

# institution watch

PEOPLE  
FIRST  
of CANADA



PERSONNES  
D'ABORD  
du CANADA



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR  
L'INTÉGRATION COMMUNAUTAIRE

Diversity includes. On se ressemble.

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Monitoring the progress toward a vision of full community living for *all* persons with intellectual disabilities.

*This is a newsletter written and produced by the People First of Canada CACL Joint Task Force on the Right to Live in Community. For more information, contact Don Gallant at 416-661-9611 or Shelley Fletcher at 866-854-8915.*

#### Task Force Members

Shane Haddad  
Laurie Larson  
Norm McLeod  
Janet Forbes  
Peter Bourne  
Roy Skoreyko  
Jean Coleman  
Dianne Cormier Northrup  
Barb Horner  
Leo Garland  
Peter Park  
David Weremy  
Chris Currie  
Catherine Rodgers  
Shelley Fletcher  
Don Gallant

## A MESSAGE FROM THE TASK FORCE

Laurie Larson and Shane Haddad, Co-Chairs



On February 24, 2012, People First of Canada (PFC) and the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) declared it was “a good day to be Canadian” in response to the Government of Saskatchewan’s announced commitment to transitioning residents out of Valley View Centre (VVC) in Moose Jaw, with the goal of ultimately closing the last large institution for people with intellectual disabilities in the province. The initial plan was that this transition would happen over a period of four years.

As is typically the case when institutional closures are announced, there was an initial backlash from some people. In order to address concerns and to ensure a successful transition for all individuals, a Transition Steering Committee (TSC) was formed and their first job was to develop a series of recommendations to guide the process. The TSC developed a comprehensive list of recommendations (listed later in this newsletter) which were ultimately accepted in full by the Government.

Throughout the transitioning process, a great deal of care and attention has been given to consulting with each resident, their families when possible, and with the support of staff from the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living developing individual plans for each person and then to set out to provide a home and the supports they each need. This has meant that the process will take longer than initially stated. However, it should be noted, that we only have to look to Alberta to see what can happen when a closure process is rushed.

It is our pleasure at this point to provide an update on the transition process. This edition

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“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.”

is dedicated to highlighting some of the stories of those who have made the move to homes in the community, many of whom have spent decades inside of the institution. All of these examples show how much better life is when included in the community and not closed away in an institution.

It should also be mentioned that one of the recommendations was to 'expand the range of funding options available'. It was acknowledged that the traditional funding model would not work for many individuals from VVC and that direct funding would ensure more success in creating the home and supports required. As a result of the successful experience of providing direct funding to some of these people (and some others who were not residents of VVC) through a pilot project, the Government of Saskatchewan has announced that direct funding will be an option to all individuals who prefer this in the new budget year. Not only will people with intellectual disabilities not have to fear being 'placed' in VVC in the future, they will also have more choice and control over where they will live now that direct funding will be an option.

We are pleased with the progress made to date on the closure and hope that all individuals complete their transitions in the not too distant future. However, it is important to keep in mind that VVC is not the only large institution left in Canada. Too many others do not have the option to plan and create lives for themselves in the community. As a Task Force, we remain committed to seeing the day when Canada is truly institution-free and that all people can have their right to live in community respected and realized. The efforts of Saskatchewan are a great example of how to support people to transition to full community living.

## THE TRANSITION PROCESS FROM VALLEY VIEW CENTRE

One of the reasons the Valley View Centre (VVC) transition process has been such a success is largely due to the Valley View Centre Transition Steering Committee (VVC-TSC). Formed early on in the transition process, the committee is a strategic coalition between government and community. Specifically, the committee is comprised of members from the Valley View Centre Family Group (VVCFG), the Saskatchewan Government's Ministry of Social Services, and the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL). Together, they have steadily guided the transition process through discussion, debate, and careful consideration. It is a component of the transition process that we believe is entirely unique to Saskatchewan, and has proven to play a critical role in the closure of VVC.

### **The 14 Recommendations**

At the very beginning of the process, the Transition Steering Committee put together a collection of insights that are now known as the 14 recommendations. Wanting to ensure not only the success of the transition, but also managing it in a way that recognizes the voices and input of those living in VVC, the committee looked to other provinces for examples. The committee sent a small team of family members of the VVCFG, representatives of the Ministry of Social Services and a SACL employee on a tour around western Canada to interview others who had lived through the transition process. They met with representatives of former or existing institutions in other provinces to see how they had transitioned residents into community. In the meetings, candid information was gathered about what worked, what didn't work, and ideas for future institution closures. Working from the observations gathered during these meetings, the committee crafted a list of 14 recommendations that have guided the entire transition process and closure of VVC.

The 14 recommendations are as follows:

1. Transition VVC services to community-based services.
2. Provide residents of VVC with the opportunity to live in ordinary homes, in regular neighborhoods, in the community of their choice.
3. Ensure each VVC resident has a person-centred transition plan.
4. Expand the range of residential services and funding options available.
5. Ensure there is continuity of services for VVC residents.
6. Facilitate the continuation and development of natural relationships.
7. Ensure VVC residents continue to have access to ancillary services.
8. Expand and enhance crisis prevention and support service capacity.
9. Expand respite services.
10. Ensure each resident has access to individualized activities of choice.
11. Ensure funding is available to support individuals.
12. Develop an action plan to implement these recommendations.
13. Develop an evaluation framework.
14. Increase public awareness regarding community inclusion.

**For detailed information on the complete 78-page Valley View Centre Transition Planning Recommendations, visit [www.sacl.org](http://www.sacl.org).**

### **A Person-Centred Approach**

One hallmark of the committee's work has been its unwavering support and embrace of the person-centred plan. Despite the incredible amount of work, and near endless amount of challenges, the committee has been steadfast in ensuring that each resident has choice and control in their own transition plan. Every single VVC resident who moves out into the community has a plan that has been created based on where the individual wants to live, who they want to live with, and what they want to do. Because of this, the VVC-TSC committee is always juggling a number of priorities from a variety of different transition plans and closely keeping track of any issues that may arise from those who have already transitioned out. It requires much commitment and determination to coordinate the successful moves of individuals living at VVC with external service-providers, and developing creative community solutions. It's intricate work and it has served both the steering committee and the residents of VVC well.

### **Current Status of the Transition**

To date, 39 individuals have transitioned from VVC into their new homes. SACL and Ministry employees continue to work closely with community service providers to follow up with each individual to ensure that transitions are successful.



## Transition Locations

A common assumption is that VVC residents are only being transitioned into the Moose Jaw community, however individuals are being transitioned to homes all across western Canada. The VVC-TSC has collaborated with both Inclusion Alberta and Inclusion BC to help find solutions for out-of-province transitions.

To date, transition locations include:

- Calgary, AB
- Esterhazy, SK
- Gravelbourg, SK
- Kindersley, SK
- Moose Jaw, SK
- Port Moody, BC
- Prince Albert, SK
- Regina, SK
- Saskatoon, SK
- Swift Current, SK
- Wilkie, SK



## SUCCESS STORIES

Here are a few examples of individuals who have transitioned from living at the Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan to community living.

### LAWRENCE

Lawrence recently moved out of Valley View Centre into his new house in the community of Moose Jaw. He likes living in the city and is out and about all the time. He enjoys going for walks around his neighborhood and heading to the local corner store for his favorite chocolate bars.

He helps with different things in his house including barbequing and yard work. One of his new favorite things to do is going out for coffee with his friends and his roommates.



### MILTON

After 47 years at Valley View Centre, Milton is now enjoying his new life in his home with his housemates in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

He has really taken to the staff that supports him and it is apparent that he likes the one-on-one care and communication. Milton continues to explore the community and live the good life.



## MICHELLE

Michelle now lives in her new home in Regina, Saskatchewan. She enjoys her community and is as happy as ever.

Her aunt says, "Michelle is ever so happy; she is the happiest girl I've ever seen! She responds to different things and we are more connected as a family with Michelle in her new home. The environment really shows that she is being cared for, really cared for, and more than that she is loved and happy. We are blessed to see her like that!"



## PETER

Peter had a long-awaited transition out of Valley View Centre in March 2016. Peter was very excited to move into his new home with two housemates after living in the institution for 27 years. Peter has been very active in the community of Moose Jaw, riding his bike to the mall and to local businesses, going to the Home Town Fair and to garage sales on the weekends.

Peter has a hammock on his deck that he likes to watch the stars at night from, and enjoys his evening snack. He shows his appreciation and love for the staff that care for him daily.



## ARLENE

Arlene moved from Valley View Centre to Calgary, Alberta in August 2016. She flew on her first plane ride accompanied by members of the Valley View Centre transition team to be greeted by her family in Alberta.

It was a very exciting time as her family has always longed to have Arlene close to them. She is enjoying her new home and roommates, and enjoys being reconnected with her family with weekly visits.



## RODNEY

After living at Valley View Centre for nearly 60 years, Rodney has successfully transitioned into his new home in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Rodney's family said that they are so happy to have him closer so that they can visit him as often as they like.

They also explained that they feel very confident in the staff that is caring for Rodney with his high medical needs.



## GARY

In August 2016, Gary moved out of Valley View Centre into his new home in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. In his new community, he is now closer to his hometown of Gull Lake and is closer to his family - many of whom live in the surrounding area.

As an avid sports fan he has season tickets to the Swift Current Bronco hockey games. He enjoys making connections in Swift Current and especially spending more time with his family. He helps around the house and thoroughly enjoys all of the delicious home-cooked meals!



## Q & A WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

Family members of former residents of the Valley View Centre in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan share their experiences with the transition of their family members to their new homes.


### *Arlene's sister, Brenda:*

**Q: Can you tell me how you felt at the beginning of the transition/closure at Valley View Centre (VVC)?**

**A:** At the beginning of the closure/transition of VVC, I felt grateful for the care that was being taken to make sure that every resident and their families was taken into consideration and their concerns heard. Over the 56 years that my sister, Arlene, was a resident, I was unfortunately not able to participate in her life at VVC, which is something that I will not be able to get back. But when I went to the first transition meeting I could feel the love of the VVC staff for the residents who still lived at the facility.

I also felt that there were family members who had been with their loved ones through the years and that they came to associate their family members who lived at VVC as part of a legacy that they did not want to see dismantled. Through their efforts, they were hoping that the decision of a closure could be averted. Through my part of the transition, I could feel the desperation they were feeling with the imminent closure, but at this point I had already decided that I wanted to bring my sister closer to me for the remainder of her life. I felt 'the fight' to keep VVC would not be my fight, but I did respect the efforts by the other families to keep the legacy going. One thing that I felt was that Arlene was blessed to have had VVC as a home since her home with family could not accommodate her disability. I am happy that there was someone out there to take care of her needs.

**Q: In what ways did the transition team help Arlene?**



**A:** The transition team was very thorough in the efforts to make the transition easier. Every time there was a glitch in the transition from my end, it was handled immediately through numerous emails and phone calls to the respective parties. There were numerous times that the process became very frustrating and I was relieved to know that it could be handled easily by the transition team. With the transition team in place, it seemed to make the process flow easier and quicker, which took a lot of the burden off my shoulders.

**Q: How has the transition process been for Arlene and what is her life like in the home now?**

**A:** The transition process was overwhelming in the positive results it produced for my sister's move. I noticed a change in my sister as soon as she got off the plane. She was more alert and receptive to her surroundings, almost like a kid in a candy store. There were two people who accompanied her on the trip to her new city, one male and one female. When they came through security I noticed how excited my sister was from the trip. When the man who was her escort left to get the luggage, my sister, in her wheelchair, moved as fast as her feet could propel her, 'bee-lined' for him through crowds of people, oblivious to the chaos of the airport.

As an update to how she responded to the move, I have been visiting my sister weekly since August and I have noticed that her appearance is more vibrant. She participates in the room around her and with the other residents. Her participation involves watching the other residents move around the room, watching the support workers, and at times I watch her assessing the room and the other residents. In particular, Arlene observes the male residents, since she had been around female residents, so having a male in the same space who never goes home is a wonder to her. I have observed her sitting close to a male resident, turning her head to look at him and then turning her head away and making a sound 'pfff' as if to signify she is ready for him to move. In all aspects, the move has been a tremendous success.

**Q: In what ways has Arlene's life improved since moving into the community?**

**A:** My sister's life has improved since her move, which is recognizable by her overall persona and physical appearance, and how she relates to the other residents living in the home and the support staff. In the first few weeks she would isolate herself to another room away from the residents and support staff, and now she is sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with the residents, listening to conversations and being somewhat attentive to the verbal communication of the group, and the music or television that is playing throughout the day. My sister has only been on one outing since her arrival, but what I witnessed is that she is very accepting of all her surroundings in any environment that she is placed in. She has already called this place 'home'.

**Q: Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share with people or with other government that may want to know more about the transition process?**

**A:** My thoughts for others going through the process of moving loved ones from an institution to a home in the community is to make sure that you know the process of the transition, and know how you can make it work better. Above all, communicate your concerns, no matter how small, to the transition team regarding the move, especially if you find that what is happening is not working and may interfere with making it an effective, fluid and seamless transition. Your loved ones are important, so please do not just let someone else take the reins in making the decision by taking it out of your hands. Showing an initiative in the process will allow for the transition to be done with the respect that is needed to find a home for people who are unable to speak for themselves. This transition team did a wonderful job in all respects and I commend them, as I know it was a difficult and time-consuming task.

## **cont... Q & A WITH FAMILY MEMBERS**

*Rodney's nephew, Ean:*

**Q: Can you tell me how you felt at the beginning of the transition/ closure of Valley View Centre (VVC)?**

**A:** In one word: Terrified. We were left feeling that we did not know where Uncle Rodney would be put or when he would be going. And we were shocked at where he would be moved to, and if there would be space or where he would go. We felt that we did not have any control over these choices.

**Q: In what ways did the transition team help your uncle?**

**A:** Our family was very happy that we were invited down to meet the staff at his new home. We formed an opinion on what the new home was going to be like and we left with a good opinion. My dad is very hard to impress and he left saying "this will be a great place for Rodney" - and that speaks volumes!

**Q: How has the transition process been for Rodney and what is their life like now in the group home?**

**A:** Well, on the initial meet and greet, we were apprehensive about the transition to a new environment and how smoothly Uncle Rodney would fit into the group home. I was expecting to get a phone call with all of the potential issues and was dreading to have to get a hold of my parents with concerns, but that never happened. That made us so happy. After a week of not hearing anything, I called the home and was reassured that he was comfortable and staff were very attentive with his needs. He is communicating with the staff like he did a long time ago. The client to staff ratio is smaller than in VVC, which has played a huge part in him fitting in so well.

**Q: Do you have any other thoughts that you'd like to share with people or other governments who might want to know more about the transition process?**

**A:** First, Uncle Rodney does have a lot to offer society. He is someone's brother, uncle, and a human being. Second, it's important for governments to recognize that people with disabilities are people too and our Rodney is a very kind and loving soul, that deserves as much attention and care as you or I do. Third, the fact that they are building these houses is so important. To look like normal functioning homes with a TV, and pictures in their rooms is wonderful. Uncle Rodney is important and deserved to have these things. Fourth, Rodney's care staff and the SACL staff have been amazing.

Our family, my mom and dad, myself, wife and my brother, were not expecting to have the transition go so smoothly. Society can be judged on how we treat the less fortunate people and our faith in humanity has been restored. Rodney is a human being and we are so fortunate to have had the transition go so smoothly because of the team. My family is grateful!