



Legal Issues in Psychiatric Boarding Homes

by Pat Capponi

There are few minority groups in Ontario, or in Canada, whose rights are as thoroughly and insidiously compromised as those of deinstitutionalized psychiatric patients who have been consigned to privately operated boarding and lodging homes. People who had been told every day for years that they were sick and in need of protection, medication and control suddenly found themselves standing on the other side of the door with a bus ticket and the address of a room or of the Salvation Army, expected to appreciate the benevolence of the state. The cost of providing hospital care — hundreds of dollars a day — was dramatically reduced to the seven dollars a day that would keep a person in a boarding home.

Various people saw the huge profit potential in buying big old houses and turning them into psychiatric homes, offering beds and three meals a day. There was no shortage of residents, no real regulation, no serious attempt at health or building inspection. They were housing people no one else wanted — problem people, usually without nosy interfering relatives. So, with the collaboration of therapists and civic and provincial governments, the deinstitutionalized

client found that life could indeed get a lot worse.

Things have not improved in the past decade and a half. Human and legal rights have been subjected to continuous abuses as landlords of boarding homes realized they were a law unto themselves. It should be noted that most owner/operators feel hard done by; they feel persecuted by frequent media exposure of abuses in the homes, and they feel they don't get nearly enough money for the services they provide.

It is in fact true that they do provide a service — to the government and to hospital professionals, not to ex-patients. They keep the deinstitutionalized off the streets, out of sight and out of mind; and out of coroner's court, where bleeding-heart liberals might question the results of Ontario's efforts to treat patients in their own communities.

What rights have been removed from the deinstitutionalized?

- * the right to receive and open their own mail (we are told by owners that chaos would ensue if ex-patients were allowed to receive their own cheques. They would blow all the money and not pay the rent. Thus the

