



**BC Association  
for Community Living**

*Supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families*

Letter to the Editor (Vancouver Sun)

October 31, 2006

On Friday, October 27, 2006 Premier Gordon Campbell gave a speech at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities convention in Victoria. A *Vancouver Sun* article (by Miro Cernetig dated October 28<sup>th</sup>), reported that Premier Campbell said “de-institutionalizing the mentally ill was a failed experiment” and went on to say “that government over the years left too many mentally ill people to fend for themselves without the community support and affordable housing they required.” There have been a number of concerned inquiries to the BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) regarding the use of the term de-institutionalization which we feel needs clarification.

De-institutionalization, to the Community Living movement, is the process of bringing people with developmental disabilities back into the community where they belong rather than housed in large institutions. The use of the term de-institutionalization triggered, and rightfully so, a strong reaction from the Community Living movement which is celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure of Woodlands School, the last large institution to close in British Columbia that housed people with developmental disabilities.

The Premier’s use of the term *de-institutionalization* was used without making the distinction between people with developmental disabilities and people with mental illness. This is a distinction that many members of the media missed as well. It also demonstrates the need for BCACL to continue our efforts to raise the awareness of British Columbians that people with developmental disabilities were institutionalized in British Columbia until 1996 and thousands still continue to be in institutionalized across Canada today.

De-institutionalization of people with developmental disabilities has been an overwhelming success. Self determination and participation in community is a basic component of citizenship and BCACL supports the continued efforts to create a community where everyone belongs.

Laney Bryenton  
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