



## **INFORMATION ALERT: ALTERNATIVES TO INSTITUTIONS**

### **A PROGRAM IN WHICH MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON (MFP)**

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In the United States the unjustifiable institutionalization of people with disabilities was established as a human rights issue years ago (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.). It was recognized that no one should be forced, especially at a time when they are extremely vulnerable, into an unfamiliar environment where they do not feel safe or comfortable. This is especially true of people with dementia, who comprise the majority (64%) of residents in Ontario's long term care facilities (OLTCA, 2019).

More than half of long term care residents are over the age of 85 (OLTCA, 2019). Imagine, at the age of 85 being forced into an institution, with no lock on your door and people you don't know being allowed to wander in and out, and having to share your living accommodations with 100 – 200 other people? Imagine, after having lost your lifetime partner, you were forced to leave the home you shared with them and enter a place where help was often not available if you needed it, where you could hear people screaming, and where you were vulnerable to infection and death? Imagine having to eat unfamiliar food, often of poor quality, at times amenable to institutional routine? Imagine being forced to have to go to bed at 8 PM because that was when a staff member could get to you?

Why do we do this to old people? Why do we incarcerate them for being old and infirm? Surely we can do better than this. Surely we can rescue them from a life of institutionalized misery.

### **Let's Get Them Out and Keep Them Out: Institute a Program In Which Money Follows The Person (MFP)**

It costs \$182.23 per person per day to live in a long term care institution (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, 2019). With most PSW's earning about \$21.00 an hour, that amounts to 8.67 hours of care per person per day on a 1:1 staff to resident ratio.

How much does someone get in a long term care facility? 2.5 hours per person per day if they are lucky, often on a 1:15 or 1:18 resident to staff ratio.

Which would you rather choose?

What if that money followed the person, instead of the person being forced to follow the money into a long term care institution?

What if three people decided to share a home or apartment so that they could have 24 hour a day care on a 1:3 staff to resident ratio with \$546.69 per day to spend for staffing? What if you could purchase the care you need collectively from a non-profit community-based organization instead of from a big, multi-national corporation? And what if you decided to pool your money and hire a homemaker to do your cleaning and cook and freeze healthy meals for you that only needed a microwave to heat up?

Imagine how different the last years of your life might look and feel?

Long term care residents co-pay from \$1891.31 to \$2701.61 each month for accommodations (Ontario, 2019). This is where large long term care corporations draw profits from.

For that you get to share a room with anywhere from 2-4 people, have to endure a place with no air conditioning, that is often dirty, according to inspection reports, and that subjects you to increased exposure to opportunistic infections, and where you get a bath once a week if you are lucky in a common bathroom.

Now imagine instead pooling that money with 2-3 other people so that you have up to \$10,804.00 a month available to rent a 4 bedroom, 4 bath house with universal design principles (fully accessible) so that you can have your own bedroom and bathroom, along with a large and pleasant common room, a dining room to accommodate up to 6 people if you want to have visitors over for tea, and a large, fenced backyard where you can grow flowers?

Why would you ever choose to live in an institution again if this option was available?

Well, this option is available, right across the border in New York State, but not here in Ontario. Unlike Ontario, New York State has a Money Follows The Person initiative which is part of Federal and State plans “designed to rebalance long term care services and promote consumer choice. As New York State continues to shift the focus of its long term care systems away from institutional care and towards integrated home and community-based care, support from the MFP program becomes valuable...” (N.Y. State Department of Health, 2016). The idea is to promote choice, enhance quality of life, and expand options for community-based care delivered in the least restrictive setting.

Imagine that! Consumer choice.

Imagine a government that wants to enhance not destroy your quality of life? Imagine being able to live in the least, not the most, restrictive setting?

This is a program that does not just increase your options to live in your own community, it might actually help to spare you from having to live in a long term care facility. The program in New York is “designed to streamline the process of deinstitutionalization for vulnerable populations including older adults, individuals with physical, intellectual, and/or developmental disabilities, and individuals with traumatic brain injury. Under the name Open Doors, the MFP program funds Transition Specialists and Peer Support to assist these individuals to transition out of institutions such as nursing homes and intermediate care facilities, and into qualifying community settings. A qualified setting may be a house, an apartment, or a group home (with a maximum of four unrelated people). Certain adults with significant medical needs can receive cost-effective home and community-based services to remain in the most integrated settings” (N.Y. State Department of Health, 2016).

New York State has been doing this for some time now. What is Ontario doing? Throwing billions into revamping existing institutions and building more of them so that even more old and disabled people can end up in them. And the government thinks that is modernizing the system.

This government will not change course unless a more educated and informed public demands it. SSAO’s release of Information Alerts concerning alternative approaches in more progressive jurisdictions is intended to inform the public.

Kindly pass this information on.

#### **REFERENCES**

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