

Archived Backgrounder

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Closing Institutions For People With A Developmental Disability

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BRIEF HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

Ontario has been serving people with a developmental disability since the late 1800s. Huronia Regional Centre, Ontario's first institution, opened in 1876. There, overlooking the waters of Lake Simcoe, people with a developmental disability were treated as patients in need of tranquility and medical care.

Doctors counselled parents to send their children to institutions like Orillia's, so they could be sheltered from the stresses of everyday life and the judgement of society. By the 1960s, the government operated 16 of these institutions in rural settings across the province.

With time, however, attitudes started to change. Society began to see that people with a developmental disability didn't need to be secluded in an institution. They needed to be included in a community. In 1987, the Ontario government committed to closing institutions for people with a developmental disability by 2012.

CLOSURE PROCESS

In 2003, the Ontario government committed to closing Ontario's last three institutions by 2009 -- three years ahead of schedule. The government invested \$276 million to help move nearly 1,000 people into new homes and strengthen community services and supports.

The average age of the residents at Huronia Regional Centre, Rideau Regional Centre and Southwestern Regional Centre was 51, and most had lived in institutions for about 39 years. The government worked closely with residents, families and agencies to find homes with the supports people needed to live in the community.

Through the hard work of communities, agencies, staff and families, many people from these three institutions have re-established relationships with loved ones, explored opportunities in their new communities, and enjoyed experiences that were simply not possible in an institution.

MODERNIZING DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

With the right supports, people with a developmental disability can make their own choices and live independently in the community.

So when Ontario announced in 2004 that it would close the province's last three institutions, work began on a long-term plan to modernize

The government's long-term plan includes a new law that reflects how people live today -- in communities, not institutions. In the fall of 2008, Ontario's new developmental services legislation passed: The Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act. This new legislation will mean:

- better service -- so that people can get services more easily
- more choice -- so that people and families can get supports that fit their changing needs, and
- fairness -- so that everyone will be treated fairly across Ontario.

ONTARIO'S LAST THREE INSTITUTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY

Hurononia Regional Centre in Orillia

- Opened in 1876
- Originally called the Orillia Asylum for Idiots. It was renamed the Ontario Hospital School.
- Resident population in 1971: 1,875

Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls

- Opened in 1951
- Originally named the Ontario Hospital School, Smiths Falls
- Resident population in 1971: 2,070

Southwestern Regional Centre in Chatham-Kent

- Opened in 1961
- Originally named the Ontario Hospital School for Retarded Children at Cedar Springs
- Resident population in 1971: 937