

Setting the Record Straight: Community living cuts and group home closures

BCGEU response to B.C. government "For the Record" on "Community Living BC Service Redesign – Group Homes"

B.C. GOVERNMENT – "FOR THE RECORD"

Group homes where people with developmental disabilities live are not being arbitrarily closed, contrary to recent claims made through the media.

Funding for Community Living British Columbia has been increased by the Province, not cut. This fiscal year, CLBC received an increase of more than \$13 million for a total operating budget of \$692 million – this represents a 7.8% increase since 2008/09.

We are not closing group homes to save money. We are changing the way services are provided to allow for the greatest community integration and independence for people with developmental disabilities.

The changes build on decades of progress towards full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities, and the hard work of families and advocates.

Many of the group homes that closed had two residents, and their new living arrangements will provide for more community interaction with appropriate supports.

BCGEU – SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

No one is claiming the closures are arbitrary. On the contrary, each closure is clearly and consistently driven by the government imperative to cut costs.

According to 2010 budget documents, CLBC's provincial government funding is frozen from 2010/11 to 2012/13. Its caseload is projected to grow by 10 per cent, or over 1300 individuals, during that time.

According to CLBC's 2005 and 2006 service plans, moving from higher cost group homes to alternative residential options is one of several "high level strategies to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of service expenditures" and free up financial resources. CLBC's 2006/07 annual report describes the review of group home placements for the purpose of exploring other residential options as a strategy "to enhance value for money spent." And its most recent service plan states that CLBC "has been very active in demand, cost and budget management" since 2005, including by focusing "on alternate residential settings, which has reduced the average residential cost by 12% over the last seven years even after inflation."

The closures have been planned and carried out without consulting families – despite the hard work of families many years ago to come together to open group homes.

Research has shown more positive outcomes for individuals in smaller group homes (CLRP, *Residential Options for Adults with Developmental Disabilities: Quality and Cost Outcomes*, October 2006, p.18) and has identified social isolation and disconnection from formal supports as potential outcomes of home sharing placements (CLRP, *Home Sharing: A Review of Current Practice and Policy with Recommendations*, Spring 2008, p.39)

Group homes may be closed or consolidated because of attrition as older residents pass away and there are no incoming residents of a similar age.

It is important to note that if individuals are moving from a group home to another residential arrangement, the individuals maintain their connection to the agency through the transition and commonly continue to be supported by the same agency.

Contrary to allegations, no one is being "forced" into new living arrangements. CLBC is working with people who want a greater say in their living situation. All will receive appropriate disability-related supports.

More than 50 per cent of home sharing providers have more than 15 years experience. Many of these providers have been supporting the same individual for 15 years or longer.

CLBC has developed rigorous standards and policies to outline the expectations it has of home sharing providers and to ensure individuals receive consistent and high quality support.

These types of changes are cost-driven. Maintaining group home vacancies to allow greater opportunity for consolidation and closure of homes has been a strategy for reducing expenditures and freeing up financial resources (see 2005 and 2006 CLBC service plans).

Group home closures and moves to home sharing risk separating individuals from their support agencies. For example, the recent announcement that Prima Enterprises' Lower Mainland group homes will be shut down due to funding cuts and transferred – along with the residents – to Thompson Community Services could result in at least one of the homes being closed and the movement of some residents into home sharing.

In addition, some home sharing placements are not administered by any support agency, but rather contracted directly through CLBC. And even in respect of agency-supported home sharing arrangements, agencies themselves have raised concerns. For example, the agency participants at a BCACL forum in 2007 noted that "agencies rarely receive the funding they need" to support home sharing placements, "and both direct service and administration often occurs 'off the side of the desk'" (BCACL, *Report – Forum on Family Care/Family Life Models of Care*, January 2007). Reports from families and service providers indicate otherwise. For example, when asked this summer if individuals are being forced to move, Lilla Tipton, executive director of Power River Association for Community Living, answered: "I can't say that they're not. Against the family wishes, people were moved, yes" (*Powell River Peak*, "Potential home closure raise ire – Families of residents speak out against moves," July 2010).

Agencies have identified the inability "to recruit qualified, trained [home sharing] service providers" as a problem, and have noted that the commitment of home sharing providers and the longevity of home sharing placements "cannot be assured" (BCACL, *Report – Forum on Family Care/Family Life Models of Care*, January 2007). Some agencies have turned to Craigslist to find home sharing providers.

Many of CLBC's standards and policies only apply to home sharing providers that contract directly through CLBC – not to home sharing placements administered by support agencies. Moreover, standards and policies – which may or may not be enforced – are no substitute for independent oversight and government regulation, monitoring and enforcement. Home sharing placements of two adults or less are not subject to the provincial licensing framework that protects the health and safety of individuals living in group homes and other residential settings. Concerns regarding home sharing have centered around the lack of provincial standards and safeguards and the absence of a system of external agency oversight.