
VOR Weekly E-Mail
Update
February 8, 2008

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VOR Note: VOR's

January 25, 2008 Weekly Update included another good article by Dan Rodricks (see, <http://vor.net/Jan252008.htm>). If you haven't already, you are encouraged to post a comment or submit a letter to the editor. To post a comment, visit <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/bal-md.rodricks20jan20,0,1438444.column#comment-form>.

Letters to the Editor should include your name and address, along with day and evening telephone numbers. E-mail: letters@baltsun.com; Mail: Letters to the Editor, The Baltimore Sun, P.O. Box 1377, Baltimore 21278-0001; fax: 410-332-6977.

For some, old ways can beat new ways
Dan Rodricks -
Columnist (dan.rodricks@baltsun.com)
The Baltimore Sun
February 3,
2008

What we have is a copy of a note from someone's computer and a story to go with it - that a man named Tony, said to be in his mid- to late 20s, mentally retarded and in a wheelchair, showed up on Saturday, Jan. 19, outside a building at Rosewood Center, the state residential facility for people with mental disabilities. Someone apparently dropped Tony off there and left.

A state official would neither confirm nor deny the story, and the man who runs Rosewood did not return a phone call. A spokesman for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene said Rosewood is no longer taking new admissions, and that statement suggested that the Tony story might not be

true.

But two Rosewood workers have confirmed it, and one said Friday that Tony is still living there. I obtained a copy of what is said to be the note attached to Tony when he was dropped off.

"This is Tony," the note began. (A last name was included, but The Sun is not publishing it because the name could not be verified.)

"Tony was living with his mother," the note went on. "She's dying she has heart failure and is [in] a coma. We tried to get help and placement for Tony from [many] state agencies and no one would help. We contacted Adult Protective Services and they would not help. We are turning him over to the state of Maryland so he can get the help and shelter he needs. He's homeless and cannot care for himself. Thank you."

The note was not signed.

With all the patient confidentiality laws, it is difficult to get facts about such incidents.

But the Tony story is not hard to believe.

Not in a state with more than 16,000 people with developmental disabilities on the state's waiting list for services, half in a "crisis category," according to the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council.

People who work in this challenging area say that funding for housing of adults with special needs is woefully inadequate, and they don't see much help on the horizon.

Overall, the delivery system for services has not been able to keep up with the loss of resources since the noble deinstitutionalization movement began. That movement has the zealous support of many health professionals, and it's considered politically incorrect, even primitive, to suggest there might still be a place for institutions such as Rosewood. (On Jan. 15, Gov. Martin O'Malley issued an executive order to close the place over the next 18 months.)

I embrace community life over the institution. (I have two relatives with special needs who do well in group settings. It would be a sin to confine them to an institution - and 40 years ago that's where they might have ended up.)

But since first hearing the 22-letter word in the early 1970s, I have been instinctively suspicious of deinstitutionalization. Few things in life are as clean as the crusaders claim: Institutions bad for all, group homes good for all.

And having met, since the early 1980s, a few hundred men and women homeless on the streets of Baltimore, I've seen the bitter downside to the movement - an inadequate Plan B.

Doesn't matter.

We're going to close bad old Rosewood down - even as its critics decry the lack of resources for the disabled throughout Maryland.

Instead of using the imagination and converting Rosewood into, say, a pleasant, 300-acre community for people with special needs (group homes or cottages, health services, limited retail, even a restaurant-and-entertainment zone) and connecting it to mainstream Owings Mills, we're going to erase it (And, the way things work around here, another development of McMansions in its place remains a cynic's prospect.)

The fourth of Harry Yost's six children has been in Rosewood since 1962. Larry Yost is 52 years old, deaf, blind and retarded. His father, an accountant and attorney in Glen Burnie, believes reports of unsafe conditions at Rosewood have been exaggerated by those who want the place closed. In Yost's experience, the care of his son has been consistently good, and even better in recent years. Larry learned to feed himself - a major achievement that would not have been reached without the persistence of the Rosewood staff.

"There are a lot of good people out there," Harry Yost says.

So he's among those who are fighting O'Malley's executive order, and they are building their case.

"I think we deserve the right to chose where and how our children live," Yost says.

He doesn't see how a group home will improve his son's life. In fact, he thinks the change will be traumatic, and Yost doesn't trust the state to monitor his son's care, citing flaws in the oversight of group homes for children. (Two years ago, The Sun documented broad failure by the state to protect kids in 330 privately run homes in Maryland; children were being mistreated or neglected, and many homes employed unqualified or poorly trained staff. A Baltimore Circuit Court judge said that orphanages may have provided better care than some of the group homes that replaced them.)

I asked Harry Yost if he had been made to feel old-school - that by clinging to Rosewood, he clings to the past. He thought for a moment and said: "No, I got the white hat on. ... I'm right about this."

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