Abandoning a “Lifetime of Habits” to Avoid “the Sins of the Past”. De-congregating institutions with deeply held traditions

**| © Brennan, C. Lally, N, O’Brien, P & Fitzgerald, S.**

**Plain English Summary**

# Introduction

Lately, the Irish government said it will close all big institutions for people with disabilities. People will move to smaller houses in the community, but the staff from the institutions will still work with them. This article looks at how staff do not always change their ways of working after the institution is closed. We talk about how staff can change to support people to live in their communities.

* 1. **The History of Disability in Ireland**

In this article, we argue that it is very difficult to change staff’s ways of working because there is a long history of treating people with disabilities unfairly in Ireland. Ireland used to be a very religious country. It used to be the country with the most people locked up in institutions. It wasn’t just people with disabilities, women who had babies outside of marriage, and children were also locked away in institutions, and many of these were run by the church. Today Ireland is less religious. Institutions for women and children have closed, but some for people with disabilities are still open and the government is working on closing them.

**2. Research Method and Design**

We did interviews with 36 staff who used to work in the institutions and were now working in the community. These staff included, nurses, social care workers and managers.

# 3. Findings

# Some staff though that institutions are part of Irish history, culture, and tradition. The medical model and religion were very strong in the institutions. Sometimes abuse was not taken seriously.

# Many staff who worked in these institutions feel sorry for what happened in the past. Years ago, they thought they were doing the right thing. Sometimes the staff felt helpless even if they wanted to change. But other staff want things to stay the same. They don’t see a problem with institutions, and they are fighting to keep working in the same ways in the community houses. For this reason, the abuses that happened in the institutions could still happen in the community houses. A lot of work needs to be done to show these staff that there are better ways of working. Sometimes staff will change their ways when they see other staff work differently.

# 4. Discussion

This research helps us to understand that an institution is more than just a building. An institution can also be a way of working and a way of thinking about people with disabilities. A country can also be institutionalised if the history, the culture, and the traditions suggest that abuse in institutions is OK. It would be wrong to think of institutional abuse as a part of history, it is alive today and it needs to be challenged.