

Why my neighborhood?

Persons with mental and cognitive disabilities have the same rights as other members of the community to live within the community without neighborhood screening and approval. That right is guaranteed to all citizens, including those with physical or mental disabilities.

A person with disabilities needs the same things as a person without a disability, in order to live a fulfilled life. These needs include need for community, home, job, hobbies, and family and friends.

How neighbors and treatment programs can live together in harmony.

Sometimes the perception or anticipation of a problem, even when no problem or evidence of problems exist, can have a more negative impact than actual situations. In these cases, neighbor's lack of information or understanding about residential treatment or about mental and cognitive disabilities can create unnecessary concern.

It is important that both neighbors and facility staff take time to get to know each other. Neighbors should ask questions about the program and its staffing, criteria for placement, and how the neighbors can help to welcome the program into the area. They should be provided with information to help increase their understanding of mental illness. The program should ask questions about how they can best fit into the neighborhood. It should provide names of contact persons and phone numbers from both the program itself and from local organizations that can respond to questions regarding disabilities and community-based residential treatment.

Regional Ombudsman staff provide assistance to clients living in the community as well as at the Regional Treatment Centers.

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STATE OF
MINNESOTA

OFFICE OF OMBUDSMAN
FOR MENTAL HEALTH
AND
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

DISABILITIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED TREATMENT:

Alleviating Neighborhood Concerns

When residential treatment programs for persons with disabilities move into a neighborhood, neighbors often have questions or concerns regarding how the new program will impact their area. Generally, these concerns are based on lack of experience with and information about disabilities and persons with disabilities.

This brochure addresses some of the common questions raised about disabilities and community-based treatment.

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What can I expect of people with mental and cognitive disabilities living in my neighborhood?

You can expect things of your new neighbors that you would expect from any neighborhood, such as mutual respect of property and privacy. Some residents have been placed at the residential program to help them in developing or improving independent living skills and may at times seem to have some difficulty with their social skills. One of the reasons why community placement is so valuable to persons with a disability is that people can learn or relearn important skills for independent living.

Will my family and I be safe? Are people with a disability dangerous? Will there be more crime in the neighborhood?

Unfortunately, movies and television often portray persons with mental and cognitive disabilities as unpredictable and violent. This promotes a negative and inaccurate stereotype of mental and cognitive disabilities.

In reality, persons with mental and cognitive disabilities are no more likely to commit criminal acts than persons without mental and cognitive disabilities. In a study of people who had been treated for mental and cognitive disabilities, only 0.1% were arrested for violent crimes. In each of those few cases, all had a criminal record before their treatment for mental and cognitive disabilities. In other words, a person who has been treated for mental and cognitive disabilities and does not have a previous criminal record, is considered to be less likely to be arrested than the average citizen. In addition, because mental and cognitive disabilities often makes people more passive, persons with mental and cognitive disabilities are more likely to be victims, not perpetrators, of aggressive acts.

People in residential programs have been carefully screened and selected for community placement based on their readiness for community living.

Will the program fit into my neighborhood? What do others have to say about programs in their area?

In Minnesota, neighbors living near residential programs have had good or neutral impressions of them. In a survey of 65 people living within one block of a program, 74% said that the program is a good neighbor. Many said that they had initial apprehensions about the program, but have not experienced any significant problems.

The following are comments made by Minnesota residents about what it has been like living near a residential treatment program for persons with mental and cognitive disabilities.¹

- “Because there are many problems in the city, I’m happy to have this residence making good use of a big house and providing a service to the clients. They are basically quiet and present no problems. They keep the outside neat. I’m pleased with their location in this area.”
- “We make it a point to visit the program because we like to know what is going on there. We’re glad that the program is there. The previous owner didn’t keep the place up real well.”

¹ from “*Community Residences for Adults with Mental and Cognitive Disabilities*,” 1989

How are residential programs supervised? Who I can go to if I have concerns?

All programs are staffed according to the needs of the people who live there. Some clients may need intensive structure and support, while others will need only occasional assistance. Therefore, staffing may be fulltime and intensive in some settings, while others provide more general, less structured support services.

Each residence has staff who provide monitoring of residents, support and programming for residents, and assurance that all problems are identified and

resolved. It is best if neighborhoods establish open and positive communication between staff, residents, and neighbors from the beginning, so that realistic and mutual expectations can be discussed, and problems, if any, can be openly addressed and resolved.

How will my property value be affected? Will there be high turnover in the neighborhood?

A study assessed the impact of community placement on property value. It compared neighborhoods with group homes with controls and revealed:

- No significant increase in property turnover.
- No adverse effect on average selling price but an actual increase in property value.
- Sale price as a percentage of the list price increased.
- Properties did not take longer to sell.
- In addition, residences are often perceived as good neighbors in terms of property maintenance and upkeep.

Thus, it seems that the presence of a group home may even indicate an upgrading effect on the neighborhood since improvements are frequently made prior to the opening of the program.²

² from Boydell, Trainor, and Pierri, “*The Effect of Group Homes for the Mentally Ill on Residential Property Values*,” *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, September 1989, 40(9)

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