

FEATURE ARTICLE

by DAVID KNUTSON

About a year ago I attended a conference in Edmonton on Supported Employment. During one of the lunch breaks I met a man who was a previous resident of Michner Centre, and who opened up a lot about his current life situation over lunch. We both ended up missing our after lunch workshops while we talked about our jobs and our lives. Later that evening in my hotel room, I wrote down some of the things Mike talked about, and now I've put them into a sort of monologue. It helps me to understand him better, and I don't think he'll mind if I share it.

THE OTHER PLACE

Sometimes I think it was better in the other place. There wasn't a whole lot to do, but I always knew where I'd be and what would happen, and what everyone would do if I did something they didn't like, and how to stay out of trouble, and just when that guy Howard was going to throw something, and....

It wasn't so great! Nobody let me do the things I can do here. I have my own apartment now and pretty soon I'll have a real job and more money. I go downtown whenever I want and do shopping and look around and talk to people. Some people don't talk to me, but lots of people at the other place didn't talk to me either. Some of them didn't ever talk to anybody.

Sometimes when I go downtown I get sort of lost, but usually I can find the right bus and the drivers help because I have my address written down. Once Sue (She helps me at my house) had to drive around and find me. She was a bit mad and told me I have to learn how to not mess the bus up so much. I know I would have made it home if Sue didn't find me but I just would have been later than I said. Sue gets nervous about that but she gets over it.

Before I had my own apartment I never knew about things like paying the bills. I guess somebody else did that at the other place, and even at the group home where I stayed for a while in between, my Uncle Don just wrote a cheque for me to stay there. Don's my guardian and it was his idea for me to move out of the other place. I didn't want to at first but he said, "Try it and if you don't like it you can come back."

I like Don because he always lets me decide things. He says he won't have to be my guardian for long because I'm learning to do everything myself. He says whenever I'm ready, I can just tell him and he'll talk to the government about it.

Anyways, now Sue teaches me how to pay the bills with cheques so Don doesn't write them for me anymore. It feels better to be paying my own. Everyone at work always talks about paying the bills and so I can too.

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