



## The institutional bias is costly and morally wrong for people with disabilities

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All across the country there are institutions and nursing homes that warehouse people with disabilities. Depending on the state you are in, some may be called nursing homes, state schools or developmental centers. Regardless of what they are called, institutions are the most costly way to support people with disabilities. Morally, it is reprehensible to warehouse people with disabilities who have done nothing wrong against society.

There are over 1.5 million people with disabilities living in nursing homes in addition to over 48,000 people with disabilities living in state-run institutions across the United States. Many advocates believe there is a universal Medicaid bias, which denies people with disabilities their right to live and work in the community. Many of those same advocates believe that the Community Choice Act could be the beginning of eliminating that bias.

The New York Nonprofit Business Examiner recently had the opportunity to interview Robert Stack, President and CEO of [Community Options, Inc.](#) Robert is a national disability policy expert and has dedicated his career to moving people with disabilities out of institutions and into their own homes in the community. In 1989, Robert founded Community Options, which is a national nonprofit organization that develops homes, and employment supports for people with disabilities in thirty-two cities across nine states. In New York, Community Options currently operates out of the Empire State Building, Brooklyn, Binghamton and Syracuse.

“In many states, the reason that institutions have yet to be closed is lack of leadership and essentially resistance to change,” says Stack. Stack believes the resistance is based on job loss and fear of what might happen without an institution to fall back on. Stack insists on creating an incentive plan for states that place people with disabilities in the community rather than keep them institutionalized.

“It is a fact that persons with disabilities flourish in the community. The majority of people with disabilities now live in small community settings. Many of them have jobs, earn wages and become viable members of their communities. Today, families are given so many additional options to prevent unnecessary institutional placements,” Stack added.

There may be more choices for families, however, the manner in which states have set up their waiting lists and avenues to access services, people with disabilities often wait years for residential and employment services. There are over 250,000 people with disabilities on waiting lists to receive community services in the United States.

Some states have done the right thing by their citizens with disabilities. Minnesota, most of the New England states and now even Michigan have ruled out institutions as an option of support for people with disabilities. Michigan will close their last facility this summer.

Stack says, “In 1965 there were over 100,000 children and adults with autism, mental retardation, cerebral palsy and even epilepsy living in large, horrific congregate and very costly facilities. Today that number has been cut in half.”

When institutions to warehouse people with disabilities were developed, they were developed by people who were considered to be progressive at the time. Institutions were solutions to thousands of families who did not know what to do with their child or family member with a disability. Institutions were once considered very well oiled machines that rusted out fairly quickly. Stack indicates that institutions have outlasted their questionable utility.

Stack favors private and public sector partnerships that work together for the common good. He says, “The private and public sector need to form strategic alliances to consolidate these institutions and effectuate institutional exodus for persons with disabilities. Necessity is the mother of invention. This human crisis can turn current government leaders into heroes. They need to do what is right and not what is popular.”

For more information about Stack and Community Options, you can follow them on [Facebook](#) or on [Twitter](#).



Stack and Board of Directors ringing the opening bell at the NYSE to commemorate 20 years of service NYSE

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