

## Join the European Coalition for Community Living

If you, your organisation or institution are committed to the promotion, development or provision of community-based services as an alternative to the institutionalisation of people with disabilities, join the European Coalition for Community Living. By working together, we can ensure that our voice is heard.

Our members:

- Promote the policy and mission of ECCL.
- Contribute to the development of ECCL policy positions/papers and activity plans.
- Participate in ECCL monitoring and lobbying activities.
- Participate in ECCL Working Groups, meetings and conferences.
- Receive the ECCL Newsletter and other ECCL publications.
- Benefit from other ECCL activities.

The founding organisations of ECCL are Autism Europe, the Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University, the European Disability Forum, the European Network of Independent Living, Inclusion Europe, Mental Health Europe and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative.

## How to join

To join, please contact ECCL Coordinator on the e-mail address [coordinator@community-living.info](mailto:coordinator@community-living.info) or write to:

### European Coalition for Community Living

Coordinator  
c/o Inclusion Europe

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## Sign up to the Commitment

The European Coalition for Community Living calls on all governments, service providers and non governmental organisations in Europe to publicly subscribe to the Commitment to Stop the Building of New Large Residential Institutions in Europe.

### Commitment to Stop the Building of New Large Residential Institutions in Europe

The signatories to this Commitment undertake, on behalf of their organisation, political body, administration, company or government that they will not finance or otherwise support the establishment of new large residential institutions for any group of disabled people.

They commit themselves to ensuring that any new residential service for disabled people in their remit complies with the following basic quality standards:

- Location within a local social community
- Possibilities for interaction with the local community
- Respect for the personal space, privacy and property of each user
- Availability of the necessary personal support for each user

To sign the Commitment to Stop the Building of New Large Residential Institutions in Europe and for more information on membership possibilities and activities of the European Coalition for Community Living, visit:

[www.community-living.info](http://www.community-living.info)



**ECCL**  
European Coalition  
for Community Living

## What is the European Coalition for Community Living?

The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) is a Europe-wide initiative working towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation.

ECCL's vision is of a society in which people with disabilities live as equal citizens, with full respect for their human rights. They must have real choices regarding where and with whom to live, choices in their daily lives and real opportunities to be independent and to actively participate in their communities.

The European Coalition for Community Living advocates for and monitors progress towards de-institutionalisation in Europe, campaigns for, and provides information on, the development of comprehensive, quality community-based services and de-institutionalisation<sup>1</sup>.

ECCL uses the following definition of the term "institution":

"An institution is any place in which people who have been labelled as having a disability are isolated, segregated and/or compelled to live together. An institution is also any place in which people do not have, or are not allowed to exercise control over their lives and their day-to-day decisions. An institution is not defined merely by its size."

ECCL is a cross-disability initiative and targets all actors involved in the process of de-institutionalisation and the development and provision of community-based alternatives – local, national and regional authorities, the European Union, disability and other non governmental organisations, service provider organisations and staff of the existing institutions.

Membership of ECCL is open to all organisations and individuals concerned with community living and de-institutionalisation of persons with disabilities.

<sup>1</sup> We use the term "de-institutionalisation" to mean the replacement of institutions for people with disabilities with comprehensive, quality community-based services.

## Why our work is important?

Across Europe, thousands of people with disabilities spend many years, or their entire lives, isolated in institutions. While the quality of life in institutions varies, all deny people with disabilities the right to live included in the community and society.

Many institutions deny people with disabilities their basic human rights. Residents of these institutions have no choice over how to live their lives and no control over decisions made about them. Others decide where and with whom they will live, how many people they will share their room with and what clothes they will wear. Others decide how their money will be spent. In these institutions residents are not allowed to have a relationship or get married. They cannot leave the institution freely and often lose any contact with their family and friends. Most have no access to education or employment and spend their days with little or nothing to do. In some cases members of the staff have neither the skills nor the knowledge to provide residents with the necessary habilitation and therapy.

People with disabilities living in institutions are often victims of serious human rights violations. Some reports have documented residents being kept in caged beds and the use of unmodified electroshock therapy. Others highlight physical and sexual abuse by the staff and other residents, degrading living facilities and the failure to provide for basic needs.

## Background

The need for an initiative, such as ECCL, to promote de-institutionalisation and the development of community-based alternatives was demonstrated by the findings of the Included in Society project. Based on research into institutions and community-based residential alternatives for people with disabilities in Europe, this project showed that the problem of long-term institutional care for people with disabilities is prevalent in many European countries. The project's work included the development of a set of goals and policy recommendations for the development of quality residential services for people with disabilities and highlighted the need

for long-term action against institutionalisation. The project also proposed some key principles for 'positive change' which should underpin the development of community based services. These are: respect, choice, participation, independence and regional/local responsibility for people with disabilities<sup>2</sup>.

## What is community living?

In order to exercise their rights and participate fully in the society, people with disabilities need to have access to comprehensive, quality community-based services. This means living independently in the community, in small group homes or individual housing, with adequate support based on each person's individual needs. It also means having access to education and employment, as well as social and cultural life of the community. It means having choices and living with dignity.

To ensure that community-based services are provided on the basis of individual needs, people with disabilities must be involved in their development, together with other stakeholders. It is important that the planning, provision and review of community-based services are founded on the values of equal citizenship and social inclusion, as well as the principles for positive change.

## Vlatka's story

Vlatka Sirotić spent 32 years in an institution for people with disabilities. In 2001, she was included in the program of Community Based Supported Living, run by the Association for Promoting Inclusion in Croatia. Today, she lives in an apartment in the centre of town with three other friends from the institution. She is employed and receives a salary. She also has a boyfriend and many plans for the future. After many years, she re-established contact with her family. Describing the years she spent in the institution as living in a cage, Vlatka sees her freedom as her greatest achievement in her new life.

<sup>2</sup> To obtain a copy of the Included in Society report, visit [www.community-living.info](http://www.community-living.info).