

## High Park fights Group Homes

The residents of High Park in Toronto's Ward 2 are "mad as hell." They don't want group homes or other alternative housing for ex-psychiatric inmates (or ex-prisoners) in their community. Apparently, the residents don't care about the fact that group homes are legal anywhere in the city, thanks to the "as of right" legislation which Metro Council passed in April of 1981.

Last summer was especially rife with tension, largely because of the loud and angry protests waged by some High Park residents against the establishment of one particular group home. The home is being planned and managed by the John Howard Society, a social agency which helps prisoners and ex-prisoners. It will house ten "mildly retarded" or "mentally handicapped" ex-prisoners and will have 24-hour staff supervision. Resident protest became particularly strident last July 24 when roughly 300 Archie Bunker-type people showed up at a rally. Ward 2 right-wing aldermen Ben Grys and Chris Korwin-Kuczynski, as well as Liberal MPP Tony Ruprecht and Conservative Yuri Shymko, were on hand to fuel the residents' fire. Shymko claimed the residents weren't really bigots when he complained: "What makes me sick is that this community and people like me who support it (the group home) are depicted as being bigoted."

However, residential bigotry is claimed to be justified, according to a pamphlet drafted and distributed by the High Park Concerned Citizens Committee. The front page of the pamphlet reads: "We're mad as hell. We won't take it any more. Stop 114 Indian Road. And any additional half-way house." Other statements, expressed as rhetorical questions, reveal residents' fears and myths about the dangerousness of ex-inmates and their threat to property values: "Will your children be safe now?" "Would you feel safe having your child play outside, or near such a half-way house?" "Are you tired of being harassed in our streets?" "Will the value of your property go down?" "Would you buy a house next door?" "Will our neighbourhood go down the drain?" The Ontario Human Rights Commission is presently investigating a complaint by two ex-psychiatric inmates who claim that the High Park pamphlet is not only inflammatory, but discriminates against "handicapped" people.

Curtis McQuire, spokesman for the High Park Concerned Citizens Committee, claims the residents aren't really against group homes—they just don't want any more of them in their community. He told the *Toronto Star*: "We have nothing against group homes. We've just done more than our share." The facts prove otherwise. Ward 2 has 12 group homes (134 residents); however, Ward 5 has 18 homes (181 residents), Ward 6 has 9 homes (163 residents), and Ward 7 has 12 homes (171 residents).

The High Park residents are still protesting. On August 26, about 400 packed the City Council Chamber to voice their complaints and fears, supported of course by aldermen Grys and Korwin-Kuczynski. However, on September 9, 400 group home supporters (chiefly informed residents from other downtown wards, community workers and about 10 or 12 ex-psychiatric inmates from ON OUR OWN and Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre) loudly supported City Council's

reaffirmation of the group home by-law, which passed by an overwhelming majority vote.

So far, only the City of Toronto has passed an "as of right" legislation which legally allows group homes in any ward or community of the city. All the other boroughs have been stonewalling the by-law. For example, North York Mayor Mel Lastman has already appealed the group home by-law to the Municipal Board of Ontario. And the High Park committee is still obstructing the establishment of the group home on Indian Road by asking City Council to set up a special committee to investigate the "problems and merits" of group homes and other residential facilities in Ward 2.

What's needed, of course, is decisive action by the provincial government—approval and enforcement of Metro's group home by-law passed almost one and a half years ago, so that "deinstitutionalization" will become a reality instead of the farce or token effort which it is now.

*NOTE: People wishing to express their views or opinions about group homes should write letters to their ward aldermen, Mr. Paul Godfrey, Chairman of Metropolitan Toronto Council, and/or Mr. Frank Drea, Minister of Community and Social Services.*



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