

the RIGHT WAY

A guide to closing institutions and
building a good life in the community for
people with intellectual disabilities

**FREEDOM
IS FOR
EVERYONE**

PEOPLE
FIRST
of CANADA



PERSONNES
D'ABORD
du CANADA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is this guide about?	3		
Who made this guide?	4		
Goal of this guide	4		
What is life like in an institution?	5		
Task Force definition of an institution ...	6		
History of institutions	7		
Human rights, research evidence and public policy	9		
Human Rights	9		
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	9		
Research Evidence	10		
Public Policy	11		
Guiding principles and values	12		
Key parts of successful closure plans	13		
1. Involve champions at the beginning	13		
2. Make sure the needs and preferences of the person comes first	15		
3. Respect and involve the person's family	16		
		4. Use person centred plans and create a real home for each person	17
		Make a detailed plan	17
		Find the right supports and services	18
		5. Create quality supports, services and safeguards	19
		Supports and services	19
		Safeguards	19
		Evaluation	20
		6. Recruit and develop qualified support staff	21
		7. Create community partnerships	22
		8. Present a clear plan and timeline to close the institution	23
		9. Communicate the announcement clearly and effectively	24
		10. Coordinate and support each person's transition to the community	25
		Conclusion	26
		About the authors	29
		Acknowledgements	30



What is this guide about?

This document is a guide. It is meant for community and government leaders or anyone who wants to close an institution. It will help show you how to make plans to close institutions and support people to live in the community.

It will show you how to create supports for people to move to the community. It will show you how to make sure that people with intellectual disabilities are living in communities as equal members. This guide also has background information to help you understand the issue and key elements.

This guide is called *The Right Way*.

This is not to say this is the only 'right way.' It is a statement that says that *how* a single institution is closed is just as important as the need to close all institutions.

Nobody who lived there and got out has ever said, 'Boy, I'd really like to go back and live there again.'

Nobody. Not one.
That tells you something.

-Bill Hogarth (Survivor)

Who made this guide?

This document was created by the National Task Force on Deinstitutionalization. It is just called the 'Task Force' in this guide.

The Task Force is a partnership. The partners are People First of Canada and Inclusion Canada. The Task Force has members who have survived living in an institution, as well as community living advocates.

The Task Force promotes the following.

- Closure of all remaining institutions for people with intellectual disabilities
- Supported living options for all people with intellectual disabilities
- Prevention of new institutions of any kind from being created

The past 60 years has seen much change in institutions. Many provinces have closed their large institutions and created supports in the community. Many Task Force members had lived in these institutions. Other Task Force members have been involved in the closures. Together, they have a lot of information about closing institutions.

The Task Force decided to share that information and experience to create this guide. It was first published in 2010. It was updated in 2024.

Goal of this guide

The goal of this guide is to help close institutions in the right way. This means that the best possible outcomes are achieved for everyone involved.

The end result should be that each person takes their rightful place in their own home in the community. The end result is not to have a 'resident' or a 'client.' The end result is a **citizen** who is valued and included as a community member.

What is life like in an institution?

The best way to know what life in an institution is like is to hear from people who have been forced to live in one.

This quote is from Patrick Worth. He was a founding member of the Task Force.

"Institutions deny you a life. They take away your ability to know and connect to your family and your community. They deny you the opportunity for friendships. Institutions take away the ability to have responsibility for your own actions. An institution is a place where people are not permitted to dream."

This quote is from Marianne Crowley. She lived at Woodlands institution in British Columbia.

"You couldn't do nothing. You couldn't make conversation like I'm doing now. I wouldn't call it 'Woodlands,' I'd call it a jail. If you are hard to handle, they put you on one ward. I didn't go to school. I don't know why they call it a school."

Researchers have said that institutions are like prisons for people with intellectual disabilities. People who have survived living in an institution agree that it is "just like a jail."



Task Force definition of an institution

The Task Force developed a statement to define an institution. This definition has been adopted by other disability rights groups around the world.

An institution is any place in which people who have been labelled 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.

(National Task Force on Deinstitutionalization, 2002)

This definition speaks to many things. It looks at the effect on the person rather than the size of the building. It looks at the person's rights in institutional settings.

The definition also includes other places where people with intellectual disabilities are placed. These include the following kinds of places.

- nursing homes
- seniors homes
- personal care homes
- long term care facilities
- large group homes
- rehabilitation and residential centres

An institution is not just a place, it is the way people think.

- Patrick Worth

The focus of this guide is to close institutions. But there is also a need to raise awareness. There is also a need to help people living in other inappropriate settings to return to the community. This guide can also be used to help get people out of other kinds of institutional settings.



History of institutions

Institutions have been around for a long time. The first one recorded was in the 13th century, about 800 years ago.

Here is a brief history of institutions.

- 1800s: Institutions were being built in North America.
- 1830s to 1970s: Canada builds its first institutions. They were in New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec.
- 1920s and 1930s: Canada has laws that take away the right of people with disabilities to have children. Many people were forced to have surgery they did not agree to. These laws were not changed until the 1970s.
- 1950s: Families and activists began to demand that institutions close. They also demanded that services be provided in the community.
- 1960s and 1970s: More groups were critical of institutions. So were the courts. Institutions were being seen as inhumane and harmful. Institutions were seen as violating people's human rights.
- 1970s: Governments in Canada began to call for institutions to close. They made plans to close institutions and provide supports in the community.
- 1986: Records show that 10,000 people were living in 31 large institutions across Canada. These institutions had 100 or more beds.



- 2009: At least 4 provinces have closed their large institutions. This includes Newfoundland & Labrador, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Ontario.

- 2013: Alberta announces that it will close the Michener Centre institution. That decision was reversed in 2014.



- 2019: Saskatchewan closed the Valley View institution.

- 2024: Alberta has reduced the number of people living at Michener Centre. At one time there were 2,400 people living there but now there are 101.

- 2024: Manitoba Developmental Center is closed.

The first institutions were seen as modern and positive. But the recorded history tells a different story. It shows that institutions have always been bad places.

There have been reports of abuse, neglect and isolation since the first institution was opened. This has been recorded by people who lived in these institutions. But there have also been others who saw the terrible treatment of people and spoke up.

There have been public inquiries and investigations into institutions for almost as long as there have been institutions.

For more than one hundred years, there were no other options available to families. There have been tens of thousands of Canadians who have lived and died in these institutions.

By 2024, many of the efforts to close large institutions in the country have been successful. But thousands of people with intellectual disabilities continue to be living institutionalized lives in other places.

Human rights, research evidence and public policy

Human Rights

Institutions were created with the intent to provide good care and a safe place for people with disabilities. But today it is well known that institutions are not necessary. In fact, institutions are harmful to people and take away their right to live in the community.

As society advanced so did the understanding of human rights. Today, there are documents that protect everybody's human rights.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a legal agreement. It is just called the 'Convention' in this guide.

The Convention has 50 articles that protect people with disabilities. Countries sign the Convention and agree to follow it. Canada signed on March 11, 2010.

Article 19 of the Convention is about the right to live independently and be included in the community. This article gives people with disabilities the same rights as everybody else when it comes to choosing where they live and being part of their community.

The article says that people with disabilities have the following rights.

- They can choose where they live.
- They can choose who they live with.
- They can't be forced to live in an institution or other living arrangement that they do not like.



- They need to have a range of different support services, including personal assistance.
- They need to be able to choose from the same range of services that other people can choose from and get good service.

Closing institutions and helping people have a life in the community has always been the right thing to do. It is a position based on dignity and respect. The Convention makes it a legal obligation as well.

Research Evidence

Arguments in favor of institutions have been around for a long time. Usually these arguments state that institutions can provide better care or better health outcomes. Some argue that people with disabilities want to be with 'their own kind.' Some argue that people with complex disabilities or needs cannot be supported in the community.

All of these arguments have been proven to be wrong. People with disabilities who have moved to the community prove this themselves. Many research papers show the same thing. Research continues to show that institutions have harmful effects on people. Research also shows that community living has benefits for everyone.

There is at least 50 years of research that shows this. This research shows that people with disabilities who live in the community get the following benefits.

- Maintained or improved health and health care
- Increased independence and skills development
- Decreased or eliminated challenging behaviours
- Increased family involvement and support
- Lower costs for supports in the community than those in the institution
- Successful transitions to community by individuals with the most complex needs

The research shows that families completely support community living after an institution closes. This happens even if they were opposed to the closure at first. The research also shows that everybody can move to the community. People with complex disability needs and other issues have successfully moved out of institutions.

Public Policy

Public policy in Canada has changed a lot over the years. Policy is about the rules and guidelines that society follows. Provincial governments first began serious talks about closing institutions in the early 1970s.

In 1973 the term 'community living' was beginning to be used. The idea of appropriate homes in the community with supports was in discussions. But things moved slowly until the 1980s.



Today, the debate is settled. There may be small groups that disagree. But they are few and far between. All provincial and territorial governments in Canada have policies that commit to supporting community living. Society agrees that people with intellectual disabilities should not be forced to live in institutions. This policy should be taken on by the entire country.

Now, the big challenge has become how to do both things efficiently. Policy, leadership and careful attention are needed. This will help to make sure that people are supported to live in real homes in the community. This will also help prevent institutions from starting up again in any form.



**I lost 18 years of my life to
an institution. But I don't
concentrate on that.
I concentrate on what
I can change.**

-Peter Park, ON



Guiding principles and values

Deinstitutionalization is not just about closing institutions and providing supports in the community. It is about using a human rights lens to provide support to people with intellectual disabilities.

Efforts to help people leave institutions must be guided by the values and principles that promote full citizenship. A plan to close institutions must ensure that people have the following rights and access.



1. The person has the right to choose where they will live and if they will live alone or with others.
2. The person has the right to direct and control their own services and supports. The person has the right to make choices and take risks.
3. The person has the right to an individualized living arrangement. They have the right to control their own funding.
4. The person must have access to the disability related supports they need to fully take part in the community.
5. The person must have access to support in decision making from friends, family and advocates, if needed.
6. The person must have access to services that meet all of their needs so they can take part in society. These services must be high quality and accessible. Services must be portable. This means the person can take their services with them if they move to a new place.

Key parts of successful closure plans

There are a number of key parts in the deinstitutionalization process. These have emerged as lessons learned and best practices.

One of these elements is to invite and involve groups that represent people with intellectual disabilities as equal partners. This can include family, self-advocacy and disability groups.

These groups have a lot of experience with the right to community living. They have worked with the Convention for many years. They know how to create supports that put a priority on community inclusion and human rights. They know how to avoid the approaches that do not work. They know how to respect the dignity, individuality, and equality of people with intellectual disabilities.

The rest of this guide details our recommendations on how you can close an institution *the right way*.



We cannot accomplish all that we need to do without working together as a community. Inclusion has helped me gain my freedom and independence.

-Heidi Mallett, PEI



1. Involve champions at the beginning

Closing an institution is a big task. One person cannot do it alone. It requires many people working together. It takes many steps. It often takes many years to see the end result.

This task also requires vision, passion and leaders. The leaders are often called champions. They actively support the efforts of a cause. Champions are often people who are involved in the cause for the long term.

You will need to find champions to help close institutions. These champions will defend and fight for the right to community living. They will be involved in the work it takes to close an institution in the right way.

The lead role is often taken on by family members or people with disabilities themselves. But you can find champions in any part of society.

Look for champions in these areas.

- Volunteer sector
- Self-advocacy organizations
- Disability organizations
- Community living agencies
- Disability services agencies
- Board and staff of institutions
- Governments
- Political parties



Champions need to demand equal citizenship. They need to demand supports for people with intellectual disabilities. They need to demand inclusive lives in the community regardless of disability.

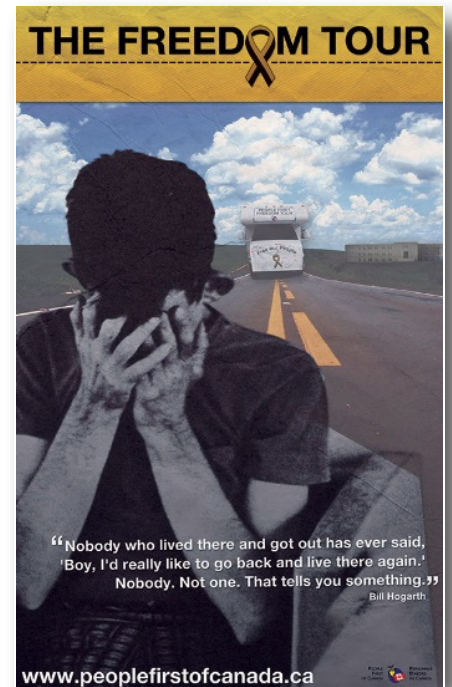
Champions have already made impacts across the country. Here are some examples of the work they did to close institutions.

- **Newfoundland and Labrador** families and people with disabilities were demanding change. Due to their efforts, the government made a new policy in 1982. It was for full deinstitutionalization. People with intellectual disabilities would no longer be put in institutions. Those in institutions would be moved out.
 - o The province closed its 2 large institutions within 6 years. All group homes were closed in the following years. This was done through a highly individualized process.
- **British Columbia** parents demanded the closure of the Woodlands institution. They wanted plans for all residents. The group did not back down from government. They continued to fight until the province finally committed to close the institution.
- **Ontario** families and people with intellectual disabilities demanded the closure of the province's large institutions. The government made the announcement in 2005. It would take 4 years to complete the process. On March 31st, 2009 the last 3 institutions in the province were officially closed.
- **Manitoba** self-advocates and their supporters lobbied for the closure of the Manitoba Developmental Centre (MDC). This was the largest institution in the province. On January 11, 2021, the MB government announced their intention to close MDC. It took almost 4 years for all residents to move out. The last resident of MDC left the facility on December 10, 2024.

- **People First of Canada** members make a documentary film called *The Freedom Tour* in 2007. It is about survivors and people who were still living in institutions in the prairies. They develop relationships with the National Film Board. They find a director who is a champion. They travel across the Prairie Provinces and film self-advocates and family.

- o They use the film as a voice of many people. They use it to call upon leaders across the country to rise to the challenge of closing these institutions. Other groups use it as a resource. It becomes part of university courses and libraries.

These examples show how champions can come from any sector. Make sure you find champions to work with to close institutions.



2. Make sure the needs and preferences of the person comes first

Closing an institution has many steps. One of the biggest steps is planning. Each person has needs and preferences. Each person needs to come first in any planning. All plans need to be individualized. This means that they need to meet each person's specific needs.

You will need to make sure each person has their own personal plan. Here is a list to help with the process.

- **Make sure the planning involves the person.** The person must control and own the plan. Some people might want to get help. Sometimes a helper can move the plan ahead easier than others. A helper can also make sure the person comes first in the plan.
- **Make sure the person has the supports to make decisions about their own life.** The person needs to be empowered to choose where they live and who they live with.
- **Make sure the person has the supports to live in their own home.** The person needs the supports and services to be able to take part in community activities in a meaningful way.

- **Make sure the home is truly the person's home.**

- o Make sure the needs of staff DO NOT come before the needs of the person.
- o Make sure any rules in the home are made by the person who lives there.
- o Make sure the home does not become a 'workplace' or 'facility.'

- **Make sure funding is individual and attached to the person.** This means the person can easily move and take their funding with them. It means they are not trapped by having someone else in control of their funding.

- **Make sure planning is ongoing and not just a one-time thing.** The person's needs and preferences may change. This could happen when they move to the community. It could happen as they age. This needs to be taken into account.

You should avoid trying to use the exact same method to close every institution. This approach is the same model that institutions use. There is no choice in this model. People are 'placed in' rather than 'planned for.' The needs of the group may not be the needs of the individual person.

It may seem easier to do the same thing to close each institution each time. But this kind of approach usually fails. There are often issues and problems for both the person and the service delivery agency.

This approach may also violate the person's rights under Article 19 of the Convention.

3. Respect and involve the person's family

Families should be informed and involved from the beginning. Family is often the best source of information about the person. Families are often the main part of the person's support network in the community.



There may be exceptions to this. The person may not want their immediate family involved. Or the person might not have any immediate family. Except for these cases, you should make sure families have a role in developing plans for the person.

You need to respect the experiences and roles of families. In the past, families were often given bad advice by medical professionals. Many families were pushed to put their child in an institution. They were told it was best for the whole family. They were told their child was too 'fragile' for life outside an institution. They were even told their child would die young. Some families were told to just forget about the child and move on with their lives.

So it makes sense that families may not fully trust this change in information and advice. They were told one thing was best and they followed that. Now they are being told the opposite is true. It's easy to understand why there might be distrust. It's easy to understand why they might feel betrayed or judged negatively.

But families might also be fearful. They may feel they are now responsible for the care of their loved one. They may not have the money or the capacity or skill to provide that care. They may also be afraid their loved one may end up in a worse living situation or even homeless.

You should look for families who have been through the experience. They know what the planning process was like. They know what community living has been like for their loved one. Connect them to the family who is new to the process. Let them provide information and possible support.

You can also get help from someone with family support skills. They can work with families to make sure they get the information and support they need during the process.

4. Use person-centred plans and create a real home for each person

Make a detailed plan

A lot of information comes out of the process of closing an institution. Those involved have to find out a lot of things in order to move someone from an institution to the community.

The process shows that a lot of supports and services already exist in the community. It also shows that supports and services can be created when there is a gap.

You need to make an individualized plan for each person. It must be 'person-centred planning.' This means that the person is at the centre of the planning. Their needs and wishes should *always* drive the plan

You can get a facilitator to help with planning. This can be someone who is already helping the person, or you can hire a facilitator. This will help to make sure each person moves into their own home in the way they want.

Some people will want to live on their own with supports. Some people may want to live with others. The important part is they get to make the choice.

You must find services based on the needs and preferences of the person being supported. This is a critical part of the planning.

Find the right supports and services

You may find that existing service models will not work for the person being supported. These models are often based on the institution model. You can get better outcomes if you use respectful person-centred planning.

The goal is to provide supports that meet the person's needs and allow them to do the following.

- Take part in society as an equal citizen
- Live in a real home
- Take part in community life in a meaningful way
- Make real choices
- Have their rights and wishes respected

You should be prepared for barriers and challenges. There may be issues in the overall closure plan. There may be issues in each person's individual plan.

It may be hard to find specific supports and housing choices. There may be shortages of some services. Here are some examples.

- There may not be occupational therapy or counselling available for institution survivors.
- There may not be enough accessible housing available in a community.
- There may be a lack of skilled support staff to hire.

You will need to be creative with resources and systems. Use them to address possible gaps or conflicts. Do this across all policy areas of government that are involved. This includes employment, education, health, and social services.

You will need to be watchful of the outcomes for people. Monitor what is happening.



Make sure that all policy that supports community living results in quality supports for the person. This includes all people with intellectual disabilities. This is also in keeping with the Convention.

5. Create quality supports, services and safeguards

Supports and services

You may find that most of the supports needed by people living in institutions are already available in the community. These supports can be improved and increased as part of the closure.

The resources that were used for the institution can now go to the community. These include the following kinds of resources and services.

- Housing
- Personal care
- Dental care
- Equipment
- Other services

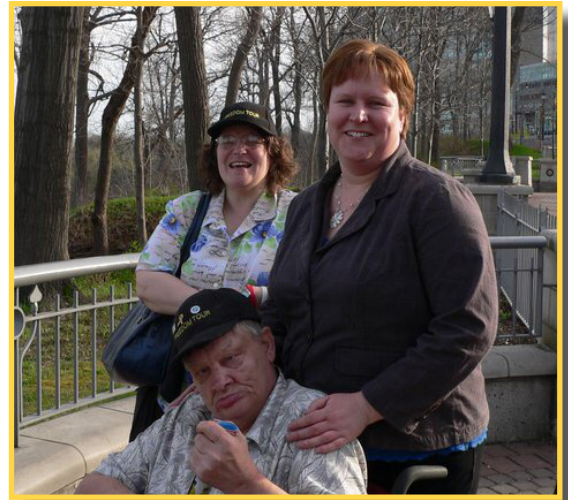
There will be a need for increased capacity in communities. You can identify these areas early in the planning stage. That way, everything the person needs is in place before they move into the community.

Sometimes the move needs a 'transitional' period. During this time, funding may be needed to develop or expand community resources while the institution is still open.

You should put timelines on the funding for transitions. By the time everyone moves out, all the resources that once went to the institution should be now be in the community to support the person.

Safeguards

People are safer in the community than they are in an institution. But people with intellectual disabilities are still vulnerable. They often have less power to protect themselves than the average person. Creating safeguards is critical to their wellbeing. A safeguard is something that is done to protect someone or to prevent a bad outcome.



You should build the following into all plans.

- Safeguards in the closure process
- Safeguards in each individualized plan
- A way to monitor or keep track of the safeguards and outcomes for each person

Research shows that 'multi-level safeguards' are best. These include the role of family, networks and community. These include both formal and informal safeguards.

'Intentional safeguards' are things that are planned. These are specific ways to reduce a person's vulnerability. But unplanned safeguards are also important. These are things like having friends and neighbours who know the person and can take action when concerns come up.

Evaluation

There are different ways to check on the quality of supports and services. There are also ways to test how good a safeguard is. Some of these methods use minimum standards of quality. Others use a more overall approach and look at all parts of supports and services. There are formal ways to evaluate services. But there are also informal ways. Both can be used to evaluate safeguards.



The main part of your evaluation has to focus on the person. It should look at the outcomes and how satisfied the person is.

Another point in evaluating is to consider if the living arrangement is a real home for the person. You should ask the person or their support network the following questions.

- Do they feel their home is their own?
- Are they able to make real choices about their life at home?
- Do they feel included in the community?
- Are their wishes being honoured?
- Are their rights being respected?

It is a good idea for you to evaluate the process of closing the institution as well. This can show what worked and what did not work. This information may be useful for others who are planning to close institutions.

6. Recruit and develop qualified support staff

One of the biggest factors in the success of a move to community is staff. Staff need to be skilled. They need to be knowledgeable. They will provide many of the supports the person will need in their homes and community.

You need to consider staffing in your plans. The person moving out will need staff. But you also need to understand that the staff at the institution will lose their jobs when the institution closes.

Not all communities have qualified staff ready and available. Even if there are staff, there may be periods where it is hard to find or keep good support staff. There may be a lot of competition in the area. There may be other employers offering better pay or other benefits.

You may find there is opposition when it is announced that an institution is closing. Staff are often part of unions and employee associations. There will be concerns about job disruptions and losses. Staff and unions may defend the institution. They may question the ability of the community to provide the same services.

Unions often have social justice committees. You should try to get them involved to highlight the human rights issues. It is a good place to share the Convention and Article 19.

It is critical that you involve institution staff and unions early in the process of closing an institution.

The decision to close will have already been made. But you can show staff and unions that you respect the impact the closure is having on them. You can offer opportunities to work together through the closure. You can also discuss the new jobs in the community.

Some institution staff may move to jobs providing support in the community. Others may not want to do this. There are other strategies that can be used like the following.

- Staff may be reassigned to community agencies.
- Staff may be reassigned to other provincial government work.
- Staff may decide to retire early.

You should provide training opportunities to the institution staff and other workers in the community the person is moving to. Staff who make the move to the community with the person may become an ally.

A lot of groups have to work together to make sure there are enough qualified staff. Government departments involved in employment and education and other areas need to be involved. Local colleges and municipalities need to be involved. Community groups like Inclusion Canada and People First of Canada should be involved.

You need to identify the community the person chooses to live in very early in the planning stage. This will help both government and community efforts to make sure the person has the staff, supports and services they need.

7. Create community partnerships

A lot of groups have to work well together to successfully close an institution and support people in the community. This includes the following.

- Individuals and families
- Government and community organizations
- Advocacy organizations
- Other allies

You should involve local and provincial advocacy groups. These include People First of Canada and Inclusion Canada. Both groups have a history of experience and can help.

This connection with people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters will help to address the human rights concerns. People with lived experience can speak with authority on their lives inside and outside of an institution.

But you should also involve other groups, like the following.

- Family support organizations
- Local advocacy groups
- Social justice advocates
- Service groups
- Unions
- Business leaders

Remember, champions can come from any sector or perspective. Important allies can come from anywhere.



You should develop and maintain positive relationships with everyone involved. This includes a relationship with the person moving and their family or support network. It includes the staff from the institution. It includes agencies that may be involved. It includes any other person or group that is involved in supporting the person to live in the community.

You need good relationships because all these groups must work together from the first planning stages to the transition to the community. This will make sure that the service planning is truly centred on the person. It will keep the focus on the person's rights and choices. This will make sure that the appropriate individual supports and services are planned for and secured.

The help and support of many different people and groups will be critical. This will send a clear and informed message that the closure has support. It will show that it is in the best interests of the community and the individuals to close the institution. The partnerships will also help to show that the closure is not political.

8. Present a clear plan and timeline to close the institution

The commitment to close an institution must be made public. Announcing the closure is a critical step. The message should be clear and direct. It should state that the institution will be closed. It should make it clear that resources will be moved to the community. It should be clear that each person in the institution will be supported to move into their own home in the community.

It is very important to learn from the experiences of other institution closures at this step. You should consult with others who have done the same thing. Do this at the local, regional and provincial level. Develop an in-depth closure plan. Develop a strategy to communicate the decision and process to the public.

You must present a clear plan to close the institution. Establish a clear public policy that supports community living. This will be the foundation for community living rights.

It sends a clear message that institutional models will not be supported by public policy or funds. Make sure both government and community leaders honour the person's rights under Article 19 of the Convention.

Many areas of the country have already made the decision to stop all admissions to institutions. This makes sure that communities are prepared to provide services and supports to everyone in their own homes.

It is important to have a clear timeline for the process to close an institution. For example, Ontario first proposed plans to close institutions in 1971. But it was not until 2005 that a clear plan and timeline was made. This led to real action and change. This plan saw almost 2,000 people successfully move to the community over 4 years.

You need to develop basic steps and a clear timeline for the whole process. This should be done before announcing the closure.

9. Communicate the announcement clearly and effectively

You need to carefully consider how to announce the closure of an institution. Develop messages about the closure. Create messages about plans for support in the community. Deliver information at the beginning and throughout the process.

You should expect some opposition to the closure. Be prepared for it. People may be opposed for many reasons. Some may feel very strongly about the closure.

Families are often opposed in the beginning. They are concerned that their family member will not have the supports they need in the community. There may be opposition from unions and community leaders. They may be concerned about jobs and the impact on the community economy.

You should be prepared for these concerns. Have clear information about what is planned and why. Have clear information about the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

You should develop the following kinds of resources. Note them in the planning stages.

- Background information about institutions
- Fact sheets about human rights and the Convention
- Media releases
- Strategies to promote the plan
- Strategies to deal with opposition

All communications should be respectful and consider the interests of other parties.

10. Coordinate and support each person's transition to the community

The planning of each person's move from the institution to the community is highly individualized.

Each person's plan will have identified basic items like the following.

- Where the person will live
- Whether they will live alone or not
- What kinds of supports and services they will need
- How the supports and services will be provided
- What kinds of activities the person likes to do at home
- What kinds of activities the person likes to do in the community
- What kind of job opportunities might be available to the person



You will need to carefully arrange the physical move to the community. Some people may need a series of visits to get used to the new community. They may need gradual change. Some may only need a few visits and may be prepared more quickly.

You should involve people who know the person moving very well. They are in the best position to help plan the transition and any steps needed. Note that the transition period is part of the individualized plan. It must be done with care and attention to the unique needs of the person.

**We all have the same rights.
We all belong in the same place.
That place is community.
I want a country where everybody
lives in the community.**

- Valerie Wolbert, MB

Conclusion

This guide has been presented by the Task Force on Deinstitutionalization. We see *The Right Way* as a guide with a dual purpose. It is meant to help people close institutions. It is meant to help people with intellectual disabilities to reclaim their lives in the community.

The guide goes through many areas. It starts with the history of institutions. It looks at research. It looks at the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. It looks at the changes in beliefs and values in our society over time. It looks at human rights. It looks at public policy and the way society supports people with intellectual disabilities to be active members of their community.



Realistically, institutions are just one part of a bigger problem. There would be no institutions if society did not believe that some lives matter less than others. A shift to a firm belief and commitment in inclusion and equality needs to happen. This will stop institutions from being built in the first place.

These are the 10 main points of action in this guide. These points are critical to follow to create real homes and plan the closure of an institution.

1. Involve champions at the beginning
2. Make sure that the needs and preferences of the person come first
3. Respect and involve the person's family
4. Use person centred plans and create a real home for each person
5. Create quality supports, services and safeguards
6. Recruit and develop qualified support staff
7. Create community partnerships
8. Present a clear plan and timeline to close the institution
9. Communicate the announcement clearly and effectively
10. Coordinate and support each person's transition to the community

Today, we know that people with intellectual disabilities are best supported in real homes in the community. Across the country, most large provincial institutions are closed. Community living for all is being embraced by many communities.

Since 1986, the number of people with intellectual disabilities living in large (100 or more beds) institutions has been greatly reduced. About 9,400 people have moved to the community. About 600 people remain in these institutions at the time that this resource was written.



While this is a great achievement, there are still challenges for people with intellectual disabilities to have their right to live in the community. Under the Convention, citizens with intellectual disability can no longer be required to live in institutions.

It will take courage, leadership and commitment from all involved to achieve community living for all people with an intellectual disability in Canada. Closing institutions is not the end of the work.

All leaders in the process will need to be watchful. New institutional models need to be rejected. Existing community services need to be monitored. They also need to be modified or adapted if required.

“

**Inclusion happens in the
community. Isolation
happens in institutions.**

-Gordon Fletcher, BC

”

In the next few years all of the provincially-run institutions will be closed. This will be a time to celebrate.

But over the last 10 years there have also been trends towards building institutions in many provinces. Not the big building institutions, but smaller ones. The Task Force's definition of an institution says "An institution is not defined merely by its size. 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." That means that any place where people are not listened to and are segregated in their community is an institution. This also happens when people with intellectual disabilities are admitted to nursing or retirement homes. Current numbers show that this is happening to thousands of people who are less than 40 years old. They are being told that it is the only option due to long wait lists for community living.



This needs to be addressed. If it keeps happening there will be more people with intellectual disabilities in these inappropriate settings than there were in institutions in 1986. This is where we need to turn our attention now.

We are just at the start of the journey to full inclusion. But it is important to do it the right way. We must make sure that every person has a real home in the community and the chance to take part, contribute and be included as a full citizen and community member.

**We deserve an inclusive Canada –
close institutions for people with
intellectual disabilities!
Living in the community is
the only way to live.**

-Harold Barnes, AB

About the authors

National Task Force on Deinstitutionalization

The National Task Force on Deinstitutionalization is a partnership between People First of Canada and the Inclusion Canada. The Task Force believes that the institutionalization of persons with intellectual disabilities is a denial of their basic right of citizenship and participation in community. We believe institutionalization is against the rights protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

For additional documents and resources, visit our website: www.institutionwatch.ca

.....

Inclusion Canada

Inclusion Canada, formerly the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), is the national federation working to advance the full inclusion and human rights of people with an intellectual disability and their families. Inclusion Canada leads the way in building an inclusive Canada by strengthening families, defending rights, and transforming communities into places where everyone belongs.

For additional information, visit our website: www.inclusioncanada.ca

.....

People First of Canada

People First of Canada is the national organization representing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are the national voice for people who have been labeled with an intellectual or developmental disability. We are about rights – human rights, citizenship rights, accommodation rights, and language rights. We believe in the right to freedom, choice, and equality for all.

For additional information, visit our website: www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca

Acknowledgements

The Task Force would like to acknowledge our members who are survivors of institutions. Survivors relive their trauma every time they tell their story. They do this to ensure that no one else will ever have to live through what they did. Your willingness to share your horrific stories helped us to write this document. We thank you.

David Weremy is a survivor from Manitoba who was asked “When do you get to stop sharing your stories?” David replied, “When there are no more institutions.”

The Task Force would like to thank everyone who has supported our work over the years. Thank you to all past and current members of the Task Force. Your efforts and your time have been so valuable to the work that we do. We also thank the people and organizations in Canada and around the world, who support our work and help share our message.

We also want to acknowledge the people who are still forced to live in an institution. We reconfirm our commitment to assisting people to leave institutions and take their rightful place in community.

The work of closing institutions will not be finished until everyone with an intellectual disability is supported to live the life they choose in the community with the supports needed to do so. We hope that you use this document to support deinstitutionalization wherever you are.

