

Sarah Holland says "these centers will no longer be available to house and 'segregate' people with disabilities." Sarah is the president of The Arc of PA.

Question: How are they segregated? They are a part of their community! Come see all the community involvement the individuals take part in for yourselves, please. There are several trips planned by different people throughout the center for a variety of things. A few examples are: Steeler's Training Camp, Kennywood, Conneaut Lake, Two Mile Run Park, Applefest, Oil Heritage, A Taste of Franklin, Bands playing at the Bandstand Park in Franklin, trips to Wal-mart, Dollar General, walks around Polk, restaurants local and far, funerals for their family members or for fellow residents, some have even been invited to staff weddings. The list I gave is so short compared to the actual amount of community involvement the residents at Polk Center have with not only the quaint little town of Polk, but also all surrounding towns and even Erie and Pittsburgh.

Since Polk Center employs 750 people and houses 194 people in our area, it's safe to say our local economy is going to take a major fall in the years coming. Not only do they support many of our smaller, local businesses (fundraising, restaurants, furniture stores), but also many larger ones.

Question: How well do you think Venango County's economy will do once all 750 people are out of a job and have to move away to continue their state careers? And also not having the thousands of dollars spent by individuals per year at numerous local businesses.

Sherri Landis, Executive Director of The Arc, says, "Moving away from a system that relies on institutional care shows PA commitment to investing in the lives of people with disabilities."

Question: What is a disability to you? Is someone with downs syndrome classified under the same "disability" as someone with severe cerebral palsy? How are you "investing in the lives of people with disabilities" if you've invested in evicting 306 people with the widest variety of disabilities that you have ever seen? Oh, wait. You HAVEN'T seen them..

"By closing centers we are reminded again and again that people with disabilities can live in their community and in fact, flourish when given the supports and opportunities to do so." "Individuals with disabilities deserve the opportunity to experience life in their community just like everyone else."

Question: Do they deserve to be moved from their homes? Do these elderly people deserve to have their lives flipped upside down with all these changes?

Since you obviously understand people with intellectual disabilities so well, enough to make major life altering decisions for them, how do you think some of them who have a daily routine that they have followed for years and if strayed from, they get anxious and upset and sometimes violent will do? Being moved to an entirely new place with entirely new people and every single thing they see or touch is entirely new and different from their every. day. routine. Pretty heartbreaking to think about.

There are many individuals that have jobs within Polk Center. They get paid and they take pride in their work. Several of these jobs make things for the public. Ceramics, cement shop, greenhouse, recycling, a couple that help in the dietary department, and they also make equipment for a local company. There are a couple guys in maintenance that work right along side the employees.

Question: What kind of jobs will be offered to our individuals once they are taken away to group homes? Not all of them are comfortable working in a public place, and not all of them are capable of it. The jobs at Polk Center were made for their individuals. For example, many of them set up silverware bags that are used to serve all of the individuals breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They get breaks with their favorite snacks and drinks.

What about all the intellectually disabled that are still on waiting lists? The last number I saw was somewhere around 13,000 people waiting for their permanent homes. Polk Center has the room to house many of them.

Question: What about the people that live at Polk who have already tried living in group homes but for whatever reason, it didn't work out? Why/how do you think it will be any different this time?

The word "institution" has a lot of stigma behind it based off of practices used 50 plus years ago. I don't know if many people know this, but Polk Center is a "no holds" facility. That means the residents are NEVER held down or restricted in ANY way. They are not put in straight jackets or locked in padded rooms. They ARE taken care of by patient, loving, caring, adoring staff that go out of their way to make sure the individuals are loved for, well taken care of, safe, and an active member in our community-if they want to be.

Question: How would you feel if your beautiful, little old grandmother lived in the same home for 40-60 years and then the government decided, with absolutely no talking it over with her or your family, that it would be in your grandmother's best interest to give up her home and move somewhere else? Really think about that. I know my heart would be broken for my grandma, and hers definitely would be.

There is a Registered Nurse or a Licensed Practical Nurse in every single cottage in the outside buildings, and right down the hall for the main building. There are even a few doctors on staff. Polk Center has had numerous people get

diagnosed with cancer and beat it and thrive. I believe that is in part because they are surrounded by so much love. Love formed from many years of feeling safe and secure.

Question: Where else are they going to find a doctor that has been with them for as many years and knows literally everything there is to know about them? Where else are they going to have access to their very own registered nurse whenever they need one? How about the many RSA's (Residential Service Aide) that volunteer to take individuals off grounds on their own time? The bonds they have formed are so strong. I can't stress this enough.

Polk Center could be changed from an Intermediate Care Facility to a Long Term Care Facility. They could get new residents. (The waiting list...) Buildings could be fixed up and reopened. Polk Center could become self sufficient again, with the exception of a couple things, I'm sure. Please, instead of uprooting these people's lives and potentially killing many of them who won't be able to handle the move and all the changes, please let them stay instead. They are home. If you don't believe me, go see for yourself.

I don't understand how people can make such major life decisions for people that they have never even met. For a place they've never even been. For families they've never even asked for their opinion.