

NEWS RELEASE

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Public Guardian and Trustee
of British Columbia

REPORT RELEASED TO ASSIST FORMER WOODLANDS RESIDENTS

VANCOUVER – The Public Guardian and Trustee released a report today, summarizing a two-year project following allegations of abuse of residents of the Woodlands School.

The PGT Woodlands Project reviewed over 100,000 pages of institutional records concerning 255 former residents. Approximately half of these former residents were interviewed and for some, this interview was the first time they had told anyone about their experiences at Woodlands.

“The overarching message we heard from former residents, family members and others is that society must continue to be vigilant to protect the rights of adults and children with intellectual disabilities,” stated Jay Chalke, Public Guardian and Trustee. “It is important to ensure the lessons of Woodlands are learned by all of us so that we do not, out of misplaced good intentions or fiscal concerns, establish such institutions again.”

Woodlands was a provincial institution for children and adults with developmental disabilities, which was closed in 1996. The purpose of the PGT Woodlands Project was to follow up on concerns that had been generally reported in *The Need to Know*, a report by former Ombudsman, Dulcie McCallum. Ms. McCallum had been asked by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to review files from Woodlands School. Following release of *The Need to Know* in July 2002, MCFD asked the PGT to undertake more investigation in order to identify and contact the former residents named in certain records reviewed by McCallum and to provide information, support and advice on options available to them. The PGT was asked to do this work because it is independent of government and could provide advice to former residents without being in a conflict of interest. The PGT is also legal representative for approximately 500 former Woodlands residents.

In addition to discussing the work of the project and its findings, the PGT’s report outlines options for former residents, including obtaining the records created about them while at Woodlands, accessing counseling and community supports and participating in legal proceedings. One such legal proceeding is Richard v. Her Majesty the Queen, a class action lawsuit related to physical and sexual abuse at Woodlands. This action was started by North Vancouver law firm, Poyner Baxter. “The report will assist former residents and their families to make informed choices about how to respond to the allegations of abuse surrounding Woodlands”, said Chalke.

The PGT’s Woodlands Project Report is available in print and audio file on the PGT’s website at: www.trustee.bc.ca/woodlands.htm.

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