



Community Living
Ontario

Intégration communautaire
Ontario

Coming Home:

Inspiring Stories about Life in the Community



Community Living Day at the Legislature - May 16th, 2007



An Open Letter to All Members of Provincial Parliament:

Community Living was formed as an association, 54 years ago, when a small but determined group of Ontario families and concerned citizens banded together to ensure a better life for their loved ones who had an intellectual disability.

The families rejected institutionalization as a way of life for their sons and daughters. They wanted their children to learn, work, and live in community. To make this happen, the families sought to build a society where all citizens belong, exercise their rights, and live with dignity. These families were motivated by a vision of inclusion. The Ontario government's decision to close all Ontario institutions in 1987, a decision embraced and fully supported by all three political parties then and still today, has played a huge part in making that vision a reality.

Following the 1987 decision, thousands of people, who had lived in institutions for most of their lives, began to live in community – leaving isolation and locked doors behind them. Were the individuals and families worried about what this new life would mean? Certainly, but they were very excited too. So many opportunities awaited them. In this booklet, you will read some of their inspiring stories, including personal messages from families about what a difference moving into community has made in their lives, and the lives of their loved ones. These stories are a compelling reminder of why facility closure is so important, and why we *must* continue to support people to live meaningful, well-supported lives in community.

Today (with funding provided by the Ontario government), local Community Living associations play a pivotal role in ensuring people have quality supports to live effectively in the community and enjoy all the benefits of citizenship. We also look forward to continuing our work with government during its transformation of the developmental services sector, which will mean increased opportunities for meaningful living for the people we support.

On this 8th annual Community Living Day at the Legislature, and on behalf of Community Living Ontario, Community Living associations across the province, and most importantly, the families and individuals we represent, I want to thank you for your commitment and continued support. *Enjoy the read and celebrate with us!*

Sincerely,

David Barber
President



Reflections on our History: The Key to the Future

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

- 1959** The Association successfully advocates for changes to plans for a proposed institution at Cedar Springs (Southwest Regional Centre), reducing it from 2,400 to 1,000 beds.
- Community Living members Betty and Jerry Anglin arrange a tour by Pierre Berton of the Ontario Hospital School in Orillia. His resulting column on the deplorable conditions in ancient overcrowded buildings creates a furor when it appears in the Toronto Star. The Minister of Health, while not admitting to Berton’s charges, proceeds to commission a film entitled *One on Every Street*, showing sinking floors, cracked plaster, crowded wards and dripping pipes in the 70 year old dormitories designed for 40 beds and “accommodating” 100 or more.
- 1971** A report by Walter B. Williston Q.C. looks into the death and severe frostbite of two men from Rideau Regional Centre and recommends the phasing down of large institutions.
- 1973** A report by Robert Welch, Secretary for Social Development, calls for the creation of appropriate residential homes in the community to facilitate deinstitutionalization.
- 1974** The Developmental Services Act is passed, providing the legislative framework for the creation and operation of community services for people who have an intellectual disability.
- The Government paper referred to as the Avocado Paper describes, for the first time, specific targets for institutional downsizing.
- 1977** The Association protests plans to build a 150-bed institution in Etobicoke – plans are altered to create community supports for 100 individuals.
- The government announces the first multi-year plan to close one institution and downsize another.
- 1978** Nipissing Regional Centre (Timmins) - CLOSED
- 1982** A second multi-year plan targets the closure of five institutions.
- 1984** The Association releases the document *Deinstitutionalization, a Value Based Process for Planning and Implementing the Repatriation of People With Handicapping Conditions*.

- 1985** St. Lawrence Regional Centre (Brockville) – CLOSED
Bluewater Centre (Goderich) – CLOSED
START Centre (St. Thomas) - CLOSED
Pine Ridge Centre (Aurora) – CLOSED
- 1987** Durham Centre (Whitby) - CLOSED
Community and Social Services Minister John Sweeney announces Challenges and Opportunities, describing a strategy for developing a comprehensive system of supports and services in the province and making a commitment to close all large institutions within 25 years. He also announces the third multi-year plan with a target of closing three more institutions.
- 1988** Surrey Place Centre (Toronto - residential) – CLOSED
- 1994** The Association forms a partnership with the Canadian Association to undertake the “Opening New Doors” project to prepare communities to welcome people that are coming home from institutions.
Muskoka Centre (Gravenhurst) - CLOSED
Northwestern Regional Centre (Thunder Bay) – CLOSED
- 1996** D’Arcy Place (Cobourg) - CLOSED
Oxford Regional Centre (Woodstock) – CLOSED
The Association presents to government the document “No Better Time Than Now – Saying Farwell to Institutions.” The document stresses the need to close institutions and the value of supporting people to live in the community.
Community and Social Services Minister David Tsubouchi announces the 4th multi-year plan with a target to move almost 1,000 people from institutions and closing 5 more facilities.
- 1998** Midwestern Regional Centre (Palmerston) - CLOSED
- 1999** Prince Edward Heights (Picton) - CLOSED
Adult Occupational Centre (Edgar) - CLOSED
- 2001** Concerned that momentum to close institutions might be slowing, Community Living associations in southwestern Ontario spearhead an initiative to renew the issue as a provincial priority. A new provincial working group is struck to demand government action on the final closure of the institutions.
- 2003** The Association members protest plans by government to build a youth detention centre on the grounds of the Southwest Regional Centre while that institution is still in operation.
The Association hosts a provincial forum “Free the People” to develop strategies for getting the government to act on the closure of the final three institutions in Ontario. Similar regional events are hosted regionally in Smith Falls and Windsor to demand action and plan for the return of people to the community.
- 2004** Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello announces that the remaining three institutions will close by April, 2009.
- 2005** Some families of people in the facilities slated to close bring court action against the government challenging the planned closures. Community Living Ontario seeks intervener status in the court proceedings. Consistent with the positions taken by Community Living, the court rules in January, 2006 that closures can proceed and that families and individuals must have access to appropriate planning that decides where they will live.
- 2006** The “key” is to have conviction in your beliefs and NEVER GIVE UP!