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### Living Situations for the Disabled

Children are always being told what they need to do by adults. Decisions are made for them starting when they are born since they are too young to make beneficial decisions on their own. People in institutions have decisions made for them all day long. Ricardo T. Thornton Sr's speech, "We Can't Go Back", from Alice Wong's *Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century* reveals that disabled people are treated terribly and are not allowed to think for themselves. Thornton says that disabled people are better off when they live on their own with supportive people surrounding them. Jennifer Hale-Gallardo et al, in their article "Serving Rural Veterans with Disabilities: A National Survey of Centers for Independent Living" discuss the roles and importance that Centers for Independent Living play in the lives of veterans with disabilities. These centers provide veterans with support and skills for them to be able to live independently in their communities. Disabled people need the opportunity to live on their own rather than being in institutions. Able-bodied people have this belief that people with disabilities do not have the choice with their freedom to live on their own. Everyone should take a step to realize the fact that disabled people get treated as if they are incapable of living for themselves and need to put an end to this by making this problem more publicly known, requiring institutions to lock their doors forever, and replacing them with Centers for Independent Living.

Ricardo T. Thornton Sr. gives a speech to a United States Senate Committee called “We Can’t Go Back”, which explains and gives examples as to why institutions are not a beneficial place for intellectually disabled people to live. He and several of his family members have experienced hardships living in institutions and experience much more joy living on their own. On a similar topic, Jennifer Hale-Gallardo et al show how Centers for Independent Living are beneficial to the community. These centers are obliged to provide services to allow the most independence and community integration possible, which is not what institutions are about. An institution is a place where disabled people are sent so they do not disrupt the flow of the community. Hale-Gallardo and a group of authors compose a study and share with the public the results in “Serving Rural Veterans with Disabilities: A National Survey of Centers for Independent Living”. It shows that CILs (Centers for Independent Living) provide many useful resources to help veterans, most of whom are disabled. Although Thornton has experienced living in institutions firsthand, Jennifer and her group of authors have not had experiences as he has. That is why they conducted a survey. They have conducted this survey to show how Centers for Independent Living are beneficial to disabled veterans and proves Thornton’s idea that institutions are a horrible place to live. When examined, Thornton Sr. and Hale-Gallardo et al work together but separately to show that institutions should be replaced with CILs since they overall aid disabled people in the communities.

People, specifically ones who have personally been affected, should start to speak up about their past experiences living in institutions, to permanently close all of them. By doing this, more people would see how these living conditions should not be inflicted upon anyone and want to make a change for better living situations. In Thornton’s speech, he stated, “Please protect people from places where no one expects anything from them and where they're just kept

alive. We can't go back. It's time to move forward" (89). This is within the last paragraph of his speech, after stating how much better he and his family lived after leaving an institution.

Thornton describes his experience living in Forest Haven, an institution in DC he lived in, and his experience living freely in his community. By doing this, he is showing that institutions are not somewhere to send a person. Instead, go to a CIL where there are more resources and employees at these places want you to live on your own. Similarly, Hale-Gallardo et al write, "Veterans affected by disabilities need a range of support...live independently in their communities. Independent Living (IL) refers to the ability to perform self-care and achieve self-determination in the least restrictive environment possible" (para 3). Disabled people need support systems when they are living on their own. Institutions are not a supportive place to be and are rather degrading. Independent living is a supportive way of life. This idea is like nursing homes or assisted living places for the elderly. People are hired to assist them when needed. The employees are not surrounding the elderly all the time but give them space. Nursing homes are where elderly people have a place to stay on their own, but also have access to many people and services meant to assist them if they need it. That is the idea of Centers for Independent Living. Institutions should forever close down for the benefit of the greater good.

Centers for Independent Living have many more resources and support than institutions. Institutions just keep disabled people alive but CILs provide support in many different ways because their employees want people that are disabled to have the chance to live on their own. Jennifer Hale-Gallardo and a few other authors wrote, "Almost one third of CILs...reported providing referrals related to mental health issues...reported providing transportation supports or programs for Veteran consumers...independent living skills training, shelter location for homeless Veterans..." (para 20-22). These services listed are not every service offered at CILs. There are

many more listed on “Serving Rural Veterans with Disabilities: A National Survey of Centers for Independent Living. For example, independent living skills training that is offered at a CILs is very useful in assisting people who are disabled, specifically disabled veterans. On the other hand, Thornton states, “...no one expects you to do anything in the institution but survive...We thought we were incompetent, so no one took the time to teach us things” (87-88). The workers in institutions thought that people who were disabled could not complete simple tasks. For this reason, disabled people were never taught how to do anything on their own.

One way to make a drastic and quick change is to make the media more aware of living conditions in institutions. If everyone wants to close institutions, then why need to make their voices heard by the federal government so they can take care of that. This is exactly what Thornton did in his essay. He essay states, “*From a statement given before the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on June 21, 2012...I am here representing the ninety-two thousand people who are still living in institutions...and for all of the people, like me, who used to live in an institution*” (Thornton 85). Thornton went to the U.S. Senate to discuss a topic that was very important to him. Everyone should put an effort in like this. Whether that means attending peaceful protests, rallies, or going to your local governor to work towards your goal. Thornton is a leader to get institutions closed. Similarly, Hale-Gallardo et al says, “This paper provides the first systematic examination at a national level of the ways in which CILs can and do support Veteran consumers...” (para 45). This group of authors conducted a survey to prove that CILs are helpful to the disabled community, unlike institutions. They said that it was one of the first examinations at a national level, which is a big step forward in the right direction for all institutions closing. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement. Once that was brought to social media and the news, so many people formed their opinions and

voices. People wanted a change as to how certain aspects of this country operates. That is what will happen once more and more people hear about the living conditions in insitutions. People will finally realize that no one should have to live in such a terrible place, and want all institutions to close.

There are different ways to counter these previous statements, but one argument in particular is that people think that everyone in the disabled community needs to be cared for all the time since they are incapable of doing anything on their own. Some disabled people need help every minute of the day, but most of them can function on their own. Thornton said, "People sometimes say that I'm not like some of the other people with intellectual disabilities. The only thing that's special about me is that people believed in me and in my potential to learn in spite of my disability, and they took the timeto help me learn" (89). Thornton was just like many other intellectually disabled people. The only aspect that made him different than others is that he had support. When disabled people have positive support, then they are able to grow and can live on their own. The website article by Hale-Gallardo et al states, "The services most frequently used by CIL Veteran consumers included services for...supports, assistance...supports...supports..." (para 18). This quote was taken from a sentence that listed a large amount of services offered at a CIL. Support and assistance means to help someone when needed. It never says that they do everything for them, the article says CIL services help the disabled. There is a difference between aiding someone when they need it and doing everything all the time for someone. Any disabled person can do what they want to, as long as they have the support to assist them.

Institutions are terrible places to live. They leave no room for disabled people to grow and be on their own. Thornton despised his time in an institution, which means that every other human will too. Hale-Gallardo et al's survey proves that Centers for Independent Living allow

disabled people the chance to experience living on their own, with access to services to assist them if needed. Because of this reason and more, institutions should be closed and replaced with CILs all around the world. Able-bodied people should put themselves in the position of a disabled person. If an able-bodied person would not like living in an institution, then they should not send people they love and care about to a place like that.

Works Cited

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