

Premier Wynne offered an apology to survivors of abuse at the Huronia Regional Centre, one of Ontario's three largest institutions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (the last closed in 2009).



Along with the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls and the Southwestern Regional Centre in Chatham-Kent, the population at Huronia started to decline in the 1970s until its closure in 2009.

The decline of Ontario's institutions owed to many factors, including the growth of associations such as Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley, the role of the media in exposing horrific conditions, and government policy development that pointed to the benefits of a community-based approach.

These institutions were both products and producers of marginalization, isolation and stigmatization of people with disabilities. Today associations that support people with developmental disabilities are champions of change and are working together with the current government to ensure an enhanced commitment to the needs of those families that kept their children at home and are now aging beyond their ability to care for their adult child. Community Living will also lobby for continued financial support to agencies to continue the good work within communities across Ontario.



This week's apology comes after a judge approved a \$35-million settlement in December in a class-action suit against the province over treatment at Huronia. The deal was reached in September just hours before the case was scheduled to go to trial.

The suit covers those institutionalized at the centre between 1945 and 2009. The settlement, originally announced in September, also includes the release of 65,000 documents, many of which would have been used as evidence of daily abuse and humiliation at the institution. The documents are being given to the Archives of Ontario where they will be available through access to information laws and will no doubt be of great interest to advocates and scholars for decades to come.

Although abuse in these institutions did at times take the form of extreme physical and emotional violence, not every resident had those experiences, and it must be noted that many of the employees of those institutions were dedicated and cared deeply for residents.





What most residents did suffer in common was an ongoing dehumanizing state of neglect, as evidenced by those who lived and died in the institutions without so much as a basic funeral ceremony or even a name on a grave.

It is difficult to process the nature of institutional abuse for those who have not survived it, but perhaps it is these [thousands of numbered grave markers](#), carelessly placed and poorly registered, that best illustrates for us the harms that become normalized when people are segregated in this way. It appears people were buried in mass graves. No one noticed and no one cared.

While some may consider that this week's apology brings this institutional era to a close, we as your local Association for Community Living have many more issues at hand to address within the Upper Ottawa Valley region of Renfrew County. Affordable housing for people who are experiencing unmet needs, for families who need enhanced respite, for aging parents who now need to find a place for their adult son or daughter to live after they pass. We, as citizens of the region must work together to ensure that the lessons learned from the former institutions are now not seen as an alternative to the lack of appropriate and affordable housing in our communities.

Today many organizations such as Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley have quality assurance programs and accreditation efforts to ensure a person's rights are respected, that they live where and with whom they choose, are supported to have valued social roles and have strict guidelines on the protection from and the reporting of abuse. My staff team does an excellent job at seeking positive life enhancing supports for those we support. Our community has been supportive, and together we are making a difference.

The Government of Ontario's Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act of 2008 (the "Social Inclusion Act") and [its accompanying Quality Assurance Measures](#) requires developmental services agencies to "support people with intellectual disabilities so that they can be a part of the community through activities such as volunteering, working, and participating in valued social roles and to become contributing members of their communities. Agencies must provide support to make sure people with developmental disabilities can be a part of the community where they live."

Chris Grayson, Executive Director [Community Living Upper Ottawa Valley](#)

Ontario Apologizes to Former Residents of Regional Centres for People with Developmental Disabilities

December 9, 2013 2:48 p.m. Office of the Premier

Premier Kathleen Wynne made the following statement to the Legislative Assembly today:

“Mr. Speaker,

One of a government’s foremost responsibilities is to care for its people, to make sure they are protected and safe. And therein lies a basic trust between the state and the people.

It is on that foundation of trust that everything else is built: our sense of self, our sense of community, our sense of purpose. And when that trust is broken with any one of us, we all lose something – we are all diminished.

I stand to address a matter of trust before this house and my assembled colleagues, but I am truly speaking to a group of people who have joined us this afternoon and to the many others who could not make it here today.

I am humbled to welcome to the legislature today former residents of the Huronia Regional Centre and Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls and to also address former residents of the Southwestern Regional Centre near Chatham, along with all their families and supporters.

I want to honour them for their determination and their courage and to thank them for being here to bear witness to this occasion.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we take responsibility for the suffering of these people and their families.

I offer an apology to the men, women and children of Ontario who were failed by a model of institutional care for people with developmental disabilities.

We must look in the eyes of those who have been affected, and those they leave behind, and say: “We are sorry.”



As Premier, and on behalf of all the people of Ontario, I am sorry for your pain, for your losses, and for the impact that these experiences must have had on your faith in this province, and in your government.

I am sorry for what you and your loved ones experienced, and for the pain you carry to this day.

In the case of Huronia, some residents suffered neglect and abuse within the very system that was meant to provide them care. We broke faith with them – with you – and by doing so, we diminished ourselves.

Over a period of generations, and under various governments, too many of these men, women, children and their families were deeply harmed and continue to bear the scars and the consequences of this time.

Their humanity was undermined; they were separated from their families and robbed of their potential, their comfort, safety and their dignity.

At Huronia, some of these residents were forcibly restrained, left in unbearable seclusion, exploited for their labour and crowded into unsanitary dormitories.

And while the model of care carried out by this institution is now acknowledged to have been deeply flawed, there were also cases of unchecked physical and emotional abuse by some staff and residents.

Huronia was closed in 2009 when Ontario closed the doors to its last remaining provincial institutions for people with developmental disabilities.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we no longer see people with developmental disabilities as something “other.” They are boys and girls, men and women, with hopes and dreams like all of us.

In Ontario, all individuals deserve our support, our respect and our care. We must look out for one another, take care of one another, challenge ourselves to be led by our sense of moral purpose before all else.

Today, we strive to support people with developmental disabilities so they can live as independently as possible and be more fully included in all aspects of their community.

As a society, we seek to learn from the mistakes of the past. And that process continues.

I know, Mr. Speaker that we have more work to do.



And so we will protect the memory of all those who have suffered, help tell their stories and ensure that the lessons of this time are not lost.”