

This is going to be a long letter and I am sorry in advanced but I cannot sit here and let it all go unsaid.

Last night I sat for nearly 6 hours in a room full of folks both for and against the closures of white haven and Polk Center facilities. Now keep in mind that I went to this meeting neither for NOR against the closure. I have my own opinions and in no way do i feel it is directly impacting my life. I do not work at Polk center, I am not a business owner, i do not have close relative family living at Polk, nor do i have close bonds such as the ones that the staff have with the folks living in the center.. With that being said. I am a part of the community, and I do have a heart!! I have heard a lot of information and testimony over the course of the last few weeks and i have learned a lot.. My standpoint may be different than most but it's my opinion and I guess we should all have a say.. When I first heard about Polk (yes I was young). I honestly had envisioned in my head that is was an "institution". And the image I saw was kind of scary to say the least. I pictured an old run down spooky building with link fencing and barbed wire all the way around, and all the clients had chains around there feet and hands with face masks on so they wouldn't bite people. And like on a full moon all the clients were "nuts" hitting, kicking trying to kill you and many more terrible images popped in my head.. I feared going anywhere around the center because of what i had thought about the center originally. It wasn't until my dad started working at Polk center around 2003 that my opinion changed.. As any other staff my dad decided to brings me along to "Take your kid to work day" now at the time my dad worked in an all-male cottage in Northside. And I'll be honest i was so scared. But when I walked on campus I saw at first the beautiful architecture, a huge pond for fishing, a huge community swimming pool, but I hadn't yet met anyone nor been inside the building. But i found a little bit of peace with knowing that so far it was nothing like what i originally thought or have been told about this "awful center". When i went into the building I was immediately met at the door by a slender kind of tall dark male that introduced himself. Nothing out of the neither ordinary nor strange, i just figured it was another staff or someone that was going to show us around. We were in the main hall and when shaking this man's hand I did not know that i had just shook hands with a very well behaved, sweet and innocent individual that would consider me his friend from the moment he met me. He lived there!!! He walked around and kept patting me on the back and welcoming me to "his home". Now when we walked into the cottage. I noticed something that i never thought I would ever see. The room was designed in such a manner that I myself would have decorated my own home. It was refreshing to say the least!! As i scanned the room I saw a few guys sitting and watching the Adams family on the big screen relaxing on couches and at the dining table eating donuts.. Can we say family? Home? Love and respect for each other? It was no different than my own home with my siblings living our daily lives within our own home.. I cannot express how much stress was gone from my shoulders that morning. My entire perspective of Polk center seemed to change immediately. Over the course of the next few years i spent a lot of time on the grounds of Polk center, interacting with the individuals, went to party's at the pool and even had the pleasure of going with an individual to the large pond out back and helping him catch some blue gill. I have met both good and some bad. But the love I saw between the individuals and staff is something i cannot even fathom.. A few short years later my mother started working at Polk as well. She worked in an all woman's cottage in south side. Now this is where i saw the good the bad and the ugly. And what i am about to say may change your opinion of me forever. But no situation or home is perfect. As I walked into my mom's work cottage for the first time. I noticed the same kind of structure, lady's sitting amongst the room watching tv, reading magazines and laying on bean bag chairs. Some of the individuals were labeled" behavioral" but i don't like labels and i don't believe we should label a person. But a behavioral to me is someone that can and will kill you if given the chance. And luckily for those people. The staffs at the centers are well equipped and know how to handle an escalating issue. My mother had a few run in with a few select "behavioral" where she required surgery, was thrown over a couch, broke her tailbone, and had a chunk missing on her arm from a bite mark that required a tetanus shot. And you would think my mom would have been so mad and hated these individuals. But she sucked it up and went on with her day. Because these folks are her family. And she loves them. And if it was your own child you will still love them even if they are a bully sometimes. Now imagine that being in a public setting where people don't love them as family, what would be the outcome? I have met, shared time with and my mother and I even took some people off campus to outings. RW and DN. RW sticks out to me because she would call my mom by "mom" and would always ask how i was or where I was at when i was not visiting. She cared and she worried about people. She was the sweetest most sincere person i have ever met. She has since passed away, which I and my mother as well as many other staff attended a memorial. but I'm telling you that girl would make your day and if she didn't you were heartless. But the hear this lady calling her staff "mom". She would color pictures for my mother and i that i remember hanging on our fridge in OUR OWN HOME!! Many outings such as dinners, movies, racing, drives to see deer and to go see the elk. That means something. She not only refuted my mother as mom. She also told my mom she loved her many times a day. She didn't say it because she was prompted to, she didn't say it because she had to. She said it because she loved my mom as much as I do, as much as a child loves their own parent. And she also looked forward to seeing her every day, and at times on my mom's long weekends she was sad because she wouldn't see "her mom" for 4 days. And that kind of bond is very rare and hard to find, DN, my mother and I went to the races, out to eat and even brought her home for a day. And being a 12 year old little girl. They became family to me. Almost like having a big sister that i never had.. And now that i am older I realize something that i didn't when i was young. All these people want is for someone to be there for them. Love them; treat them with respect and dignity. Listen to their stories and when you do. They will love you unconditionally. And that folks is something you won't find anywhere else. You ask why I tell you my story. Well it's because I myself have a mild mental impairment. Now it is not as severe as needing to be placed in a home structured facility. It does still impact my life even into my adult years. I do not learn as quick as others my age, i need help with some simple tasks. I myself need prompted to do things

on time. I am a part of a society that overlooks those that are mentally or physically impaired and I myself have been failed by our system. I have been put thru the ringer of broken promises by our Commonwealth. I have not gotten the mental stability nor do the help that I needed to obtain it. Growing up I was bullied to the point of suicide. Forcing my parents to put me into a "home "for short term. Traveling thousands of miles to get help elsewhere for my mental help i needed. With no help from our government, outreach help, DHS, DOH, centers against abuse nor any other of the 8 programs, those were all promised to me at a low cost. But when the time came. I was scheduled for all of these things. And at the last minute they realized neither my parents nor I could afford it so they threw me out. Just like a piece of trash. All because situations change, over time my impairments got worse and the money ran out. You see all throughout school and into my 20's i was failed by the same exact people that are making all these proposed plans and expectations for the folks living at Polk and the closure of Polk center as well as white haven. And you expect me to sit here and believe your bullshit lies?? Remember, you told me for YEARS the same thing you are telling these folks.. Filling these ill minded and intellectually confused minds with so much confusion and self-doubts. Making promises of a bright future that you cannot guarantee, and hiding and being deceitful with your decision making powers., when you can't even give us "the people" you serve, a solid answer to the hundreds of questions we have been begging for an answer on.. If you think i am against the best possible solution for the many lives involved, you have me all wrong.. I want nothing but the best for every single soul involved but I'm afraid the closure of white haven as well as Polk center facilities is far from the best option. Not to mention all of the families going to be affected from job loss which also include the loss of a job for 6 of my immediate family members? .So after last night's meeting and hearing these nay sayers downgrade and belittle the importance and expectant of the voices and lives of these individuals, the lack of evidence supporting the closure, and the main focus being primarily how much money is saved or transferred in to other people's pockets. I can full heartedly say i am now #polkcenterstrong and i am no longer in limbo on my decision.. Please do not give up on these people like you did on me and many others in years past.. They are people that are loved. And they deserve to have a voice , a home and to continue to be loved where they ae at this very moment. How can a governor make a decision like this without even going to Polk center or white haven, speaking to the individuals or seeing for yourself what the living facility is like. Governor wolf, i understand where you are coming from, because If i would have never been there or became familiar with those folks living here I too would have wanted them CLOSED. But please go to these centers and realize as i did they are much more than the imagination you are creating in your own mind!

I also may have a suggestion. In years past Polk center used to grow some of their own food would it save some money to go back and do it again. But this time have a better structured plan in place. Grow crops, raise goat's cows and chickens. Not only would that be providing food for the folks, but also giving the individuals that are able to work a garden or care for animals a real sense of purpose. It would in return create "jobs" for the individuals. They would be more self-sufficient, as well as be more of a community within a community more so then they already are. Also, wood shop, ceramics, garden center, swimming pool, box shop and recycling needs to be more advertised so that people within our own community as well as surrounding areas know EVERYTHING. Polk has to offer. And I'm not down playing group homes. But why couldn't we use the vacant buildings on the property to train people how to be like Polk and train them how to handle escalating situations in a group home setting. And my last piece of advice.. Put the pond back onto the grounds. Just another source of food if they had a hatchery added on!!!

Sincerely,

Angel Stull