



**citizen advocacy
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Organization advocating for rights of people with disabilities supports closure of Rideau Regional Centre and other segregated facilities

Ottawa, January 28, 2005 - Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa-Carleton – an organization which advocates for the rights and needs of people with disabilities – fully supports the closure of the three remaining Ontario institutions for people with developmental disabilities, including the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls, which will permit integration of residents into the Ottawa community and other communities in the province.

At a meeting on January 26, the Board of Directors of Citizen Advocacy Ottawa-Carleton endorsed the Ontario government's decision to close the last three segregated institutions in the province for people living with developmental disabilities. Over the past two decades, 13 such institutions have been closed in Ontario.

“We are finally witnessing the end of an era, in which persons with developmental disabilities were isolated and denied the opportunity to live in the community,” says Patricia Parker, President of the Board of Directors of Citizen Advocacy Ottawa-Carleton. “Our task now is to welcome these people into our communities and to provide them with the support they need to make the transition.”

Citizen Advocacy Ottawa-Carleton is disturbed by some of the negative statements that suggest that the closure of the segregated facilities is “cruel”, and that community living will diminish the quality of life of former residents and threaten their health and safety. It has also been suggested that communities don't have the capacity or the will to accommodate the residents.

“We understand that some people fear the change and that families want to protect their relatives,” says Brian Tardif, Executive Director of Citizen Advocacy Ottawa-Carleton. “But we can't simply throw up our hands and say that we can't include these people in our communities. Yes, it will be challenging but we must meet this challenge and commit our resources to finding solutions.”

People who have moved from institutions to community-based living have seen their quality of life improve, says Tardif, and Ottawa has been supporting community integration for people with developmental and other disabilities for decades.

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“We have a network of service providers who have considerable experience in helping people to make the transition to community living, many of them with very complex needs,” says Tardif. The executive director also notes that the Ontario government has committed additional funding to developmental services including funds for creation of additional group homes and other living accommodations in communities.

Citizen Advocacy Ottawa-Carleton opened its doors in 1974. Its mission is to help people who are living with a disability to enhance the quality of their lives by overcoming barriers which prevent them from making personal choices and from participating fully in the life of the community. Its core program matches people living with a disability in supportive relationships with volunteer “advocates”.

For further information and to arrange interviews, contact:

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