community Living Ontario



ON RARE OCCASIONS, society takes a giant step forward in addressing issues of rights and justice. Ontario took such a step on March 31, 2009 when we officially marked the end of an era of systematic segregation and closed the last large institutions for people who have an intellectual disability.

Decades ago, there were very few options in our community for a person who was born having an intellectual disability. Actually, there were really only two: you could

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send the child to an institution or keep the child at home. The former was the most encouraged and socially acceptable: doctors and society told parents to forget their child, get on with their lives and have more healthy 'normal' children. As a result, families were torn apart as children were taken into the care of the state.

It was on May 11, 1839, that the government of Upper Canada passed legislation allowing for the construction of institutions, back then called Lunatic Asylums. Eventually, 16 large institutions were built across the province where tens of thousands of people, some as young as two, lived their lives isolated from society and families. Such institutions were intended as safe "communities" where people could live in security and be cared for with compassion. The reality has been something very different. Those who are willing to speak of their experience in these places tell of abuse, neglect, and wasted lives.

Keeping a child at home, and a few parents did, meant suffering the social stigma of having what was considered a 'backward' child. There were no social supports, no opportunity to participate in community activities or programs, no opportunity to learn, play, or make friends.

But 60 years ago, a campaign was spearheaded by parents, caregivers and citizens who wanted something more for their children. Alternatives to the institutions began to emerge as families banded together to form local, provincial, and national Associations, known today as Community Living. They started by running nursery schools out of church basements and demanding that people who have an intellectual disability could, and should, be part of the regular world. They created schools, residences and other supports that would allow their sons and daughters to live in the community with their families, breaking free of the trap of institutionalization.

The tireless efforts of these parents and Associations caught on and, in time, the Ontario government began to do its part to build a more inclusive province. In 1980, Ontario passed legislation recognizing the right of children who had a disability to receive an education in publicly-funded schools.

In 1987, the Provincial government, confident that communities had the capacity to include and support all people who have an intellectual disability, announced a long-term plan to close all 16 institutions (which at the time housed more than 6,000 people). Over the years, under governments of all three of Ontario's major political parties, the Ministry of Community and Social Services has worked with individuals, families and agencies to create community supports for each and every person in the institutions.

Today, people who have an intellectual disability and their families rely on these supports to assist them in securing meaningful community living. This includes attending a regular school, finding a home, getting a job, and developing relationships with an extended network of family and friends. For parents who initially feared for and doubted the quality of life their children would have outside of institutions, this is a time of reassurance that there is great support and capacity within the community to assist their sons and daughters in reaching their full potential.

Recognizing how far we've come, this is a time for great celebration, but also sober reflection, as we remember family and friends who died in institutions and never saw this dream of freedom come to fruition.

Finally, the doors to these institutions are closed and community living, for present and future generations, can and will be the only option.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE HONOURABLE MADELEINE MEILLEUR

Minister of Community and Social Services

Breakfast with Community Living Ontario, April 1, 2009



I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the executive, staff and families from community living associations across Ontario for their partnership, service and dedication to people with a developmental disability. I am proud to join you on this historic day for developmental services in Ontario. A day that, for many of your members has been sixty years in the making.

In 1948, Toronto's Mrs. Victoria Glover, loving grandmother and accidental activist, ignited a movement ... A movement inspired by her dreams for her grandson ... A movement that continues to inspire thousands today.

Yesterday, this movement achieved a major milestone when we closed the doors to Ontario's remaining institutions for people with a developmental disability. And today, we begin a new era in the history of developmental services, as we throw open the doors of Ontario communities to all people with a developmental disability.

For too long, people with a developmental disability did not have a voice. So you lent them yours. Throughout its history, Community Living Ontario has used its voice to build communities that are diverse and supportive of people with a developmental disability. Your work has meant that they are now being welcomed into Ontario communities as neighbours, coworkers, and friends.

It wasn't always this way. 133 years ago the government took its first steps to serve people with a developmental disability. Back then, they were considered too vulnerable to live in the community. Institutions relied on a medical model that focused mainly on healing disabilities instead of cultivating abilities. Thankfully, the medical community long abandoned this view. And so did government.

For the last 22 years, the Ontario government has been closing institutions across the province. And with these final closures, we have officially shut the door on outdated philosophy. We have tipped the scale from disability to ability. We have proved that the strengths of people with a developmental disability overcome any challenges. And we have proceeded in the confidence that – with the right supports – these people can live with the independence and choice we all enjoy.

So let us take a moment to honour the advocates, like Mrs. Glover, who helped us understand that people with a developmental disability do not need to be secluded in an institution. They need to be included in a community. Let us remember those people who have died before they could join our communities. Their spirits animated the halls of those institutions and their legacy will not be forgotten. And last, but certainly not least, let us recognize the people with a developmental disability who now live in communities across Ontario. This province is richer for their contributions.

We have come far. And we are proud of what we have achieved with you, our partners. In just five years, Ontario has passed new legislation, closed three institutions and invested nearly half a billion dollars to increase wages, strengthen services and create new supports. We have ended the era of institutional living and begun the era of community living.

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Of course, as you know, it is one thing to live in a community. But it is another thing to be a part of it. That is why we continue to transform Ontario's developmental services system to give people the supports they need to participate fully in community life.

We are developing policies, regulations and programs to support more people with a developmental disability than ever before. But we need more than new supports or new investments. We need new attitudes. We need more Ontarians to open their eyes to the strengths and opportunities people with a developmental disability bring to their communities. And we need your knowledge, experience and creativity to guide us in the future as you have guided us in the past. The fact is that we need to change the way we do things.

While our government has made unprecedented progress in developmental services, we are dealing with an economy vastly different than it was five years ago. Last week's Budget outlined how different the financial reality is today, not only in Ontario, but in the world. None of us is immune to this reality. But — even in tough times — our government has reinforced its commitment to people with a developmental disability.

And I am calling on you, and the people like you who are leaders in this community, to help us find ways to do more — to help more people with the resources we have been given. Together we have met our commitment to close institutions. Together we have met our commitment to overhaul outdated legislation. And together we must meet our commitment to transform Ontario's developmental services system into one that is modern, fair and financially sustainable for the future. We need you to stand with us as we build a future where all people with a developmental disability can enjoy the opportunity and promise that is their birthright as Ontarians.

Today is only the beginning.

## **MESSAGE FROM RICHARD RUSTON**

**President, People First of Canada**



**V**ERY RECENTLY, members and representatives from People First of Canada and many other organizations gathered in front of the Ontario legislature. Although we have gathered in front of other provincial legislatures before, it was usually to raise awareness. This time we came together to celebrate. We were celebrating a great and important milestone – the closing of three large institutions. Ontario joined Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia as another of Canada's provinces that do not institutionalize their citizens with intellectual disabilities.

For me, this is a very happy and proud moment. I live in Ontario and I have worked for many years to get people out of institutions and living in the community. I am part of the People First movement. I was part of The Freedom Tour and I keep the stories of the institution survivors I talked to close to my heart and mind. I am proud to be a part of this movement and the work it does. I want to continue to see the institutions in this country closed, one by one, for good. I want to see all the people with intellectual disabilities start on their own journeys – to have their own 'freedom tours' into the community.

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To do that, we have to change the way we do things in our society. We have to change from institutions to inclusive community living. We have to change the way we see people – as valuable, contributing members of a diverse and inclusive society. And we have to change the minds of those who think otherwise.

These changes are happening in Ontario, and People First congratulates the province and all the efforts of many people and many organizations who also believe in positive change. Because we also know that change of this kind cannot be done alone. In the People First movement and membership, with all our supporters, family, and friends, we celebrate this milestone knowing that the journey continues – that there is still more to come.

## **MESSAGE FROM BENDINA MILLER**

**President, Canadian Association for Community Living**



**O**N BEHALF OF the Canadian Association for Community Living and all our provincial/territorial ACLs, please accept our sincerest congratulations on the closure of the last large institution for persons with intellectual disabilities in Ontario.

The closure of these institutions, in so many ways, heralds a new era in Ontario – one in which persons with intellectual disabilities will be able to live and participate fully in community, as ordinary citizens. An era in which families will no longer have to live in fear that their sons/daughters will end up in inappropriate institutional settings. An era in which the Government of Ontario had the courage and vision to do the ‘right thing’.

Be assured that what you have achieved in Ontario represents a significant and historic occasion, not only in Ontario but indeed throughout Canada. Not only do these closures represent a new beginning for so many hundreds of persons with intellectual disabilities in Ontario, you have also provided hope to persons who remain trapped in institutions throughout this country. A hope that other governments, buoyed by your efforts and leadership, will also demonstrate the needed moral courage to undertake similar efforts. A clear and unequivocal message has been sent to all Canadians – that institutions need not play a role in the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities. A message that persons with intellectual disabilities have a right to live in community. A message that the rhetoric of community living can and must be translated into action. A message that community living must be made a reality for all people. These are powerful and needed messages; messages that will resonate throughout this country.

The tenacity and vision of Community Living Ontario, the Government of Ontario, People First Ontario and countless individuals and families have led us to this historic occasion. There is much for all of us, as Canadians, to celebrate.

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## MESSAGE FROM RICK TUTT

Chair, Community Living Ontario Deinstitutionalization Working Group



ON MARCH 31, on the lawn of the provincial legislature and in communities throughout Ontario, people gathered to mark what is arguably the most important achievement in the history of the community living movement in our province.

We gathered together by candlelight to reflect on something truly remarkable: at Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia... at Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls... and at Southwestern Regional Centre in Blenheim... no one would be sleeping there because no one lives there anymore. In the case of Huronia Regional Centre this would be the first time in 135 years that we could say, "This is not anyone's home!"

This important day was made possible thanks to the collective efforts of a number of people and organizations who worked together for a common cause:

- THANKS to our friends from across Canada who challenged us and supported us in this journey to close institutions and ensure that people are supported to enjoy life in the community;
- THANKS to People First for their tireless work, pushing and prodding us all to ensure that we keep the most important ideals uppermost in our hearts;
- THANKS to the founding parents of the community living movement who toiled against all odds to develop a life for their sons and daughters in their community. A special thanks is due to parents who had no other choice but to accept institutional care for their children yet continued to work for community based alternatives.
- THANKS to the community organizations in Ontario and their caring staff who for so many years have provided a labour of love to welcome thousands of Ontario citizens back from institutions to a welcoming life in their communities;
- THANKS to the membership of Community Living Ontario who, in spite of criticism and adversity, did not wavered from its goal of dignity for all people;
- THANKS to the successive governments in Ontario for their non-partisan commitment to closing the large provincial institutions and to the politicians who showed great leadership in making the closures a reality;
- THANKS to the thousands of people who endured life in the institutions and who have accepted and embraced the opportunity for a new life in their community. They continue to amaze and inspire everyone involved with their courage and joy of life.

The closure of the large provincial institutions in Ontario has given us cause to reflect with a great deal of pain and sadness as we remember what the legacy of institutions has done to so many of our friends.

As we move past the date of the closure of the large facilities we will be entering the next phase of our work. We will work with the PFC CACL Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization to look for ways that Ontario can support other provinces in their efforts to close large government operated institutions.

In Ontario, we will begin the daunting task of identifying the other types of institutions where many people who have an intellectual disability are still confined such as nursing homes, long-term care

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facilities and other large institutional settings. We will connect with other like minded organizations to work toward alternatives to these settings and ensure that people are able to access supports to return to or stay in their home in the community.

We will need to gather our collective strength again as we look forward to the work that lies ahead. Perhaps our most difficult challenge will be to look inward at the supports and services that we have created with the greatest of intentions in the community living movement. It will take our combined efforts to be sure that these supports do not institutionalize people in more subtle, but no less damaging ways.

Our movement can claim the closure of the large provincial facilities in Ontario as one of its finest hours. It is important to seize this moment of happiness and celebration. As we move forward together we can think of those sprawling sets of buildings and say, with a great sense of accomplishment... No one lives there anymore.

## MESSAGE FROM THE TASK FORCE

THE CLOSURE OF the last remaining large government operated institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities in Ontario is indeed a historic moment. These closures culminate years of effort on the part of individuals and families, and organizations such as Community Living Ontario and People First Ontario, who fought tirelessly for the right of their sons, daughters and friends to live in community. It is also the result of years of transformation on the part of successive Ontario governments, in moving from a highly institutional model to one that now no longer views institutions as an acceptable option for persons with intellectual disabilities.

This Task Force, on behalf of CACL and PFC, would add its voice in congratulating the citizens of Ontario on finally closing the doors on the era of institutionalization. With these institutions now a thing of the past, full attention, focus and resources can be directed to ensuring that the supports and services in the community remain responsive and adequate to the needs of returning individuals. Equally important, with institutions no longer competing for finite resources, increased attention can be given to the development and expansion of a comprehensive system of community supports that will ensure that the future needs of persons with intellectual disabilities will be fully and appropriately met in community. Attention to ensuring that community has the necessary capacity to ensure that no future generation of individuals or families are ever again faced with the potential of institutionalization.



**The People First of Canada CACL Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization**

And finally, it is our sincere hope that the successful efforts in Ontario serve as a catalyst for change in other Canadian provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba. Provinces that have steadfastly refused to acknowledge that institutions are not in the best interests of persons with intellectual disabilities. Provinces that have refused to announce a date for closure of their outdated and inappropriate institutional facilities. Provinces that have

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refused to allocate the necessary resources to create the needed community supports that would enable persons to leave these institutions. Provinces that have refused to do the right thing. Ontario did the right thing – it is now time that all other provinces followed their lead, and in so doing ensure that Canadian citizens with intellectual disabilities, regardless of where they live in this country, have an expectation of and the right to life in community.

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR HISTORY: THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

**T**HE FIRST INSTITUTION in Ontario opened in Orillia on September 25, 1876. Not until the emergence of Community Living in the 1950s were there alternatives to this flawed model of support for people who have an intellectual disability. In his 1971 report, Walter Williston stated that “a century of failure and inhumanity in the large multi-purpose residential hospitals should, in itself, be enough to warn of the inherent weakness in the system and inspire us to look for some better solution.” Following are some of the milestones over the past 5 decades as Community Living has worked to find those “better solutions” and bring to a close our long history of institutionalization.

**1959** The Association successfully advocates for changes to plans for a proposed institution at Cedar Springs (Southwest Regional Centre), reducing it from 2,400 to 1,000 beds. A column by Pierre Berton on the Ontario Hospital School in Orillia and its deplorable conditions creates a furor when it appears in the *Toronto Star*.

**1971** A report by Walter B. Williston Q.C. looks into the death and severe frostbite of two men from Rideau Regional Centre and recommends the phasing down of large institutions.

**1973** A report by Robert Welch, Secretary for Social Development, calls for the creation of appropriate residential homes in the community to facilitate deinstitutionalization.

**1974** The Developmental Services Act is passed, providing the legislative framework for the creation and operation of community services for people who have an intellectual disability. The Government paper referred to as the Avocado Paper describes, for the first time, specific targets for institutional downsizing.

**1977** The Association protests plans to build a 150-bed institution in Etobicoke – plans are altered to create community supports for 100 individuals. Government announces the first multi-year plan to close one institution and downsize another.

**1978** Nipissing Regional Centre (Timmins) is closed.



**1982** A second multi-year plan targets the closure of five institutions.

**1984** The Association releases the document *Deinstitutionalization, a Value Based Process for Planning and Implementing the Repatriation of People with Handicapping Conditions*.

**1985** St. Lawrence Regional Centre (Brockville), Bluewater Centre (Goderich), START Centre (St. Thomas) and Pine Ridge Centre (Aurora) are closed



**Rideau Regional Centre** in Smith Falls

- Opened in 1951
- Originally named the Ontario Hospital School, Smith Falls
- Resident population in 1971: 2,070

**1987** Durham Centre (Whitby) is closed. Community and Social Services Minister John Sweeney announces *Challenges and Opportunities*, describing a strategy for developing a comprehensive system of supports and services in the province and making a commitment to close all large institutions within 25 years. He also announces the third multi-year plan with a target of closing three more institutions.

**1988** Surrey Place Centre (Toronto - residential) is closed.

**1994** The Association forms a partnership with the Canadian Association to undertake the "Opening New Doors" project to prepare communities to welcome people that are coming home from institutions. Muskoka Centre (Gravenhurst) and Northwestern Regional Centre (Thunder Bay) are closed.

**1996** D'Arcy Place (Cobourg) and Oxford Regional Centre (Woodstock) are closed. The Association presents to government the document "No Better Time Than Now – Saying Farwell to Institutions." The document stresses the need to close institutions and the value of supporting people to live in the community. Community and Social Services Minister David Tsubouchi announces the 4th multi-year plan with a target to move almost 1,000 people from institutions and closing 5 more facilities.

**1998** Midwestern Regional Centre (Palmerston) is closed.

**1999** Prince Edward Heights (Picton) and Adult Occupational Centre (Edgar) are closed.

**2001** Concerned that momentum to close institutions might be slowing, Community Living associations in southwestern Ontario spearhead an initiative to renew the issue as a provincial priority. A new provincial working group is struck to demand government action on the final closure of the institutions.

**2003** The Association members protest plans by government to build a youth detention centre on the grounds of the Southwest Regional Centre while that institution is still in operation. The Association hosts a provincial forum "Free the People" to develop strategies for getting the government to act on the closure of the final three institutions in Ontario. Similar regional events are hosted regionally in Smith

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Falls and Windsor to demand action and plan for the return of people to the community.

**2004** Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello announces that the remaining three institutions will close by April, 2009.

**2005** Some families of people in the facilities slated to close bring court action against the government challenging the planned closures. Community Living Ontario seeks intervener status in the court proceedings. Consistent with the positions taken by Community Living, the court rules in January, 2006 that closures can proceed and that families and individuals must have access to appropriate planning that decides where they will live.

**2009** Community and Social Services Minister Madeleine Meilleur proclaims the final closure of Rideau, Huronia, and Southwest Regional Centres



## **DISABILITIES NOT A REASON TO SEND A PERSON TO 'JAIL'**

**ANDRÉ PICARD**

[apicard@globeandmail.com](mailto:apicard@globeandmail.com)

**April 2, 2009**

**O**N TUESDAY NIGHT, on the grounds of the Ontario legislature, a group of community-living activists and former residents of institutions gathered for a candlelight vigil.

They were celebrating a historic moment in the evolution of health and social-welfare systems that occurred when, on March 31, Ontario closed the last three large institutions for people with developmental disabilities.

The Rideau Regional Centre in Smith Falls (once the largest facility of its kind in the Commonwealth with close to 3,000 beds), the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia and the Southwestern Regional Centre in Blenheim harked back to an era when people with physical, developmental and psychiatric disabilities were warehoused and hidden away.

It was a time not so long ago when there was no place in society for “cripples,” “retards” and “crazies,” to use once-common pejoratives.

Psychiatric patients and those with physical disabilities have been largely de-institutionalized over the past few decades, but those with developmental (or, if you prefer, intellectual) disabilities such as Down syndrome and Fragile X syndrome have, to a certain extent, been forgotten in the push for social justice and equality.

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While the vast majority of people with disabilities now live in the community - they are our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbours, fellow congregants, hockey buddies and so on - a disturbingly large number remain trapped in institutions.

While Ontario has closed its institutions (and British Columbia did so years ago), there are several thousand people with development disabilities across Canada still residing in large, sterile facilities such as the Michener Centre in Red Deer, Alta., the Manitoba Developmental Centre in Portage La Prairie, Hôpital Rivière-des-Prairies in Montreal and Sunset Adult Residential Centre in Pugwash, N.S.

Historically, these facilities were dank, oppressive places - isolated, grossly overcrowded and rampant with abuse.

In 1971, the Ontario government, embarrassed by the freezing deaths of two residents of the Rideau Regional Centre, asked lawyer Walter Williston to examine the situation. In a devastating report, he called for all such institutions to be closed, concluding that “a century of failure and inhumanity in the large multipurpose residential hospitals should, in itself, be enough to warn of the inherent weakness in the system and inspire us to look for some better solutions.”

***When people live in... isolated, segregated settings, they don't have the opportunity to have real, natural relationships. That separation, that creation of a class of different, less valuable people, is a harmful construct for a society to maintain.***

**Keith Powell, Executive Director,  
Community Living Ontario**

Decades later, his recommendation has finally been implemented with the adoption of the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, a law that effectively strips government of the right to operate such institutions.

While it is true that these residential hospitals were, in recent years, well-maintained and had

dedicated staff members, one fundamental issue remained: It was and is unjustifiable to “jail” someone for want of a few IQ points.

There is not a single person housed in these facilities - in Ontario or elsewhere - who could not be cared for as well, if not better, in the community.

The mistake that was made with the de-institutionalization of people with psychiatric disabilities was to release them into nothing, leaving them to struggle with severe mental illnesses without necessary supports such as housing and income.

The result is thousands – no, tens of thousands – of people with psychiatric illnesses and addictions living on the streets and in the rooming houses of Canada’s big cities, a social disaster and a national disgrace.

To its credit, the community-living movement has, through its advocacy and hard work, ensured a smoother transition for people with intellectual disabilities.

Throughout history, people living with developmental disabilities have been vilified, patronized and marginalized.

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But, when afforded a voice, they express a desire for the same thing as everyone else in society - a good life: friends and family, a roof over their heads, basic wealth, choice in daily activities and the ability to make a contribution to society.

In short, while it may not always be articulated in this fashion, they want citizenship. And if our commitment to rights and equality is real, if the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is to have meaning, people with disabilities (developmental, physical and psychiatric) need to be full citizens, to have an equal opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of community life.

But equality does not mean sameness. Flexibility, accommodation and commitment are required to ensure that people with developmental disabilities, no matter how severe, can live on their own, attend school, work (in real jobs, not in sheltered workshops), shop and play like everyone else.

There is no one-size-fits-all alternative to institutional life but, rather, many programs and approaches, all with one overarching goal: community living.

There is also a need, given the shocking number of people with developmental disabilities who are still warehoused and denied full citizenship in most provinces, to honour what Ontario has done, no matter how overdue.

At the sombre candlelight vigil, they remembered the dark period of institutionalization but, in each candle, there was also a flicker of hope, a recognition that we have finally extended to our fellow citizens the ability — and the right — to belong.

### ***'What a difference we've made in this province in 160 years'***

#### **FORMER INSTITUTION RESIDENT MARRIES, LIVES IN APARTMENT OF CHOICE Monday, April 06, 2009 — Natalie Miller**

Reprinted from *Community Living Leaders*, an online news service of Community Living Ontario. [www.communitylivingontario.ca](http://www.communitylivingontario.ca)."

TORONTO — Today, Peter Park lives in an apartment of his choosing with his wife of 26 years. Earlier, he spent 18 years in an institution for people who have an intellectual disability. When we wanted to propose to his girlfriend, he had to ask a third party for permission to get married instead of simply asking his partner like everyone else does.

With the March 31st closure of institutions, Park, co-founder of People First of Canada and of People First of Ontario, was on hand to share part of his story during an April 1st press conference at Queen's Park.

Dianne Garrels-Munro said the closure of Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia and Southwestern Regional Centre in Blenheim, signifies substantial progress.

"What a difference we've made in this province in 160 years," said the president of Community Living Ontario's board of directors, referring to 1839 legislation that allowed for the construction of institutions.

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“Many people who have an intellectual disability now have a better quality of life because they are living in their homes, are active members of their communities and are more connected with friends and family. Because of this, Ontario now stands as an example to other provinces in Canada and across the world, where institutions still exist, that, yes, people can be supported to live meaningfully in the community and that ‘community living’ really is the best option.”

***We're making a significant change here in Ontario, closing the last of our large institutions, but across Canada many still exist in other provinces, so we feel as a movement there's a lot of work to do.***

**Gordon Kyle, Community Living Ontario**

The father of a son who has an intellectual disability said the closure of institutions entails a brighter future for Ontarians.

“Today, people with an intellectual disability are holding their heads high as they take their rightful place as valued, respected and included citizens,” said Rick Strutt, who is also president of Community Living Toronto.

Parents, caregivers and citizens who wanted alternatives to institutions for people who have an intellectual disability spear-headed the community living movement about 60 years ago. “They created schools, employment training and other supports that would allow their sons and daughters to live in the community, close to their family, breaking free of the trap of institutionalization,” he said.

Decisions such as where people want to live, what they want to do when they finish school, how they want to spend their free time and even their plans for retirement are choices people now have, Strutt continued.

“Having the freedom to make those choices was but a dream 60 years ago. Today, it’s not only a reality for people like my son, Tyler, but for every person with an intellectual disability living in Ontario.”

## **THE END OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ERA IN ONTARIO**

**March 31, 2009**

**W**E GATHER HERE TODAY to mark the occasion of the closing of the last of the large institutions operated by the Government of Ontario under the soon-to-be-repealed Developmental Services Act.

This is a time for rejoicing. But it is also a time to be sad when we think of the lives of thousands of people (most of them still young children) who were needlessly separated from their families, friends, homes, pets, familiar places, neighbours and the larger community where they belonged. Instead of being able to live normal lives like everyone else, these our fellow citizens were forced to spend their days, most of them to the end of their days, knowing nothing but the company of others who knew the same pain of abandonment, exclusion and segregation, and of those who were paid to care for them. Their basic needs were met by staff who were often compassionate, but who also suffered the effects of institutionalization. Some residents of the institutions were the victims of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, in addition to the mental suffering they had to endure just by being forced to live in those facilities.

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Let us first reflect in silence on the pain experienced by so many in being uprooted from parents, sisters and brothers, often while still in the very early years of their lives, and taken to places, and to the company of people, that were totally strange to them.

For those still living, we offer our deepest sympathy and longing for them to be healed of their wounds, and restored to the joy of loving relationships.

For those who have died, we offer our prayers for their everlasting rest and peace.

For those who formed bonds of affection for their long-time companions and care workers in the institutions, we offer our understanding that some may feel confused and friendless all over again, until they realize that they have new opportunities for friendship, acceptance and meaning for their lives in their new homes and communities.



Now let us turn to more positive thoughts about this momentous occasion in the life of this province. Let us reflect on the simple truth that, without the persistent advocacy efforts of people who have an intellectual disability (many of whom had experienced what it is like to be institutionalized for a good part of their lives), and of those who support their voices, their rights and their freedom, the closing of the institutions would not be happening today, and perhaps not for years to come.

We do not pretend that we can take all of the credit for this history-making occasion, but we did open the eyes of politicians and civil servants, as well as the general public, to the rights of people to live fulfilling lives in the community with the supports they need, and to which they are entitled, rather than to be forced to live beyond the reach of our society, behind the walls of the institutions.

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, self-advocates persuaded the Associations to stop using harmful, demeaning language even in the name under which they had organized themselves. Self-advocates pushed for the name "Community Living", and that name became, in effect, a two-word agenda for policy and decision-makers, inside and outside of government, which brought us to this happy day.

Let us silently reflect with gratitude on the lives and voices of those who have been advocates, policy-makers and decision-makers, leading to the end of institutions in this province.

Let us give thanks for those who endured being confined in the institutions of this province and survived to rejoin civil society and to tell about what their lives were like behind those walls.

Let us give thanks for those in the People First and Community Living movements who never gave up in their pursuit of the vision of a just and inclusive society, which is only possible when institutions no longer exist.

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Let us give thanks for those who worked in the institutions of this province over the years, and who did so with genuine respect and concern for the people who relied on them for care and support.

Let us give thanks for the members of the Ontario Legislature who caught the vision of community living, and have decided to replace the Developmental Services Act, which continued the existence of the institutions, with the new Social Inclusion Act, which does away with them. Let us give thanks for the civil servants who have worked hard to assist and encourage politicians to change the law and to implement the decision to close the institutions.

Finally, we know that we cannot assume that the closure of these last large institutions means that everyone who used to live in them will now enjoy a full and meaningful life in the community. There is still work to be done, and there always will be, to make community living a reality for everyone. As long as some children are not welcomed into the same schools and classrooms as other children, they will be faced with a very difficult struggle to gain a place in the communities where they will live when they grow up.

***As we close the doors to institutions, we also close the doors to segregation, seclusion and stereotyping of Ontarians with a developmental disability,***

**Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of  
Community and Social Services**

As long as there are still places where people with intellectual disabilities are forced to live that do not treat them as 'people first', but congregate them and set them apart from the rest of us, the goal of true community living will still be only partially achieved. We must make every effort we can to ensure that those who have left the institutions are genuinely welcomed and included in the communities to which they have

returned. We live in a society where at least half of our citizens admit that they are uncomfortable in the presence of a person who has an intellectual disability. Let us reflect in silence and in hopefulness on the tasks that remain ahead of us, and on our respective roles in carrying out those tasks.

Let us commit ourselves to continue to work to achieve the closure of facilities that still exist in Ontario that employ the institutional model of segregating and congregating people in places where they have little or no control over how their days are spent, and where they are denied opportunities for full participation in the life of the community.

Let us commit ourselves to do what we can to ensure that people who have a intellectual disability do not end up in long-term care facilities when their needs are such as can readily be met in community settings.

Finally, let us commit ourselves to take every opportunity to welcome people who have an intellectual disability into our presence, into our circles, and into our neighbourhoods, our schools, and wider communities, and to encourage others to do the same.

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## **WE KNOW OUR WORK IS NOT DONE**

**April 08, 2009 — Natalie Miller**

“Reprinted from *Community Living Leaders*, an online news service of Community Living Ontario. [www.communitylivingontario.ca](http://www.communitylivingontario.ca).”

TORONTO — While Paula McCarthy is pleased Ontario has closed its three large remaining institutions, she thinks Community Living and the government need to continue to do more for people who have an intellectual disability.

Travelling from Newmarket to take part in the recent celebrations at Queen’s Park, McCarthy approached Community Living Leaders following the closure breakfast at which politicians spoke about the March 31 closure of Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia and Southwestern Regional Centre in Blenheim.

“I understand they’re closing the big institutions,” McCarthy, who has an intellectual disability, said. “They should be closing the little ones as well. (People living) in the little ones should have more freedom than they’ve ever had before.” McCarthy herself lives in an apartment.

Amidst the celebrations about the closures, others also made it clear there’s still work to do to create the inclusive Ontario people within the community living movement envision.

“Of course, as you know, it is one thing to live in a community,” said Community and Social Services Minister Madeleine Meilleur during a speech. “But it is another thing to be a part of it.”

“That is why we continue to transform Ontario’s developmental services system to give people the supports they need to participate fully in community life. We are developing policies, regulations and programs to support more people with a developmental disability than ever before.”

“But we need more than new supports or new investments,” Meilleur added. “We need new attitudes. We need more Ontarians to open their eyes to the strengths and opportunities people with a developmental disability bring to their communities.”

When asked later, Rick Tutt, chair of Community Living Ontario’s deinstitutionalization working group, said Meilleur made a “subtle” but “important” distinction in her speech when she discussed living in community versus being part of community.

Tutt said Community Living is turning the magnifying glass on itself. Community Living wants people who have an intellectual disability to attend mainstream classes in regular schools, live in homes of their choice with the people they want and be engaged in community activities of their choice.

“We’re looking inwards to make sure what we’re (creating) with the greatest intentions isn’t institutionalizing or controlling,” Tutt said. “We know our work is not done.”

Community Living is fortunate to be guided by advocates like People First, Tutt noted. “They are obviously the people most (impacted) by this and are holding us accountable. We’re really blessed that we have them, generally with us, sometimes against us, holding us to the grindstone of what we should be doing.”

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## ONTARIO ON BOARD TO HELP OTHER PROVINCES CLOSE INSTITUTIONS

Friday, April 17, 2009 — Natalie Miller

“Reprinted from *Community Living Leaders*, an online news service of Community Living Ontario. [www.communitylivingontario.ca](http://www.communitylivingontario.ca).”

TORONTO — Ontario is pledging its support to help abolish institutions in other provinces now that the remaining three large facilities here are closed.

Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia and Southwestern Regional Centre in Blenheim officially shut their doors March 31.

Institutions still exist in other provinces including Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. “Our work here is not done,” said Rick Tutt, chairperson of Community Living Ontario’s deinstitutionalization working group. Efforts to close institutions will not cease until all Canadians who have an intellectual disability are living in community settings, he added.

***When I lived in an institution, you didn't get support. You sit around and do nothing. You feel like you've done something wrong.***

**Phyllis Burtch, former resident**

“Many provinces are teetering on the verge of abandoning plans to maintain or expand these archaic forms of housing and are ready to move on to community alternatives. They need every encouragement that we can offer,” Tutt earlier told Leaders.

During a recent breakfast reception at Queen’s Park in Toronto, Community and Social Services Minister Madeleine Meilleur said she was willing to lend support to other provincial governments looking to close institutions.

To that end, Tutt said, “this federation also pledges its support.” The community living movement in this province, coupled with People First, are strong change agents, he added.

People First of Canada continues to encourage Canadians to sign a declaration of support for community living. Launched in August 2007, the Institution Watch website is an initiative of a joint task force created by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and People First of Canada. It is designed to bring deinstitutionalization back to the national agenda and develop a plan to make the issue a national priority.

Peter Park, founder of People First of Canada and co-founder of People First of Ontario, recently spoke during a press conference at Queen’s Park following the closures here. “It’s a historical moment in Ontario,” Park said.

However, he added, “this is a baby step we’re celebrating,” implying advocacy efforts must continue.

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## PROVINCIAL / TERRITORIAL UPDATES

### MANITOBA

A complaint was filed with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission (September 2006) on behalf of the 380 people with an intellectual disability who live at the Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC) in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. The complaint came after many attempts by Community Living–Manitoba to negotiate with the Manitoba Government for the development of appropriate community living alternatives, and in response to a government announcement (in 2004) to invest significant new funds in the institution. The complaint outlined that the Manitoba Government had taken the wrong direction on services for people with intellectual disabilities. The complaint was filed on behalf of those people living at MDC and with support of many community agencies, including service agencies, People First of Manitoba, People First of Canada, coalitions of social justice groups and families.

Since 2006, the HRC Investigator has completed an investigation of facts of the case and prepared a report for the Human Rights Commission. In October of 2008, an interim assessment from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission regarding the Manitoba Human Rights Complaint was released. This report presented a favorable finding that discrimination exists in continued placement at MDC. This finding meant that sufficient grounds existed to further proceed with this complaint.

In March 2009, the Provincial Government advised that it would not proceed to mediation. Given this decision by government, we now pursue a full investigation of the complaint. The Provincial Government maintains an option to pursue mediation at other times during the investigation.

A 20 part proposal was submitted to the Honourable Gord Mackintosh, Minister of Family Services and Housing on March 13th, 2009. The concepts of the proposal promote well-planned, thoughtful options in the community. Community Living – MB met with Minister Mackintosh and key government officials on May 22, 2009. No firm response to our proposal was made but there was an understanding to develop strategies, attempt to resolve “impediments” to developing options and meet again by September 25th, prior to our Annual General Meeting to assess progress. Community Living – MB remains optimistic that a solution can be reached.

It is also noted that in excess of \$33M continues to be budgeted within Family Services and Housing and Government Services for maintenance and operation of MDC for 2009-2010. 314 people currently live in MDC facilities.

### ALBERTA

The number of people living at Michener Centre, the largest institution in Alberta, continues to gradually decrease. The majority of the residents living at the Centre have private guardians who hold their legal rights, and decide on where and with whom their son and daughters will live. Many private

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guardians have been successful in keeping institutions open through their effective lobbying of elected members of government.

The Central Region (Services to Persons with Developmental Disabilities) is supportive of providing supports to people with intellectual disabilities to live in the community. During the last year they have assisted 25 people with intellectual disabilities, who were inappropriately placed in an institution for people with mental health needs, to move to the community. The Provincial government this week tabled its budget for this fiscal year 2009/10; the budget gives an increase of approximately 5% to community agencies to support people with intellectual disabilities. This increase should help community agencies recruit and retain qualified staff.

Families, people with intellectual disabilities and community agencies must play a more active role in providing information to provincial politicians to convince them of the necessity to close institutions. Other provinces have closed their institutions, why is it that Alberta cannot do the same? People with intellectual disabilities in Alberta must be given the same rights and privileges as people living in other provinces.

Calgary: Graduated Support: 24 beds, 17 residents  
Edmonton: Eric Cormack: 17 beds, 15 residents (with 1-2 short-term respite)  
South: Alfred Egan Home Bow Island: 31 beds, 27 residents  
Special Dev Unit Ft. McLeod: 18 beds plus 1 respite bed, 16 residents  
Central: Youngstown: 22 beds, 18 residents  
Michener: 280 beds, 261 residents

## **SASKATCHEWAN**

As of March 2009 there are still 243 people in Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw, SK. There have been a small number of people who have been supported to move out of the institution in the last year and while the Government of Saskatchewan still maintains its support of community living for all individuals with intellectual disabilities, as yet they have not committed to closure of the facility. In the fall of 2008 the Government did however, commit to a \$76.9 million investment to eliminate the wait list for residential and other supports in our province. It is hoped that some of that investment can be used to help transition more people out of the institution and into the community. Lack of adequate supports in the community has been a barrier to moving more people out of the institution, so this investment is certainly a step in the right direction and should eventually lead to an increased ability to transition people to community more quickly. We remain hopeful that the Government will take the next step to announce a closure date and provide the necessary investment so that planning can begin in earnest with the individuals and their families to create homes with the needed supports in the community. Advocacy efforts continue to try and achieve this goal.

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## YUKON

The City of Whitehorse is undergoing an Official Community Plan (OCP) Review. A part of this review as it relates to zoning by-laws is of interest to people with disabilities.

Currently, any new “staffed” homes (in residential areas) housing up to 6 individuals would have to apply to be rezoned. YACL is working on policy recommendations with other community partners supportive of new wording and definitions that would guarantee more protection for inclusive living for adults with intellectual disabilities within our neighbourhoods.

An example of this is a clause from the Richmond OCP – “Integrate special needs housing into areas designated for residential use throughout the community.”

## NOVA SCOTIA

The province of Nova Scotia continues to view institutions and large group homes as appropriate living options for people with intellectual disabilities.

Nova Scotia opened its newest institution in the summer of 2009. Housing 24 individuals, it is located in the Halifax Regional Municipality in a renovated building that was previously a health centre and situated between a major highway and an off ramp.

The Nova Scotia government has recommitted institutions as part of its “continuum” of placements. Individuals wishing to move from their parents’ home and requiring more than 21 hours a week of support no longer have the option of living in their own apartments. They may live with an alternative family, group home (if available) or institution.

Nova Scotia has committed to building more group homes, another move to more congregate settings, and has decided that 8 bed facilities are the optimum size.

NSACL and our many community partners remain very troubled by the position of our provincial government, a position that is clearly out of step with what we know to reflect best practices and research. We will continue our efforts to persuade this government to recognize that an institutional model has been repeatedly rejected by persons with intellectual disabilities and their families, and that our province must move forward to develop the necessary community supports and services that will enable full community life for all persons.

## QUEBEC

According to the latest available data, there are approximately 350 people with intellectual disabilities still living in institutions in the province of Quebec. While progress is slow, the province is committed to assisting persons in leaving these institutions. The Association du Québec pour l’intégration sociale (AQIS) continues to monitor these provincial efforts to ensure that as people leave they have access to appropriate supports in the community.

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## **NEW BRUNSWICK**

In June 2008, the Minister of Social Development announced that the Disability Support Program would become a full provincial program by 2010. This new program (which was successfully piloted in 2 regions from 2005 to 2008) will provide individualized and flexible disability supports to adults ages 19 to 64 so as to facilitate their personal development and their participation within the community. In addition to individualized funding, the program will promote personal involvement and control over planning for supports by promoting person centred approaches to developing disability support plans and by providing access to independent planning facilitation. Following a provincial tendering process, NBACL has been selected to provide independent planning facilitation throughout New Brunswick over the next five years.

In January 2009, the provincial government also established a Steering Committee to advise government on the future role and scope of a new psychiatric facility to replace the existing Restigouche Hospital Centre in Campbellton. The current facility currently houses approximately forty people who have an intellectual disability – some of whom have a co-occurring mental illness. As a participant on the Steering Committee, NBACL has been advocating for the return to the community for these individuals and the limitation of the mandate of the new facility to the provision of acute or tertiary mental health services for people who require short term hospitalization. The government has agreed to the establishment of a separate process to plan for the return to the community for people with an intellectual disability who no longer require the services of an acute care psychiatric facility. This process will unfold over the coming months and NBACL will be significantly involved in its work.

## **NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

In its 2009 budget the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced it will invest \$35 million into our long-term care and community support services system. This investment will help individuals and support the hard work and dedication of care providers across the province. While the details are still forthcoming, there are plans to implement a new financial assessment process to determine eligibility for home support services, to increase monthly allowances of clients in the long term care and community supports system and to support a wage increase for home support workers.

Effective April 1, 2008, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador amended regulations to support improvements to the tax system for individuals with disabilities and their families by exempting the Registered Disability Saving Plan (RDSP) from the calculation of Income Support benefits. The provincial government has also provided the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living (NLACL) with \$100,000 to promote RDSPs, increase awareness and develop the capacity of individuals with disabilities and their families to fully realize these benefits through the establishment a support trust. NLACL is currently working on creating a telephone helpline and interactive website, as well as a number of plain language guides to assist individuals with disabilities and their families better secure their financial future.

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## BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia has long been recognized as a leader in the community living movement in Canada. So it was surprising to learn – at the celebration of the Ontario institution closures, no less – about a plan to house 24 individuals with developmental disabilities on a 2.5-acre site in Campbell River on Vancouver Island.

Jo Dickey, a parent whose determination and passionate advocacy were instrumental in the government's decision 30 years ago to close its large institutions, shared her concern that plans for mini-institutions were being discussed in several BC communities.

At a media conference in Campbell River on April 6, 2009, Housing and Social Development Minister Rich Coleman confirmed plans to build 24 "residential units" in four buildings for people with developmental disabilities on the 2.5-acre site.

Although all official documents and announcements refer to the intended residents as adults with developmental disabilities, the Campbell River and District Association for Community Living (CRADACL) now describes two distinct projects on the 2.5-acre site - one being a group home supporting up to 6 individuals with developmental disabilities and a second project comprising 3 buildings, each housing 6 "low-income single people...tenants, each having an individual support plan".

CRADACL objects to the project being referred to as a mini-institution, however, what is proposed is a classic institutional model. Many of North America's institutions created in the heyday of institutionalization in the mid-1800s (including Woodlands in New Westminster) also began as 20-30 bed facilities which congregated a mix of people with developmental disabilities, mental health problems and people at risk of homelessness.

For its part, Community Living BC (CLBC), the crown corporation responsible for community living services in the province, asserts that it "does not support the creation of any new institutions for individuals with developmental disabilities" and that it "remains committed to an individualized person-centred approach." With respect to the Campbell River project, CLBC states that it is only committed to continued support for four individuals living on the current site and added capacity for one respite bed.

For years, BCACL and community living advocates in BC have been calling on CLBC to down-size and close mini-institutions around the province – more than 700 individuals still reside in 130 mini-institutions housing between 5 and 20 individuals each. If CLBC's commitment to an individualized person-centred approach is to be taken seriously, it must take action on closing mini-institutions – at least the ones it funds directly - and on preventing the creation of new ones.

The provincial government is promoting the Campbell River development as a "homelessness initiative". Minister Coleman announced that \$123 million will be dedicated to building "1,000 new homes for seniors and persons with disabilities across BC. Those units will be built this year, largely in smaller communities." The Minister, discussing plans for mental health facilities, recently stated, "Some people would call it reinstitutionalization, and I don't actually argue with that."

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Minister Coleman's ready acceptance of institutions is concerning. If the Campbell River project is an indication of what is planned, BC may soon see a rapid and dramatic reversal of the progress forged by the pioneers of BC's community living movement over the past three decades. The Minister suggests that this project will "turn people's lives around", however, this and other proposed mini-institution projects promise to turn the clock back 30 years on community living in BC and tarnish our province's reputation as a leader.

Fortunately, there is still time and opportunity to reconfigure the current project.

The \$7.3M in capital costs alone translates to more than \$304,000 per "residential unit". This funding presents a tremendous opportunity to develop individualized and responsive supports to even more individuals (in smaller, more personalized homes) than would be served under the costly institutional model proposed.

The Campbell River Association has expressed an openness to further discussion and has invited BCACL and others to participate in consultations. They have presented a forward thinking set of principles upon which planning for the project will be based; principles which, - if followed - will result in an innovative plan and a person-centred approach.

But the current plan – which presupposes a particular model and the use of a single, specific piece of land – must be shelved in favour of an array of community housing options which flow from individualized plans that respect and value people as individuals with unique needs, and visions of how and where they wish to live in the community.

Seizing the opportunity to step back and revise the current plans will take leadership, courage, resourcefulness and imagination on the part of all involved parties. While this may seem unlikely – construction is currently scheduled to begin in October - it would not be the first time that people of vision and principle in British Columbia have risen to the challenge to do the right thing for people with developmental disabilities.

Given the details of the current facility-based plans in Campbell River, Jo Dickey stated, "It breaks my heart. It's like Woodlands all over again. It's shameful. I hope they find it in their hearts to change their plan. People need to realize that the world is watching what we do here and we can't step backward." Institution Watch will report on developments on this and related projects next issue.

A video of the Campbell River media conference can be found at: [http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver\\_island\\_north/campbellrivermirror/news/42631277.html](http://www.bclocalnews.com/vancouver_island_north/campbellrivermirror/news/42631277.html)

## **The Woodlands Project at Douglas College**

A month-long exploration of the institutional experience was presented in March by Douglas College in New Westminster. Events included an exhibition by Michael de Courcy called *Dead and Buried: The Cemetery at Woodlands*, a screening of *Asylum*, a film by Heidi Currie and Lisa G., the staging of *Imperfect*, a play by Mary Burns and *Our Story*, a panel discussion with former residents and their families, and former employees of the institution.

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## Developments in the Woodlands Class Action Suit

Phase one of the Woodlands class action suit against the BC Government is slated for January 2010. On February 13, 2009, the court ruled that the province must release an estimated 2.2 million pages of Woodlands-related documents, including records on involuntary sterilization (the provincial government had appealed the court order to turn over the documents). In March, another ruling, bolstered the February decision. Woodlands survivor and class-action representative Bill McArthur told the Georgia Straight. "The province wanted just to respond to questions about sexual abuse, but the judge wants to look at all the practices at Woodlands, including the lack of educational and vocational resources. This is a great victory for us."

For the full Georgia Straight article, follow this link:

<http://www.straight.com/article-213248/woodlands-survivors-see-legal-opening>

## BC Leads the Way in Supporting the Declaration of Support for Community Living

The people of BC appear more ardent than ever in their support for community living. More people from B.C. have signed the Declaration than any other province or territory!

BCACL extends a sincere thank you to everyone who supported the national task force's Declaration of Support for Community Living at <http://www.institutionwatch.ca/petition-signatures-action/id.1>

## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

As reported in earlier editions of *Institution Watch*, the Government of the Northwest Territories has moved ahead with a cluster housing model to provide supported living services to those with an intellectual or developmental disability. The facility is located in the community of Hay River. Both the Yellowknife Association for Community Living and People First NWT expressed concerns about the service model chosen and the fact that a "day programming" building is to be located on the same site. The Minister's response to our concerns indicated her understanding of the issues and acknowledged that cluster housing was not ideal (see *Institution Watch*/Spring 2008). Despite our concerns, the Yellowknife Association for Community Living decided to work with the Department of Health and Social Services to ensure that the new facility reflected our values.

The mission statement of the Hay River Supportive Living Programs is "to promote a quality of life for all persons with disabilities through dignity, support, community inclusion, participation and choice."

The programs have a statement of values that provides a framework for practice and includes:

- Dignity values the intrinsic self-worth of the person and recognizes that persons with disabilities have rights and freedoms equal to those without a disability;
- Support which implies that every individual, regardless of their ability, is entitled to receive person-centered supports to assist them to live as independently as possible;
- Community Inclusion allows for opportunity, through a concerted and supported effort, to have persons with disabilities interact with the larger community and experience opportunities for success and growth;

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- Participation values citizenship, equal opportunity and difference as persons with disabilities strive to become integrated within the larger community;
  - Choice implies that persons with disabilities have the right to control and manage their own personal affairs to the greatest extent possible and / or where they may be legally capable. Choice is largely related to “personal outcomes” which refers to the major expectations people have in their lives.

The stated objectives include:

- To value the unique character, skills and abilities that each person with a disability brings to the Hay River Social Services Authority’s Supported Living Program;
- To promote independence and self-reliance in recognition that this contributes to self-esteem and autonomy for persons with disabilities;
- To provide supports to assist persons with disabilities in building and maintaining connections and relationships with family, friends or other community members while recognizing that supports should not define all aspects of the person’s life;
- To assist persons with disabilities to be fully included and live meaningful lives in the community;
- To empower persons with disabilities to exercise their right to decide, choose and take action upon their needs, wants and desires in a healthy and safe manner, with adequate supports, if necessary;
- To collaborate with family, guardians, community organizations and government in providing supports, programs and services as a shared responsibility that are person-centered and within the person’s best interests.

The Hay River Health and Social Services Authority “Supportive Living Services Campus” opening celebration took place April 27, 2009. Two of the three, four-bedroom homes are ready for occupancy. The vast majority of the individuals who completed the application process are those currently living in southern facilities or those who would need to move to southern facilities in order to have their support needs met. This is positive in that these individuals may now be closer to family and friends and will be able to live in a smaller community if they wish. The building to be used for “day programming” is not yet complete. This may actually have a positive influence in that it will be absolutely necessary for the individuals to be involved in community based activities as opposed to “campus based” activities.

Although the cluster housing model is not what we would have preferred, we are pleased with the philosophy demonstrated through the mission statement, statement of values, and statement of objectives.

## **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

In December, 2007, the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI) brought together 11 members of the community to form a Disability Services Review Committee. The committee’s mandate was to hear the stories of Islanders about living with a disability, review the range of services currently provided and scan the practices in other jurisdictions to identify best practices.

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The process resulted in two reports being submitted to the Minister of Social Services and Seniors, the Honourable Doug Currie. The first report consisted of the stories heard during the consultations which were categorized into themes which included Employment, Housing, Inclusion Supports and Services, Income, Recreation and Transportation.

On Friday, May 8th, 2009 the provincial government released the Phase II report which consisted of 50 recommendations made to the Minister of Social Services and Seniors aimed at improving the disability services and supports that are available in PEI. The committee synthesized a comprehensive set of recommendations that were formed around core values and operating principles as well as five broad cross-cutting themes: Leadership, Policy, Program Delivery, Resources (Financial and Human) and Public Education and Awareness.

As a result of the report, the Minister will be forming a Disability Action Committee comprised of government staff, community advocates and people with disabilities to serve as an advisory body for legislation, policy, programs and services. Within the recommendations include the call for the evolution of programming and services delivery from “institution-centered” programming to a person centered and community inclusion approach, to addressing the needs of aging parents still caring for their son or daughter at home, to people living with disabilities living in inappropriate residential placements.

Printed copies of the report, including the full list of recommendations, are available through the Department of Social Services and Seniors by calling 1-866-594-3777, or on the web at <http://www.gov.pe.ca/disability/>

The release of the Phase II report and the creation of a Disability Action Committee are indeed positive steps forward. The PEIACL and Partners for Change are optimistic that these recent developments will lead to new and innovative responses to the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities that will ultimately lead to their greater inclusion in all aspects of our society.

## **NUNAVUT**

There are no large institutions designed specifically for persons with intellectual disabilities. People who have returned to Nunavut from institutions are living in group homes. There are still, however, many people living in institutions in the South, who have not been assisted to move back home.

## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

We encourage you to submit stories, Provincial/Territorial updates, pictures and/or personal perspectives on this issue. Please send all contributions directly to Don Gallant at [dgallant@nl.rogers.com](mailto:dgallant@nl.rogers.com) for publication in our next edition (due out in September 2009).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The opinions and interpretations expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.



Kinsmen Building,  
York University Campus,  
4700 Keele Street,  
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3  
T: (416) 661-9611  
F: (416) 661-5701  
E-mail: [info@cacl.ca](mailto:info@cacl.ca)  
Web: [www.cacl.ca](http://www.cacl.ca)



120 Maryland St., Suite 5  
Winnipeg, MB R3G 1L1  
T: (204) 784-7362  
Toll-free for Members: 1 866 854-8915  
F: (204) 784-7364  
E-mail: [info@peoplefirstofcanada.ca](mailto:info@peoplefirstofcanada.ca)  
Web: [www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca](http://www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca)

## Have you signed the Declaration of Support for Community Living?

This Declaration of Support for Community Living can be accessed at

<http://www.institutionwatch.ca/>

Please visit this site and sign our declaration, and the Task Force would ask that you share this site among your various organizations and networks.

WE, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, commit to working together to assist persons to return to their communities and call on all levels of government in this country to:

- Acknowledge that institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities have no place in today's society;
- Stop financing or otherwise supporting the establishment of new institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities;
- Stop all new admissions to existing institutions;
- Support the right of all people with disabilities to live in the community as equal citizens;
- Commit the necessary resources to support the development of quality, comprehensive community-based alternatives to institutional care;
- Acknowledge the wrongs that have been committed against those individuals who have been held for far too long in institutions across this country.