

institution watch

PEOPLE
FIRST
OF CANADA



PERSONNES
D'ABORD
DU CANADA



50 years

Canadian
Association for
Community Living

Diversity includes.

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

This is a newsletter
written and produced
by the People First of
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"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



SPRING 2011

MESSAGE FROM THE TASK FORCE

**Norm McLeod and Shane Haddad,
Task Force Co-chairs**

Progress toward the closure of the last large institutions for persons with intellectual disabilities in Canada remains unacceptably and frustratingly slow despite ongoing efforts by families, self advocates, and organizations working on their behalf. Even in light of Canada's recent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which contains Article 19 (the right to living independently and being included in community), there are still three large institutions in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. Equally alarming, other provinces such as Nova Scotia continue to assert that institutional placements represent an acceptable part of a residential continuum for persons with intellectual disabilities. In reality this means that daily we witness young adults with intellectual disabilities being offered placements in such facilities as Nursing Homes, Seniors facilities and other long term care facilities rather than the necessary supports needed to establish and/or maintain an appropriate life within community.

While governments should be held accountable for the provision of supports and services that are known to be in the best interests of their citizens (and we know that institutions are not), blame for the continuation of an institutional model cannot be placed solely on government. As citizens we must also share the responsibility. If we believe in the right of all people to live in community, then we must ultimately become more active and vocal in our opposition to the continued institutionalization of our fellow citizens with intellectual disabilities. We must do more to ensure that politicians and government officials hear our voices. We must make institutional closures a political issue; an issue that cannot be ignored or deferred any longer.

REMEMBERING MARY ROTHMAN



Mary Rothman was a stalwart leader and believer in the community living movement for over forty years – first as a volunteer and for the past many years as Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Association for Community Living. Mary was also one of the founding members of the National Task Force on Deinstitutionalization. Mary was a passionate believer in and vocal defender of the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Mary Rothman passed on February 27, 2011, after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

The true essence of our humanness, our inherent value as a person, that which gives meaning to our lives, is truly measured by our impact on our world and the people in it. We find fulfillment in the people who touch us and who in turn are touched by us during our short stay on this earth. Our true worth as humans is measured by the kind of positive change and influence we bring, not by the length of time we live. Our contribution to the human condition is not defined by how long we live, how smart we are, or the possessions we have – but rather how we choose to use the time that each of us is given. Our lives find meaning in those we love and who we are loved by. The legacy we leave behind. By all these measures Mary had a remarkable life.

Mary Rothman was a courageous woman, a principled woman who lived her values and beliefs everyday. She reminded us everyday of the inherent value and dignity of people, regardless of label or condition. Mary worked tirelessly for the closure of institutions in this country.

She was a colleague, a friend, and a mentor. She will be dearly missed.

LIVING LARGE IN THE COMMUNITY

The first twenty-one years of Scott Klassen's life were spent in St. Amant Centre, an institution for people with intellectual disabilities in Manitoba. People First of Canada recently sat with Scott and talked to him about his life.

On Institutions

My life for the first 21 years was very structured. I had no say in what was going on around me. I was put into the institution (St. Amant Centre in Manitoba) as an infant and spent 21 years in there. I have vision problems, so I was sent to school in Branford, Ontario, to the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in 1973.

When I came home for holidays and school breaks, it was to the institution. When I went to my parent's home, it was the same thing. My Dad didn't want me out of the institution. He wanted me in a place where I could be controlled. I didn't have fun at my parent's home. My father was very overprotective. I was in bed by 8:00 pm, even when I was eighteen years old. Dad didn't want me to grow up. He didn't want me working at the radio station, or living on my own. He wanted me in a group home or apartment setting. I don't like it when people say I can't do something. I am not sorry when I prove them wrong. I also don't like the unfair assumption that people with disabilities can't speak for themselves. Not just those with intellectual disabilities, but someone with a scooter, a walker, or cane, or even a guide dog. Don't tell these people they can't do anything. They are contributing.



Scott Klassen with his friend Shelley.

There is no comparison to being on the inside and living on the outside. On the outside I am accepted, I've met special people, and I get to live my life. In St. Amant, I had no control; I had no say in what went on. It was very religious and it was run by nuns. It was completely structured. Society has no right to put people in institutions. I would never go back. I'm glad I have good friends, a lot of people in my life who would never let me be sent back. I used to be afraid of being sent back, but not now.

How can anyone say the institution is good? How do you respond? It can be difficult to respond because the institution had been the only home I had ever known. When I was there, it wasn't my home, I didn't feel like it was. Things happened there – abuse – but nothing happened to the abusers. I think parents don't want to ask questions because they are told everything is okay. Sometimes families put their children in institutions and have them stay there – they just don't want to bother, they don't want the burden.

There's nothing wrong with expecting a healthy child but putting a child in an institution is wrong. But then there's no funding support to help parents to keep their kids at home. Without supports, it's hard for the parents. Where is the Vulnerable Persons Act when these things happen.

On Connections and Life

I feel so lucky because I've met a lot of people from People First. In 1990, we ratified the People First Constitution, I remember Pat Worth and I looked at each other and said – “we did it, we did it!” The founding of People First of Canada, it was in New Brunswick – when PFC became official, I was there. I sat on the board and met a lot of wonderful people; Harold Barnes is one of them. I also remember celebrating my 20th year out of the institution, I was speaking to Paul Young and he was congratulating me. I know Pat Worth was watching over me. I always believe that People First gave me my voice. I was helped a lot in my life, especially to get my voice. Pat Worth and Peter Park and People First was a big part of that. They helped big time. I bonded with People First. I still feel affiliated with them.

I feel honoured to have taken part in *The Freedom Tour*, in the launch and by following it through to the end. I first saw it at the premiere and I cried when I saw it. I can't see it anymore because it's too close.

I have a support worker who is like a brother to me. I've never experienced it more than during a recent stay in hospital. He was there for me and his family was there for me. They helped me out. I am a part of their family. When I was asked to attend their 50th wedding anniversary, I was honoured. I sat at the head table as part of the family. As for my own family, my biological parents are gone. I have one sister in Calgary, and one brother in Winnipeg who I don't have contact with. He doesn't see me as part of his family.

One thing that I would like to speak about is parents speaking to their children about words and attitudes. Sometimes children can be cruel and when they make bad comments, their parents should correct them. Some of these comments show discrimination and prejudice and parents should work to stop this behaviour in their children and fight these kinds of attitudes.

**People First helped me
get my voice.**

I work as a data entry operator for CHUM Winnipeg. I have been there for 22 years and I love my job. I have also volunteered at the Red River College radio station.

I feel at home at the radio station. My co-workers are the best I could work with. The staff at the station value me. Whenever an event comes up, a get together, I'm always invited. If I need help with the computer, they give me a hand. I feel valued at the station, like I'm a big piece of the puzzle – an integral part of the place. They value me; they are my co-workers and friends.

I am in a band called The Scott Tones. We are all friends in the band. I knew Harry Havey from Red River College. After getting to know each other, we talked about putting together a band. Then we got Trevor Walker, after awhile, Marc Battle also joined. We started doing shows and we've been playing together for 10 years or more now.

On Getting out

The TV and radio were my outside links to the world when I lived in the institution. I started working at the radio station and doing music as a DJ the year before I got out. Two years after leaving the institution, I was working at a radio station. I wanted to prove to people that as someone who lived in an institution, I could contribute to the community.

I gradually realized that I had choices in the little things – like when to get up and what time to eat.

When I moved out of the institution, I had some choice and options of where to live. The first place I lived was Central Park Housing. I left in 1991, and I've had the same support worker ever since. He's been my roommate for the past six years.

I reflect at night on what has been good and what has been not so good. Society seems like it doesn't even know the wrong they are doing with institutions. I don't believe it. I think they know. Society

knows but I think they don't have a tone of remorse in their voice. Most people are bigots. They don't want to see what is happening. When I moved out, I didn't know how I was going to be accepted by the community.

The interesting part was that I gradually realized that I had choices in the little things – like when to get up, and what time to eat. Inside the institution, it was so structured that there was not choice in the little things. I've done so much since I left the institution. I've done public speaking – my experience is the topic. I talk about what is and what is not happening for people with disabilities in the USA and in Canada. I have spoken in Wyoming, Colorado, and California, along with many places in Canada. In the almost 25 years I've been out of the institution, I have made great friends, I've had paid work, I have volunteered. I have done the things I wanted to do. I have lived my life the way I want and I'm still doing it.

A GOOD LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

During the early 1980's when the *Coming Home* program came into effect in Manitoba, four individuals from Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC) came to live in a residence in Selkirk. These individuals were considered "severely challenged" and it took a great deal of work on the part of Community Living Selkirk to convince the Government that this move would work. One of these individuals was Terry Gunter.



Terry Gunter lived in both the St. Amant Centre and MDC during his childhood and through to his early adulthood. For more than 25 years, Terry has made a life for himself in Selkirk, Manitoba.

Although Terry learned and grew when he was living in those institutions, he was isolated from his family and suffering from a lack of structure and activities in his daily life. His family advocated for more structure and engagement in his life and some activities were incorporated into Terry's program. However, there were still concerns both about Terry's health and wellbeing.

When the *Coming Home* program came into effect, Terry's family took advantage, and in 1984, Terry moved to Selkirk where his mother and siblings lived. During Terry's first few years in Selkirk, he had some anxiety issues which were due to his fearing he would have to go back to MDC. He settled down once the issue was recognized and he was assured that that would not happen.

Terry makes all of his own choices in his life now. He gets up and goes out almost everyday – he doesn't like to sit in one place for too long. He has structure and routines that he likes. He likes to go shopping, to hockey games, and visiting friends and family. He also spends time in the Recreation and Social Division of

Community Living Selkirk, taking advantage of swimming opportunities and social activities. He is part of his church community and that is very important to him. Terry likes to be part of the town, part of the community – and the community is very supportive of Terry. This never would have happened when Terry lived at MDC. Terry's family can see how much he has developed since he came to live in Selkirk, and how much more a part of their lives he is now.

Living in Selkirk, Terry gets to see his family frequently. When in MDC, Terry was isolated from family life. He was home for all holidays, but still could not be involved beyond the special occasions. Now, Terry is an integral part of his family. His sister states that he has kept them all close (Terry has five siblings), he makes sure they all get together and are involved. He is also close to his nieces and nephews who have learned to love and appreciate him for who he is.

Terry's life is far different from what he could have expected had he remained in MDC. The things that make for a good life in the community for Terry are independence, choice, and support.

COMMUNITY LIVING: A SIBLING PERSPECTIVE

My name is Linda Paluck. Terry is my brother. He went to live at St. Amant Centre at the age of 5 after our dad died leaving my Mom with six children to raise. Terry was the youngest and I was the oldest at 14. While he was in St. Amant we visited him every other Sunday, taking him for rides, to parks, etc. He also came home for holidays – which are still very important to him. The Sisters at St. Amant taught Terry a lot of personal care and helped him grow in various ways. However, they could only keep him until he reached aged 10 or 11. They kept him longer than most because of his quiet, easy-going manner.

Terry was sent to MDC and his life deteriorated – he was in a ward where he did nothing all day. After making the administration aware of our concerns, Terry was moved to another ward with people more his age. He seemed happier there and took part in regular bowling and activities. However, while there he became infected with a serious case of hepatitis, and we were not allowed to see him. This was the first time we weren't together for Christmas and it was a difficult time for all of us. Eventually, Terry was moved to Maple and Elm cottages. This was a very hard time for him as there didn't seem to be any structure to his days, other than some time at occupational therapy. When he came home he often had scrapes and sores with no accounting as to how he got them. One time, we were told he had put his fist through a glass window. This was very difficult for us to understand as he was always so mild mannered.

One day my sister and I showed up there unexpectedly with some treats for Valentine's Day. Boys were running all over, many of them with no clothes on. We realized how this situation would upset Terry and, if they had been chasing him, it made sense he may have been hurt trying to protect himself (even hitting out and breaking a window). Because Terry was born paralyzed on the right side and couldn't use his right hand, he had a very strong left hand. He was able to walk due to surgery, but his right leg was not strong and he wouldn't have been able to keep up with the others.

As time went on, things didn't improve. When we took Terry home, he did not want to go back. I recall taking him back one time – he started to cry quietly as we drove on the Perimeter around Winnipeg and was miserable all the way to Portage. (We seldom see Terry cry even when he is upset – he has always been unable to cry and tended to laugh instead, so this was very hard on all of us). When we reached the cottage, there were boys outside and he told us they were crazy – in sign as Terry wasn't talking then.

When there was a chance for him to come to live in Selkirk, my mom worked tirelessly to make it happen. Two staff brought him home one day to meet with Mom and I was able to be there. They told us Terry spent most of his days sitting outside the staff office listening to their music. What they didn't realize was

that he understood everything he heard and knew there was a chance for him to move home. While we sat and discussed the move, Terry sat quietly and listened. When we were almost done he was restless and I asked him if he wanted to go to his room to listen to his records. He nodded and I told him he could go for a bit. The staff were amazed that we could converse and that he understood what was going on. These staff spent time with Terry on a daily basis, but they hadn't figured that out. I think this helped in the decision to let him move to Selkirk.

This was, of course, 25 years ago, and I would hope things have improved at MDC. However, nothing can take the place of more individualized planning and care, so that each individual can reach their utmost potential.

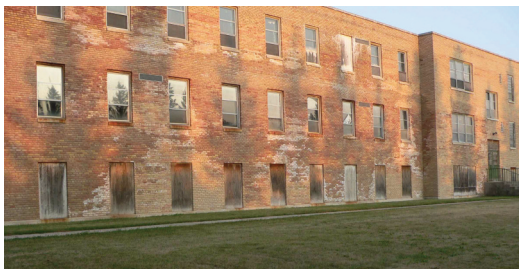
We have never looked back. Terry has been much happier and spends a great deal of time with our family as well as his friends at Community Living. He loves to be out and about attending hockey and baseball games and listens to all sports on the radio. He has been very pleased with the fact we have two more ladies from MDC living in one of our homes, and he loves to visit them. Terry is well known in Selkirk and not because of our family. I have been with him when people acknowledge him and stop to talk even though he can't really converse with them. They seem pleased to know him, which is wonderful.

I have become very involved with Community Living and enjoy the people we support. We have dedicated staff who stay because they love the people they support. I was recently told by a friend about a couple of young staff members who were discussing their jobs and how much they loved them and how excited they were about what the people they supported had accomplished. We must be doing something right! Each individual in our care has his own bedroom with his own belongings and may decorate it to his taste. This gives them a sense of ownership and some control over their own lives.

As you can surmise, I am very much in favour of moving people out of MDC. I realize this is a big undertaking and people are worried about losing well-paid government jobs. I don't see how their expertise couldn't be put to better use in smaller scale living arrangements. I see no problem with most people remaining in the Portage area if that's what it takes. Perhaps it would be possible at the same time to ensure all staff in the Province have similar training and receive wages in accordance with their level of education.

PROVINCIAL / TERRITORIAL UPDATES

MANITOBA



Manitoba Developmental Centre

As of February 2011, 272 people are still living in the Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC).

The Human Rights Complaint filed in September 2006 continues and nearly five years later has still not been resolved. However, many agencies throughout Manitoba are working hard to welcome people into the community and make sure that they are being well supported. Efforts and discussions continue toward a request that MDC be closed and that individuals be assisted to return to community.

However, opposition to a call for closure has emerged at several levels. A committee calling themselves Friends of MDC has been created. They met with Minister Gord Mackintosh in December of 2010, to explain why they feel MDC should not close and to seek amendments to the Vulnerable Persons Act that

would make it easier to have people readmitted to MDC once they have been discharged. A Working Group (established in April of 2010) comprised of officials from the town of Portage la Prairie, representatives from MDC, the Manitoba Government and Manitoba Government Employees Union (MGEU) has been looking into the future possibilities for MDC and its present employees. It has recommended that MDC stay open as it is one of the largest employers in Portage la Prairie.

Despite this opposition we remain optimistic that the provincial government will ultimately recognize the inappropriateness of institutional placement and take the necessary action to ensure that people are assisted to return to community, and that MDC will cease to play any potential role in the future lives of persons with intellectual disabilities in this province.

ALBERTA

In December of 2010 the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Central Region Board announced that Youngstown Home, a small institution that houses 15 people, is scheduled to close this summer. Individual planning is currently underway with the people living at the institution and their guardians. Wayne Morrow, CEO of the Central Region PDD office indicated families are generally in favour of the decision to close the facility. Community agencies are very receptive to providing supports to people to enable them to move back to the community. The Task Force on Deinstitutionalization and the Alberta Association for Community Living have offered assistance to PDD Central Region however they have to date not taken us up on our offer.



Michener Centre

The closure of Youngstown institution signals government's acknowledgement that institutions are not appropriate places for people with intellectual disabilities to live. While the closure of Youngstown institution is a step forward there still is no decision regarding the closure of Michener Centre, the largest institution in the province. As of March 2011, there are still 237 individuals residing in Michener Centre.

The courage and willingness to make the decision to close all institutions housing people with intellectual disabilities is not yet visible. Knowing what's right and doing what's right appears to remain a challenge in Alberta.

SASKATCHEWAN

In May of 2009 representatives from People First of Saskatchewan, the Valley View Centre Family Group and the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living met in Saskatoon and discussed the future of the Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw. A letter of agreement was crafted confirming a commitment among these groups that a planning process should be put into place that would enable people to move to community in a planned and thoughtful manner, and that ultimately such a process should lead to the closure of Valley View Centre. A meeting was requested with the Minister of Social Services, the Honourable Donna Harpauer.

Subsequent meetings were also held with representatives of the Ministry of Social Services. Since then there was a cabinet change and the Honourable June Draude was appointed as the new Minister of Social Services for Saskatchewan.



Valley View

On December 10th, 2010 these three parties met and reaffirmed the agreement reached in May of 2009, discussed terms of reference and the next steps involving Valley View. A meeting with the new Minister of Social Services was requested. A response was received from the Ministry on January 21, 2011 acknowledging the request and stating that the Ministry of Social Services appreciates the opportunity to work with the three parties with respect to Valley View. Arrangements are currently being made to establish a meeting date with the Ministry of Social Services to again discuss the future of the Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw.

As of March 2011, there were approximately 214 individuals still residing at Valley View Centre.

NOVA SCOTIA



Riverview

Nova Scotia is once again in an unfortunate spotlight. Less than two years ago, investigations into institutions in this province uncovered 49 cases of abuse (September 2009). This year began with a story of a young autistic man who had been locked in a room for 15 days, often without access to a washroom. He was also video-taped 24 hours a day during his period of confinement –

with a light shining near his bed constantly. The incident occurred during September 2010. A worker at the institution informed his mother of his living conditions and she demanded that the locks be removed and her son be given access to a washroom.

The Braemore Home Corporation is privately operated but provincially funded and houses 134 people. Upon hearing of the incident, the Nova Scotia Community Services Minister Denise Peterson-Rafuse ordered an investigation into the incident. The investigation determined that the incident constituted abuse and ‘a failure to provide adequate care’ by the institution.

In Nova Scotia, approximately 400 individuals reside in residential care facilities of one sort or another. A disturbing and telling point made by Peterson-Rafuse in a Canadian Press news release was that ‘until recently, the province had limited say in the adult residential centres and has only recently started to attempt to negotiate agreements with required standards.’ For decades, disability advocates in Nova Scotia have been demanding that the province shift to community-based living options and cease placing people with intellectual disabilities in institutional facilities. With the revelation that the province has little or no control over the facility and its treatment of the individuals who live there, advocates say now is the time to shift control back to the individuals and away from facilities like this.

Representatives from the Nova Scotia Association for Community Living, People First of Canada, and Canadian Association for Community Living Joint Task Force on Deinstitutionalization met with the Deputy Minister of Community Services and senior officials recently to present alternatives to Nova Scotia’s current rate of institutionalization, which is currently one of the highest in the country.

The announcement by Minister Denise Peterson-Rafuse of an independent review of Braemore Homes Corporation where she said “Government has a responsibility to look after our most vulnerable people, and we take this responsibility very seriously. We will not tolerate abuse of any kind. We want to be sure we fully understand how and why this happened” is a welcome step. However disability advocates continue to call for a systemic shift to more open, transparent and person-centred community-based supports. An independent review is not sufficient; the only acceptable answer is to assist persons with intellectual disabilities now living in institutions such as Braemore to take their rightful place in community, with the necessary supports to enable them to live meaningful lives in community.

ONTARIO

Although Ontario closed its final three large institutions two years ago, Community Living Ontario is still hard at work on a number of institution related issues including:

- Monitoring and assisting with the three class action lawsuits against the three large institutions that closed in 2009.
- Addressing the fact that many people who have an intellectual disability are still inappropriately living in institutions such as psychiatric facilities, long term care facilities, nursing homes, unregulated boarding homes, and other similar inappropriate settings.
- Developing strategies to ensure that institutional culture and practices have not been transferred into community supports and programs.
- Investigating ways of supporting people with the ongoing pain and suffering resulting from their years of living in institutions.

This work is being spearheaded by the Association's Deinstitutionalization Working Group in close collaboration with People First of Ontario.

AFTER THE CLOSURES

by Kory Earle, People First of Ontario

March 31, 2011 will mark the second anniversary since the last three large institutions closed in Ontario. It is a time to celebrate and it is an emotional time because not everyone got to see this historical moment. Some people didn't make it. But, because people with disabilities demanded and pushed for the government to look at institutions from another angle, many people have made it. And it wasn't just People First who pushed. It was everybody around who questioned why people were segregated, why they were not part of the community, they really questioned if this was the kind of city, province, and country we want to live in. People need to be treated with dignity and respect.

Currently, several people who lived in these institutions now live in my area – Lanark County. They have a place they call home now. One girl told me just being able to go outside and breathe the fresh air felt like a privilege.

In Ontario, in February 2011, a class-action lawsuit was started against Southwestern Regional Centre. This means that former residents are suing all three of the last large institutions that closed in Ontario two years ago, the other two being Huronia Regional Centre and Rideau Regional Centre. The lawsuits say the province failed to properly care for and protect the residents of these facilities and that residents were emotionally, physically, and psychologically traumatized by their experiences in these facilities.

We can't deny what has happened in institutions. The people who lived the abuse – they know. The government needs to acknowledge this, not question it. People need an apology and restitution. The province has to be accountable for what has happened in institutions and find the way forward to make people's lives better now. Peter Park has been appointed as the People First of Ontario representative in these lawsuits. He will give the perspective from People First of Ontario.

In terms of furthering community living in Ontario, we need to start looking at group homes. We still have institutions if we run group homes. It's just size. If we compare group homes and institutions, a lot of things are the same. We should not plan to put up more group homes because we close larger institutions. We need to work harder at educating the public about this, society needs to know why we have to close these institutions. These lawsuits show just some of the reasons why.

INTERNATIONAL EYE ON INSTITUTIONS

The Deinstitutionalization Task Force scans events here in Canada and throughout the world. Below are some recent news items about institutions in other parts of the world.

Violations in Virginia

A report released by the Virginia Department of Justice (February 2011) revealed that the state violated federal law by needlessly institutionalizing people with intellectual disabilities and failing to provide adequate community-based treatment. Beginning with an investigation into one specific 'training centre' the investigation expanded to the state's entire system of delivering treatment to people with intellectual disabilities. Currently in Virginia, over 1,100 people are institutionalized throughout the state's five large training centres. An additional 3,000 individuals are believed to be at risk of institutionalization if they don't receive immediate community services.

The report described a segregated life in an institutional setting. The report stated that there is limited privacy, or opportunities for meaningful employment and virtually no chance to interact with non-disabled peers. Residents can't choose what or when to eat, what to watch on television or make many decisions for themselves. The 'unnecessary segregation' causes 'irreparable harm,' the report said. Residents have repeated accidents and injuries, inadequate behavioral and psychiatric interventions and inadequate physical and nutritional management, it said. Restraints are also relied on too heavily.

'These inadequacies have resulted in needless and prolonged institutionalization of individuals with disabilities who could be served in the community with more independence and dignity at a fraction of the cost,' the report said. When residents are ready to be released, the report said there is a 'slow and muddled' process.

"These are systemic problems that have been inherent in the system for a long time, we're going to be working toward as much as we can, but we're not going to solve them all in the next three-year period," a government official stated.

Progress in Pennsylvania

A class-action lawsuit filed by former residents of a Pennsylvania institution for people with intellectual disabilities prompted a judge to issue a federal violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (February 2011). The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare has been charged with violating the federal ADA because of a lack of means to integrate individuals of its intermediate care facilities back into community-based programs.

Current programs and services are inadequate and the only plan in place discriminates against those individuals who are already institutionalized by not placing them on equal footing with new mental health services clients to secure spots in community based programs. Additionally, there are numerous loopholes in the state plan that makes it possible for officials to bypass this group when integrating people back into the community. Currently, over 1,200 people are housed throughout the state's five care facilities for people with intellectual disabilities.

Shock and Shame from the Netherlands

A picture taken by a staff in an institution in the Netherlands sparked much debate in that country about restraints and the conditions in institutions for those with disabilities – both psychiatric and intellectual.

The picture shows a teenager in a harness tethered to a wall; the harness can also chain his arms behind him. For the past three years, 18 year-old Brandon has lived this way every day. A video of Brandon shows him demonstrating his harness for a film crew.

Further investigation revealed that Brandon has been institutionalized since he was five for learning disabilities. He had been going to his home on weekends but, due to staff concerns, has not been home for three years and has instead been tethered daily. Additional investigation disclosed that Brandon is not an isolated case and that there may be as many as forty other individuals existing under similar continuous restraint. In an emergency debate in parliament, the Health Minister for the Netherlands both defended the practice and promised an urgent review of other options and methods.



Horrors in Mexico

Late last year (December 2010), the investigative findings of Disability Rights International (DRI) and the Mexican Human Rights Promotion Commission were released and the atrocities against people with disabilities that were revealed were horrifying. Children and adults with disabilities are disappeared, trafficked, abused, held without any record or name, or age, or hometown. Within the institutions, many with disabilities were in some form of restraint – tied to beds or wheelchairs – for years at a time, in filthy and inhumane living conditions. The institutions still practice lobotomies without consent, and other life-threatening forms of mistreatment. More shocking still – the new report is a mirror of the one filed a decade ago. Some individuals were even found in the same institutions, living in the same conditions. Both organizations are calling on the Mexican government to stop these human rights abuses and are citing violations against the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Advocacy Advances in Australia

Using the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), a nationwide campaign to close institutions for people with intellectual disabilities is occurring in Australia. **The Shut In Campaign to Close Institutions** is meant to raise awareness about people with disabilities living in institutions, to take action to close institutions and to advocate for housing and supports to enable people with disabilities to live in the community just like everyone else. It is primarily a self-advocate run campaign along with the advocacy organizations that support them.

The campaign gets its message out through a national speaking tour where people with disabilities tell their stories of living in institutions and their current life in the community. They hope to reach people who support institutional living but have never heard the personal stories of people who have lived there.

The campaign is committed to getting the Australian Government to close all institutions that house people with disabilities. The campaign is also developing a database of information and evidence for their advocacy efforts (success stories) as well as monitoring the state of institutionalization in Australia. Ultimately, they hope to put pressure on government to live up to the promise to close institutions, to stop placing people in institutions, to stop redeveloping segregate and congregate facilities for people with disabilities, to enforce the current policies that are geared toward community living and not institutionalization, and to enforce the articles of the UNCRPD.

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 for publication in our next edition (due out in July 2011).

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.

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

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