

institution watch

PEOPLE
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DU CANADA



50 years

Canadian
Association for
Community Living

Diversity includes.

Spring 2012 / Volume 6, No. 3

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 Canada-CACL Joint Task Force on the Right to Live in Community. For more information, contact Don Gallant at (416) 661-9611 or Shelley Rattai at (866) 854-8915.

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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 2012

MESSAGE FROM THE TASK FORCE

Laurie Larson and Shane Haddad, Co-chairs

VALLEY VIEW CENTRE TO CLOSE

The Task Force is pleased to highlight the recent announcement by the Government of Saskatchewan to, over the next four years, close Valley View Centre. In this edition we bring messages from many of the organizations that have played a role in arriving at this historic moment.

Valley View Centre is one of the last government operated institutions in Canada specifically designed for persons with intellectual disabilities. Designed to house 1,500 residents, today it still serves more than 200 people. Its ultimate closure will signal a new era in Saskatchewan, one in which there is acknowledgement that ALL persons have a right to live in community. Moving away from this institutional model will enable a full investment of resources at a community level, to the benefit of current residents, as well as future generations of Saskatchewan citizens with intellectual disabilities.

The closure of an institution such as Valley View invariably evokes many and varied responses – from that of unbridled celebration, optimism, hope and joy to sadness, concern, reticence and fear. These reactions are neither wrong nor surprising. For better or worse Valley View has been a ‘home’ for many hundreds of people over the years, and as with any change, its closure will cause different emotional responses. As you read this edition of *Institution Watch* you will undoubtedly see the differing perspectives. However what is most important to remember is the collective commitment to ensuring that persons currently residing in Valley View will be assisted to take their rightful place in community, with access to the individualized supports and services needed to ensure full inclusion and participation in community. The focus of our efforts must now move from debating this issue to placing full priority on ensuring a full and successful transition back to community. We must now ensure that the right thing is done in the right way!

MESSAGE FROM CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

Laurie Larson, President



On behalf of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) and all our provincial/territorial ACLs, we extend our sincerest congratulations to the Government of Saskatchewan on the announcement to close Valley View Centre.

Valley View has long been an ongoing reminder of a very dark period of history for persons with intellectual disabilities, both in Saskatchewan as well as throughout this country. A reminder of a time when persons with intellectual disabilities were removed from and hidden away from society. A reminder of a time when families were not provided with the necessary supports and services to enable them to keep their children at home. A time no longer acceptable.

The closure of this institution will, in so many ways, herald a new era in Saskatchewan – one in which all 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 an institutional setting. An era in which the Government of Saskatchewan had the moral and political courage and vision to do the ‘right thing’. The Government of Saskatchewan has indeed taken a major step toward ‘making Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for people with disabilities.’

With this announcement comes a responsibility to undertake a planning process that will give life to the dreams and aspirations of persons with intellectual disabilities who for far too many years have lived in Valley View, rather than community. Government’s commitment to collaborate closely with the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living, the Valley View Family Group and People First of Saskatchewan in the development and implementation of individualized responses for each resident of Valley View gives us much optimism for positive outcomes for everyone concerned. We are confident that working in close partnership with these organizations will ensure that every consideration is given to the choices and preferences of each person. Only in that way can we ensure that this closure process will be successful.

A clear and powerful message has been sent to the citizens of Saskatchewan, and indeed all of Canada, that persons with intellectual disabilities have value, that they have the fundamental right to live within the mainstream of society, and that no longer will we tolerate or accept their relegation to a life of isolation and segregation.

This announcement is an occasion for celebration. The celebration of the end of institutions in Saskatchewan but more importantly the celebration of a future of full community inclusion and participation for all persons with intellectual disabilities. We at CACL and throughout Canada join in that celebration.

MESSAGE FROM PEOPLE FIRST OF CANADA

Shane Haddad, President



When an institution is closed, it represents more than just the closing of a building. It is more than just words on paper and an event for the press. A closed institution represents many things to many people.

Every closed institution represents freedom to those who lived there and to those who fought to get them out. It represents hope for the future and for a life in the community, rather than the fear of a life in an institution.

Every closed institution represents communities that are now more open, welcoming, and

diverse. Every closed institution strengthens us – it confirms our belief in human rights and advances our collective citizenship.

Every closed institution represents a change – a change in heart, a change in mind, a change in attitude – a shift in thinking. Every closure of an institution represents an enormous long-term effort by many people to simply do the right thing for all our citizens.

Every closed institution strengthens our determination to continue our work; to continue fighting for what is right. Every closed institution shows others that it can and must be done.

Every closed institution represents a victory on the road to freedom.

The announcement of the closure of Valley View Centre was a very personal moment for me. I was proud and pleased on many levels – as a person with an intellectual disability, as a citizen of Saskatchewan, and as the President of People First of Canada.

Like many other self-advocates, I have spent a lot of my life and my time fighting for my rights and for the rights of other people with intellectual disabilities. One of the most important rights we have been fighting for all over this country is the right to live in the community – to not be institutionalized. With the announced closure of Valley View Centre, we are now closer to that being a right for all people in Saskatchewan.

I recall the words of my friend as I celebrate this closure announcement, knowing that this dream can now come true for many people here in Saskatchewan. As I celebrate this victory I also know that we need to continue our work and bring this dream to all citizens in Canada.

A lot of people who have been labeled still have never been given a chance to dream. They can't even dream about a life of having the right to walk down the street in their own neighbourhood.

Pat Worth



MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF SASKATCHEWAN

The Honourable June Draude, Minister of Social Services

On February 24, 2012, the Province of Saskatchewan announced that we would begin to work with the residents of Valley View Centre and their families and supporters on new services to replace the current Valley View program.

These services must include a range of options, such as community- and government-operated group homes and expanded day programming for current Valley View residents as well as others with intellectual disabilities. We must balance the need to provide choices for residents and families with the need for specialized services for those with complex medical and behavioral needs. Our priority will be to ensure that services meet the unique needs of each individual. To that end, we will be working closely with each resident and his or her family to develop transition plans and determine the services required.

Valley View has not admitted new residents for the last 10 years, since 2002. While it was built in 1955 for a population of 1,500 people, only 207 residents live there today. The Centre is nearly 60 years old and requires significant upgrades, at an estimated cost of more than \$37 million. Our Government has instead chosen to invest in new services that truly will enhance the quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities and, where possible, enhance their participation in their communities.

New services will be phased in over the next four years, so there will be no immediate changes for residents, their families or employees of the Centre. We made this announcement now to ensure that there is sufficient time to plan for the transition from the Valley View program to new services.

Along with residents and their families, the Valley View Centre Family Group and the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living will be involved in developing detailed plans over the coming months. The employees of Valley View will also have an important role to play. They have provided wonderful care to the residents of the Centre, and have become like family. We recognize the importance of these relationships between residents, families and staff, and that will be critical to our planning. It will also be important to continue to provide the critical mass of professional skills and co-ordination of care that has been available at Valley View.

Supporting the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in our communities and providing the services they need are key priorities for our Government. In 2008, we announced the largest investment in the province's history to eliminate a waitlist of 440 Saskatchewan people with intellectual disabilities who required programs and services. By the end of March this year, services for 373 of those 440 people – or 85 per cent of the waitlist – will be in place or in development with community-based organizations across Saskatchewan.

This announcement will allow us to continue the commitment we have made to make Saskatchewan the place where people with disabilities get the best care and support available in Canada... a place where people can find the best services, the most dignity and the greatest opportunities.

MESSAGE FROM SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

Gloria Mahussier, President



There has been considerable discussion amongst those connected to the Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw since the Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services announced its decision to develop transition plans and determine the services required to meet each individual's unique needs.

For many residents, the Valley View Center has been the only home they have ever known. Many previous governments and decision-makers have grappled with the complexities of Valley View's future and more importantly, the residents' future. With the residential population declining and the age of the facility advancing, a difficult but necessary decision to make a transition was finally made in Moose Jaw on February 24th, 2012.

As the saying goes, now the hard work really begins. I recently had the opportunity to attend a gathering of families representing residents currently living in Valley View Centre. Many of those whom I talked with were very concerned about the future, mainly because there were so many questions and uncertainties about where their loved one would be living. I understand these concerns. I have heard the worry expressed that many residents will be put out on the streets with no place to live, and nobody to give them support.

Faced with what is right, to leave it undone shows a lack of courage.

Confucius

As President of the SACL, I commit to all of those with loved ones at the Valley View Centre that SACL will do everything it can for the remaining Centre residents and their families to ensure the successful transition of services.

The Ministry of Social Services has said they are willing to work with residents, their relatives, and other organizations to ensure that everyone's future needs are taken care of. I believe this is an excellent commitment, because the development of new services to replace the current Valley View Centre program must recognize the unique needs of those who remain at the Centre, and their families. It is therefore crucial that an individualized transition plan is developed for every remaining resident.

The decision affecting Valley View Centre marks a huge milestone for the benefit of those who reside there, because it will allow individuals, and their families, the ultimate ability to choose their own place of residence, as well as whom they live with on an equal basis.

What happens now will be difficult, but through cooperation motivated by courage, I know that we can all come together as one to do what is right for the residents at the Valley View Centre.

MESSAGE FROM VALLEY VIEW CENTRE FAMILY GROUP

By June Avivi, President

June Avivi and Doug Conn are members of the Valley View Family Group. June, a founding member of the Group, has a son who currently lives at the Valley View Centre. Doug, who is also a member of the Group, had an uncle who recently passed away at the Centre.

It may come as a surprise to readers that when Doug and I first heard about the plans of the government to transition residents away from the Valley View Centre, our reaction was not of victory, but of sadness. There is no victory when you tell a person that they have to move out of their home. There is sadness because for many, the Valley View Centre is the only home they have ever known. But the slow decline of the number of residents, and the advanced age of its buildings meant that the Centre's end was inevitable.

Doug and I have a very personal connection to the Valley View Centre. I have a son who has been a resident there for much of his life. Doug, who joined our Group a few years ago, had an uncle who was a long-time resident. Even though his uncle passed, Doug remained with the Group. I'm deeply grateful for his kindness and commitment.

The Valley View Family Group was formed more than 25 years ago. The main purpose of the Group now as then, is to support and improve the lives of residents at the Centre. Over the years, many parents have devoted great time, energy and personal expense by helping to expand services and programs offered at Valley View.

Doug and I recently had the opportunity to meet with more than 150 relatives of residents who still remain at Valley View. It goes without saying that everyone we talked with had a significant stake in what will happen over the next few years. Many relatives were greatly concerned, even fearful, about the future. We can understand these fears because much of it comes from uncertainty about what is going to happen next.

What will happen next is a great deal of consultation and work. It will be critical for everyone who has a vested interest in the Valley View Centre to come together with a cooperative and collaborative mindset. Over the next four years we must all strive to provide residents and their relatives with the supports they need to ensure that all needs are met. We must strive to communicate frequently with residents and their relatives about the future, to help alleviate fears. We must strive to talk openly and listen respectfully to the voices of everyone who will be impacted.

Ultimately, we must strive to ensure that when the process is finished, individual plans are made that benefit each and every remaining resident and their families.

The Valley View Centre announcement does not mark a time to celebrate. It marks a time when we must all look forward and pull together as a group towards something new and better.

We have not yet arrived at a time to declare victory. We will only know victory once the transition is complete to the benefit of all Valley View Centre residents and their families.

MESSAGE FROM PEOPLE FIRST OF SASKATCHEWAN

Neil Mercer, Vice President and Diane Otterbein, Advisor



A call for the closure of Valley View has been a central message People First has been sending to government since our beginning in the early 1980s. In the 57 years of Valley View Centre history, many of our peers have spent time living on the inside. It was built for 1,500 people and over the next four years, the last 200 people will be moving into the community and taking their rightful place.

Neil Mercer, Vice President of People First of Saskatchewan attended the closure announcement. He was very moved to be in Moose Jaw to hear this good news. Neil was a resident in Valley View and recalls many negative experiences during his time there. Neil warns, "It is going to be important that the people are given the right kind of support when they leave." He remembers how much his life changed when he left Valley View and how he has since built a life for himself within community.

During the announcement, Minister of Social Services, June Draude said: "Over the next four years, we will develop services that better support the inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities and enhance the array of services available to Saskatchewan people."

One concern that people express about the closure is where all the residents will live. Since 2002, no one new has been forced to move into VVC. That means hundreds of people have been supported to live in the community instead. This says a lot about how to do the work. People First of Saskatchewan is celebrating the announcement and wants to be part of helping people settle in the community by offering peer support and membership.

Choosing where we live is a human right in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This and many other rights are violated every day when people are not given as many options as everyone else to decide where they want to live. People First of Saskatchewan has been working in partnership with the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living and the Valley View Centre Family Group for the past four years. This working group had a common mission and vision that included the formal closure of Valley View Centre. We are proud of our involvement in making this mission a reality. Our goal now is to hold the government to its promise of investing in enough alternative housing options to allow every resident of VVC to transition to the community successfully. Institutions will become a thing of the past!

One of the youngest members of PF Saskatchewan, Tyler Haddad, feels it is a good thing to close VVC. "Because of the history and because the idea of sending people to an institution makes me feel sick to my stomach. I have heard the stories of people leaving VVC. They live better lives in the community and would never go back. When we were little, my parents got the support they needed to learn how to parent. Because of their willingness to learn and because of the support they had, I am who I am now. If times had been different, my parents might have been sent to a place like that. They are living proof that people with a label can live independently, work, marry and have children. I am inspired by the way they have built a community, raised us and how they help other people in need."

This closure is an opportunity for People First to do the work we do best, supporting each other to be active in our community and to stand up for social justice. We intend to keep up our advocacy, to keep speaking up about our human rights and to keep fighting for a truly inclusive Canada. Our dream is to make sure the next generation of People First members will never feel what it is like to be locked in from the inside.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We celebrate that the government of Saskatchewan has at long last taken steps that will see the ultimate and successful closure of Valley View Centre. This news has been positively received by the community living movement across our country. To realize that another province in Canada has at long last realized that our friends and family members should take their rightful place in community is very much a cause for celebration.

We take this opportunity to congratulate the government of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living and the Valley View Parents Group. In particular we acknowledge the efforts of People First of Saskatchewan who have been advocating for this closure for many years. Their leadership and unwaveringly commitment to community living for all people serves as an example for all of us.

However the joy we feel for people in Saskatchewan is tempered by the frustration, sadness and shame experienced when we think of the many citizens in other parts of the country who are still forced to live in institutions, away from friends and family and the communities of which they deserve to be a part.

Today, the reality is that there are provinces in this country, namely Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta, who still inexplicably refuse to discontinue their reliance on institutions and/or an institutional model. Why does the Michener Centre in Alberta and the Manitoba Development Centre remain open? Why have closure announcements not yet been made for these facilities? Why are persons with intellectual disabilities in Nova Scotia still being placed in institutional settings? Why are young people with intellectual disabilities, in many provinces and territories across this country, being placed in seniors' facilities and nursing homes? Why do these provinces and territories not honour Canada's commitment to compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability? Why as citizens of this country do we not speak out loudly against these practices? Why indeed.

Institution Watch encourages all readers to write to their government and hold them accountable for enabling all persons with intellectual disabilities to exercise their right to live within community; to ask that institutions such as Manitoba Development Centre and Michener Centre be closed; that placement of persons with intellectual disabilities in other institutions cease immediately; and that the necessary supports and services be created to enable all citizens to live in community.



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 Summer 2012).

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CACL and People First of Canada gratefully acknowledge the Government of Canada (Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability Component) for supporting our national Community Inclusion Initiative.

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