



Fact Sheet #1: History & Advocacy

Why More People with Disabilities Now Live in the Community

In the last forty years there has been a shift away from institutionalization and toward supporting individuals with disabilities to live in the community. This movement is rooted in decades of advocacy, legal decisions, and civil rights protections.

Timeline:

- **Pre-1980s:** Many individuals with disabilities lived in large, state-run institutions, often isolated from their communities and families. Conditions in these institutions were frequently poor, and rights were limited.
- **1980s–2000s:** A nationwide movement emerged to close institutions and replace them with smaller and more individualized **community-based living options**, including group homes.
- **1990s–Today:** Successful litigation helped push the movement along. This included:
 - **Olmstead v. L.C. (1999):** A landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision. It found that unjustified segregation of people with disabilities violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). States must provide services in the **least restrictive environment** possible.
 - **Minnesota's Olmstead Plan (2015):** Outlines the state's commitment to supporting people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in their communities as they choose.
 - **Jensen Settlement Agreement (2011):** Found that residents in Minnesota state institutions were unlawfully restrained and secluded. It resulted in reforms that emphasized dignity, freedom, and autonomy.
 - **Positive Supports Rule (2015):** Mandated that restrictive procedures—such as physical restraints—be used only in emergencies and with strict oversight.
- **Current Trends:** Individuals with **lower support needs** often live independently with provider supports coming to them. This looks different for different people, including:
 - A child with disabilities living in their family home with intermittent staffing to support the child and provide training to the parents.
 - An adult with disabilities living with friends in an apartment with daily services coming in to help the person build skills, maintain employment, etc.
 - Group homes now tend to serve people with **more complex needs** who require 24/7 care and supervision. They often serve just 2 or 3 people in a home.



Why Community Living Matters:

Rather than isolating people, group homes and in-home services allow individuals to live among neighbors, access services, participate in local activities, and enjoy everyday life. Community-based housing reflects a person-centered philosophy that values:

- **Autonomy and independence**
- **Integration** into society
- **Respect for civil rights**
- **Access** to meaningful relationships, work, and recreation

Learn More and Watch Recommended Videos:

- [From Institutions to Independence – A Brief History of Disability Rights \(YouTube\)](#)
- [About the Minnesota Olmstead Plan / Minnesota Olmstead Implementation Office](#)
- [History of the Plan / Minnesota Olmstead Implementation Office](#)
- [Minnesota Council On Disability | Your Policy, Training and Technical Resource](#)
- [Learning Center - The Arc Minnesota](#)
- [Home Page - NAMI Minnesota](#)