

Closing Institutions

Myths and Realities

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Freedom, Reconciliation, and
Community Living for All

A Forum on Deinstitutionalization

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

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Closing Institutions in Canada

- “Life in institutions” is a very sad part of Canadian history
Still thousands living in institutions
- Too many stories that *break your heart*

Look deep
Deep into the hearts of my people
Witness their horror
Witness their pain
Your spoken words alone
Will never soothe
Do not try to explain it away
They will never believe you...

Robert Williams

Changing Definition of 'Institution'

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.

People First of Canada

Patrick Worth



Patrick Worth, First Chair of the CACL / People First 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.”

Closing Institutions in Canada

- Pace of closures is very slow - started in 1971 and will likely continue for many more years
- The threat of institutionalization is real and of great fear to citizens with disabilities.

Myth # 1

People with complex disabilities
require institutional care

Reality

Citizens with complex disabilities have
been able to live full, rich lives in community
(In every province)

First Institutional Closure in Canada



1971
Weyburn
Mental
Hospital
Sask.

First Institutional Closure in Canada



**Aerial
view
sheds
different
light**

What Conditions Led to the Closure of Weyburn?

- **Leadership “within” the institution**

- Hugh Lafave

- **Leadership “within” government**

- Supported by Premier & cabinet

To current premiers ...

Do the right thing now

**because all the right reasons have
been well presented by those who
came before you**

Mountainview Institution Near Truro, Nova Scotia

**What conditions led to
its closure in 1976?**

- A persistent parent
- Advocates who challenged the system

Tranquille Institution Kamloops, British Columbia

What conditions led to its closure in 1985?

- A government trying to save money
- A focused and strategic provincial association for community living

Myth # 2

All stakeholders must be “on-board” and support the goal of a closure before governments can move ahead with a plan

Reality

Most institutions in Canada have closed with only two or three stakeholders *initially* supporting the closure

Research Findings:

Outcomes of Institutional Closures

Improved Outcomes When Living in Community...

- Individual behavioural change
- Home-life participation
- Family perceptions and visiting patterns
- Individual perceptions and satisfaction
- Community participation
- Relationships and social networks
- Costs – very cost effective

**Outcomes seldom led to
paradigm change in service delivery**

Myth # 3

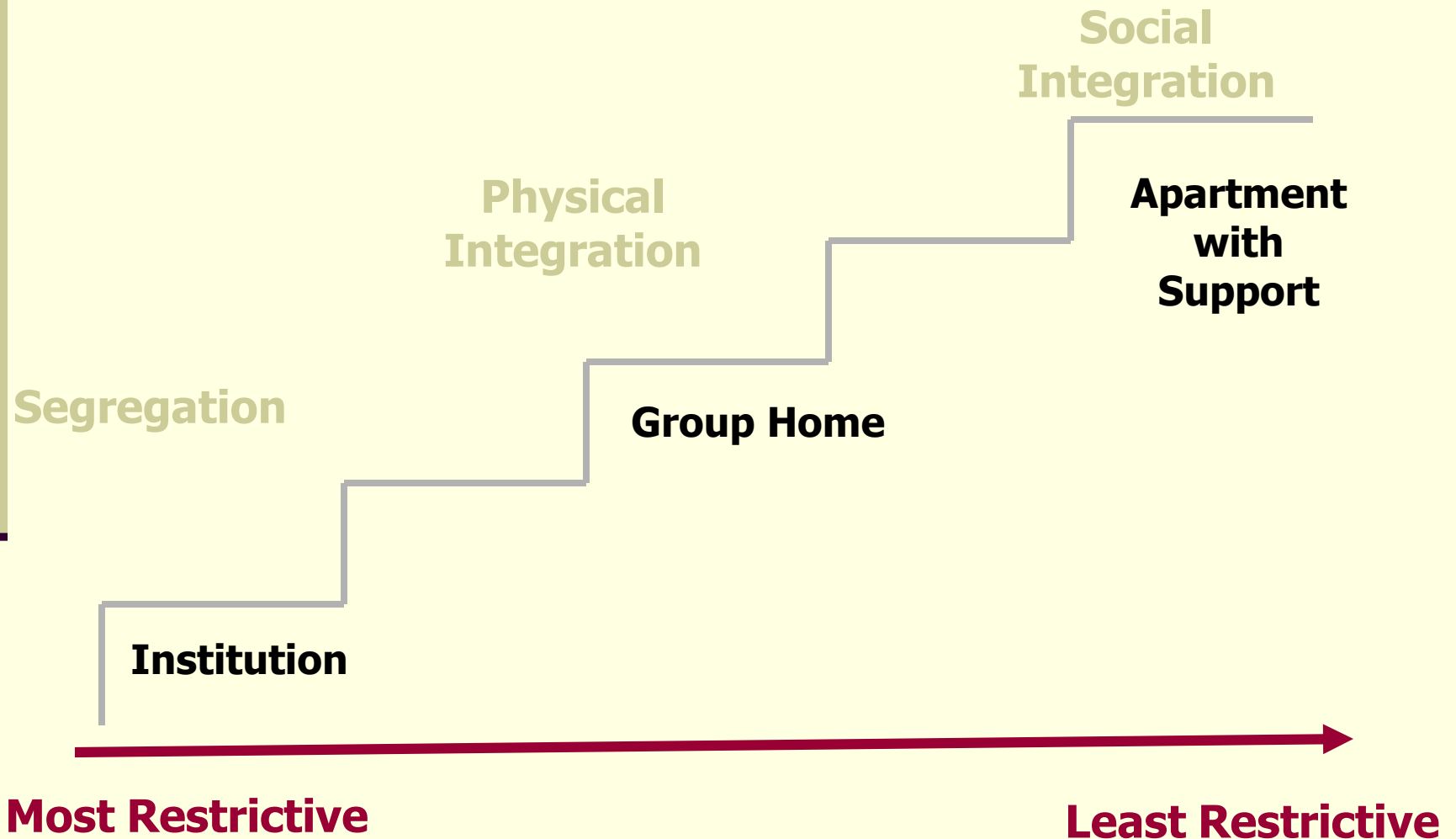
A continuum of services makes sense and is the best way to provide supports to people with disabilities

(See next slide)

Reality

A continuum approach leads to labelling and segregation and needs to be replaced by a new paradigm of individualized supports

The Housing Continuum for Persons who are Labelled



Why Limited Paradigm Change When Closing Institutions?

Failure to change

planning mind-set
from 'bricks and mortar'
to 'self-determination
and community'

Barrier to Paradigm Change

The significant problems we face can not be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

Albert Einstein

Why Limited Paradigm Change When Closing Institutions?

Failure

**to use existing research
and knowledge about new
paradigm approaches**

What We Know: How Best to Close an Institution

Elements that can led to a *New Story* :

1. **Set vision with clear, reasonable time-line**

“We should never, ever be afraid or ashamed about dreams. The dreams won't all come true, we won't always make it, but where there is no vision, a people perish.” **Tommy Douglas**

2. **Be guided by values & principles** – e.g. citizenship, community inclusion, collaboration, person-centred

What We Know: How Best to Close an Institution

Elements that can led to a *New Story* :

3. **Create a strong family support strategy**

Families are often afraid and ambivalent; they need support, mentoring, and education

4. **Support workers in adjusting to change**

5. **Provide independent facilitators who plan with individuals, families, communities**

Key role in insuring that planning is person-centred

What We Know: How Best to Close an Institution

Elements that can led to a *New Story* :

6. **Provide training and support for networking & community building strategies**
7. **Create mechanisms for effective, individualized resource arrangements**
 - Individualized & flexible funding
 - Brokerage, negotiation supports
 - Incentives for service provider innovation
 - Opportunities for family-governed new organizations

What We Know: How Best to Close an Institution

Elements that can led to a *New Story* :

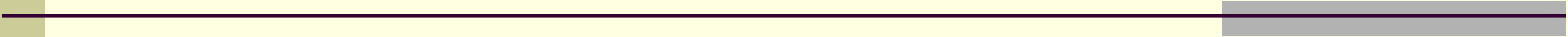
8. **Create formal and informal safeguards that link quality assurance to individuals, families, services, and policy**
9. **Develop evaluation approaches that provide on-going feedback about process and outcomes**
Feedback & action helps movement from closed system to open system

Can We Create a *New Story* with People from Institutions?

- We know how to do it – research is clear
- The costs are manageable
- The ethics are clear – it is the right thing
- Political will is essential factor
- We know that ‘collaboration’ creates better outcomes than ‘consulting’

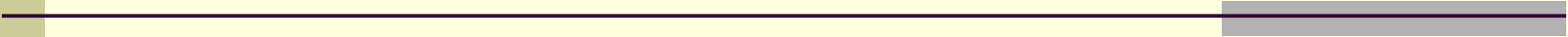
Can Deinstitutionalization Create Opportunities ?

- Communities can become more diverse and viable
- *New Story* ideas can be integrated in closure plan and process
- People with disabilities regain their citizenship; families get re-united



There is nothing more powerful
than an idea whose
time has come

Victor Hugo



For further resources

www.johnlord.net