

Putting Deinstitutionalization in Focus

Questions and Answers

The call for deinstitutionalization started in Saskatchewan in 1955 when the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) was created. **Parents wanted to keep their sons and daughters at home, so they created SACL to help them advocate for alternative services in the community.** Our service system today was built because of the hard work of those parents and it continues to evolve as parents push the envelope and expect better, more respectful options.

Today SACL is still working towards a time when all people will be supported to live, go to school, work and recreate in their communities as equal citizens. Every person with an intellectual disability has dreams, can love and be loved and can contribute to the community in their own way. They deserve the same opportunities as the rest of us and they deserve the support to live their lives the way they want, fully included.

Community living has always been our goal, not just for some people with disabilities, but for everyone, no exceptions. **Why do we think community living is for everyone?** Because it makes sense. You can't have a full life and live out your dreams while someone else makes your decisions, from breakfast to bedtime. None of us would want to live our lives constrained by those rules. This is why deinstitutionalization continues to be a big priority for SACL.

Since 1972 **people with even the most complex disabilities** have been successfully served in normal adult living arrangements and yet institutions still exist today. We are standing up with People First of Canada, the Canadian Association for Community Living and our provincial and territorial partners to challenge the continued existence of institutions and help the service system evolve so that people have the choice and opportunity to live a good life, a self-determining life, in their community.

Deinstitutionalization is not a disability issue, it is a human rights issue. Just as other groups have fought for their citizenship to be respected, so are people with disabilities and their families. As we move forward, we are hearing lots of myths about deinstitutionalization and we are asked lots of questions:

Question: Why is SACL calling for the closure of institutions when people with significant physical, behavioural or medical needs cannot be supported in regular homes?

Fact: People with every kind of significant challenging need are already being supported in small supported homes. This is not a new phenomenon. People with challenging support needs have been our neighbours, receiving the supports they need in more intimate, regular adult settings, for over 30 years in Saskatchewan and across Canada.

Question: Why is SACL calling for the closure of institutions when there are no alternatives?

Fact: SACL would never advocate for the closure of an institution without making sure that there were alternative housing and day supports available. As we move forward with deinstitutionalization, every single person must have a plan and a home based on their preferences and dreams, with adequate time to transition, appropriate staffing and a circle of support around them. *We would not accept anything less.*

Question: Is SACL advocating for stripping services away from people with intellectual disabilities?

Fact: No, absolutely not. It is ridiculous to suggest that there will be no alternative services available because options other than institutions are already in place in our community. The only way that more and different options will be more readily available is if we demand them as an alternative. Deinstitutionalization

means realigning resources, helping them evolve and change. It does not mean stripping services away from people.

Question: Is the service system threatened by deinstitutionalization?

Fact: SACL's role has always been to question and to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are supported in the best way possible. We have been part of the development of exciting alternative services and we continue to push hard to find and develop best practices for people with disabilities. What we believed was best 30 years ago may not be the best we can do now. We know more. We have learned new and better ways to support people with disabilities. We are not advocating for shutting down services. We are advocating for better services. We want to see these institutional service models evolve, to deliver services in a different way that meets the needs of people today. We honour the work of parents a generation ago by continuing to move forward and do better.

Question: If institutions close, will the people with disabilities who are currently living in them end up living with their aging parents?

Fact: No. The service system was set up so that families could be sure that their sons and daughters would have a safe place to live as adults. SACL does not expect any parent, aging or otherwise, to bring their adult son or daughter home to live with them. We also know that many people living in institutions do not have actively involved family members. For those without family, we will work to ensure the same high level of support and will develop a circle of support for them.

Question: Are people with disabilities having their choices taken away by closing institutions?

Fact: No. In fact it is just the opposite. Choice is a word that is thrown around and misused a lot. Ask people with intellectual disabilities how many choices they have had in where, with whom and how they live. The answer is very few. If people with disabilities could experience a more independent way of living, with their own home and with staff that take direction from them, they would choose it over anything else. It is hard to really choose when your experiences have been limited. Presently, there are almost no choices. Institutionalization is the only option that many people are offered. SACL believes in real choice. We believe that people with intellectual disabilities deserve to be the authors of their own lives with the support they need. Telling them that SACL is threatening their homes is not true and it is irresponsible. It scares people into accepting and being thankful for any support they are given. Real choice means being able to make choices with your own support money and have the service system respond to your needs and dreams.

Question: Where does SACL take their direction from?

Fact: SACL is a family-driven organization that has a close partnership with People First of Saskatchewan. This means that **families and people with intellectual disabilities give us our direction, they make up our board and they lead the way in what we advocate for.** The Executive Board of SACL and People First of Saskatchewan are committed to deinstitutionalization, believing that we must not accept discrimination based on disability anymore. Our members believe that we need to push harder to make sure that there are **better and different services available.** Families and their adult sons and daughters are demanding person-centred, individualized supports. In an open and transparent way, SACL is calling for change, knowing that there are innovative exciting alternatives already available that will allow people with intellectual disabilities a chance to express their individuality and author their own lives. We have learned and grown over the past 50 years, over the past 30 years, over the past 5 years. To cling to outdated, institutional models of service delivery is unfair to people with disabilities who have not had all the opportunities for a full life that they could have.