



Province urged to close centre

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Roughly 50 people rallied in front of the Legislative Building on Wednesday to push the government to close a long-term care institution in Moose Jaw.

The rally was organized by the Deinstitutionalization Coalition of Saskatchewan, which is pushing for the expedited closure of the Valley View Centre. The coalition's members and supporters say the institution for people with intellectual disabilities does not respect the residents' rights.

"(Valley View) was not progressive when it opened and it is even less so some 50 years later," said Faith Bodnar, executive director of the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL), which is a founding member of the coalition.

The institution is similar to something that would be seen in a movie, said Bodnar, explaining residents are not free to leave at any time, must do activities in groups or spend time in common rooms not doing anything.

"It is an environment that takes away rights. People have no right to choose who they live with, what they eat. Some of the practices in the institution are incredibly out of date. It is time that Saskatchewan woke up and did the right thing by the people who are still in the institution," said Bodnar, adding it's the only facility of its kind left in the province.

People attending the rally came from a number of different provinces to show support for the coalition. Amidst chants of "Free our people," supporters waved signs that read "Inclusion, not institution," "Label jars, not people," and "Freedom is for everyone."

Community Resources Minister Buckley Belanger said that Valley View currently has about 270 residents, down from roughly 1,200 that it had in 1972 and there haven't been any further admissions into the facility. While he respects the views of SACL, Belanger said he must also show respect for families who have loved ones in Valley View.

"Those that use Valley View, many of the parents for example, are elderly parents that simply cannot care for some of their family members who are residents at Valley View ... Many residents may not have the greatest experience in some of these institutions while many others appreciate some of the services at these institutions," said Belanger.

Laurie Larson, co-chairwoman of the coalition, said she has two children with significant disabilities. While she can make sure her children never go to an institution like Valley View while she is alive, Larson said she worries that if something happened to her or her husband, someone else may place her children there.

Larson said she is concerned that even though the government may be halting new admissions at the institution now, that may not be happening in the future.

"This government may be committed. But what is the next government going to do? We don't know that," said Larson, adding the only way to truly stop admissions is to close the institution.

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