

Living At Home, Not In A Home

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Each day we call people with disabilities in nursing facilities who have asked for help with planning their move home to the community and to greater safety. Too often when we call someone who is poised to go home, we hear “Jim has died.”

COVID-19 and nursing home conditions swept him away and his family and friends are devastated, we are devastated. In the last year, the death count has been unprecedented among people who hope to make their simple dream – going home – a reality.

The New York State Attorney General, Tish James, released a report exposing the stunning level of underreporting of COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes. The report is stark. It shows the dangerous conditions that nursing facility residents have faced for years.

This is nothing new for our community. We have been fighting these conditions for decades. Fighting to help people leave institutions for their own homes. COVID-19 has made these horrible conditions worse. The rate of death is twice what is reported. Lack of testing, low vaccination rates, missing or reused protective gear, shockingly inadequate infection control and unbelievably low staffing levels have created a crushing wave of deaths.

The time to shift taxpayer resources from sustaining the nursing home industry to supporting people at home is long overdue. Independent Living Centers (ILCs) statewide, including CIDNY, are part of the solution. We are community-based nonprofits run by and for people with disabilities that work with people with disabilities of all ages to ensure we can live like our neighbors and be treated with dignity and respect. We back this up by providing practical education, hands-on navigational help, problem-solving support, and other assistance to help ensure people with disabilities can thrive.

In 2020 alone, we helped 150 people leave nursing facilities for their own homes and many more avoid institutionalization. Because it is very often cheaper to live in the community than in an institution, helping people leave institutions saved state taxpayers nearly \$12 million in state Medicaid dollars.

New York is facing a budget crisis. Savings to the state would mount if the state flipped the switch from propping up the nursing facilities to paying well for high-quality care and support at home and in the community.

New Yorkers want to live at home, not in a home. It’s time for the State’s budget and policies to catch up. People tell us they don’t want to be shut away. They want to live their lives in their own homes.

And, there is a better model of care but we have to make sure that the well paid workforce is there, and get rid of incentives to institutionalize. But lawmakers won’t act without a push.

Your voices can help make the change we want to see. We are many. We make sense. We’re not going away. Let’s make sure that our elected officials hear us and are accountable. Tell them “Our homes, not nursing homes.”