

Children bound for nursing homes live in fear

Tracy Odell's story

I would be long dead if I never had accessible housing.

When I was 7, I left my home in Ottawa to live in a long-term care institution for children with physical disabilities. Forty other children lived there. Imagine having to leave home at age 7! Maybe some of you have.

As a teenager, I continued to need physical support with activities of daily living ... ordinary things such as getting washed and dressed, going to the bathroom, cooking, and cleaning.

Kids like us were fobbed off to nursing homes when we turned 18. We heard very little from our friends who went there. What we did hear was very frightening. One girl died within a year. Another girl was forgotten outside all night. She died. There were other such children, and other horror stories.

Can you blame me for being petrified of going to a nursing home? I wanted to live to go to university, live on my own with help, and have a decent life. I wanted to be in the same community as my friends. None of this would be possible in a nursing home. If they didn't kill me with neglect, I probably would have found a way to kill myself.

I was extremely lucky that I turned 18 when I did. A pilot project provided care in the community along with accessible apartments for 100 people living in Ontario. Ten of these apartments would be available in Toronto. I had to share an apartment, but I was living in the community! Free to go to school and have friends in my life!

What happens to 18-year-olds with physical disabilities today who are ready and willing to leave home? They will be sent to a nursing home if they cannot live with their parents.

The problem

In the 50 years that have passed since I left the institution, there has been little progress in providing accessible housing. People with disabilities are on hold or on waiting lists for accessible units for **more than 10 years**. Then, they are often given a choice of only **one** apartment in the entire city!

Solutions, and a call to action

If EVERY newly built apartment were accessible from now on, people with disabilities could freely choose where to live, just like anyone else. We have a lot of catching up to do. All new housing built with government funding or supports must be built to be accessible.

No tax dollars should ever be used to create accessibility barriers.

Let your elected officials know that affordable, accessible housing is an absolute must! Tell the mayor, your city councillor, and your MPP that affordable, accessible housing is a human right. Not only will you be helping people with disabilities, but you will also be helping people to stay in their own homes as they get older. Who knows? That might be YOU one day!

Tracy Odell is a longtime disability rights advocate. See photos below. For a video version of Tracy's story, go to <https://youtu.be/DIMtM7jLvmk>.



Marie

Marie (1956-1975), on the veranda of Bloorview Hospital, Home and School. Tracy took this photo shortly after arriving at Bloorview in 1965. Marie, a fellow resident, had been at Bloorview for several years, and lived on the same ward as Tracy. They played together. The veranda was attached to a small sunroom off the Girls' Floor, which was the third (top) floor of the building. Tracy says, "The nurses would chase us out to the sunroom in good weather so they could have quiet time without us underfoot while they made beds, dispensed medications, and chatted among themselves. It felt like banishment, because there was seldom a nurse on the veranda to keep us company or introduce us to games we might play out there." Marie is almost completely wrapped in bandages, and she is sitting in a narrow wheelchair.

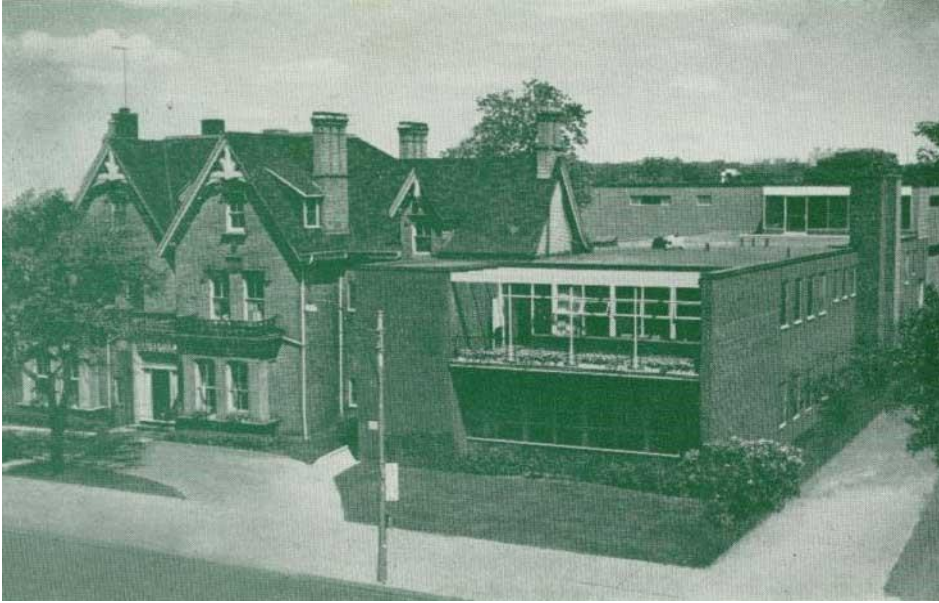
Source: Tracy Odell's photo collection.



ADL Class

Three residents practice skills in the Activities of Daily Living (ADL) Unit at Bloorview Children's Hospital. One teenager is in a wheelchair, bending forward to open an oven. A second teen is standing at the stove, and a third is looking in the fridge.

Source: *Bloorview Children's Hospital 64th Annual Report* (January 1 to December 31, 1963), p. 14.



Bloorview

Bloorview Hospital, Home and School, 278 Bloor St. East, Toronto, Ontario. Formerly called “The Home for Incurable Children.” This expanded house is where Tracy lived from age 7–18. The building has had many names and locations over the years.

Source: *Bloorview Children’s Hospital 64th Annual Report* (January 1 to December 31, 1963), p. 2.