

A Call to Action in a New Era

Creating and maintaining large government-operated institutions was one of the most harmful things we have done as a society. Gradually the harm we were causing people was recognized. We had to stop. On March 31, 2009, the doors of the remaining three large government institutions for people who have an intellectual disability closed forever in Ontario.

This splendid moment marked the end of decades of struggle for people who have an intellectual disability, their families and friends, other citizens, community organizations, and government working together to do the right thing.

In the heart beat of time that we paused to celebrate the closures we realized that the struggle is far from over. Among the many challenges facing us in the future, three in particular call us to action:

1. We fully recognize that there are similar forms of residential institutions in Ontario and we must prevent people from being institutionalized in them simply because they have an intellectual disability. We must also work to enable those who live in such institutions to return to community.
2. We will continue to eliminate harmful and controlling approaches from the choices offered to people who have an intellectual disability and will ensure that institutional practices are not transferred to community settings.
3. We will continue our work to open communities as wide as possible so that people who have an intellectual disability are respected and welcomed citizens. We will confirm the fact that we and our communities are not fully human without the diversity that comes with the inclusion of people who have an intellectual disability.

We know that it is within our power to ensure that people who have an intellectual disability can be safe in the community without requiring them to give up their rights and liberties.

We will act together as communities to support each other. We will encourage those services and supports that promote inclusion, and work to eliminate any that exclude people from community. We will call upon our values, beliefs and principles that help us meet these challenges, not those parts of our culture and habits that keep people who have an intellectual disability apart from us and the lives to which we are all entitled.

We are used to challenges. We are also not always sure about how to meet them. We will struggle together, in community after community, to develop ways that work, not only in Ontario, but throughout Canada.