

Good riddance, say Woodlands survivors

BY NEAL HALL, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 19, 2011



Former residents were on hand Tuesday to watch the demolition of the last section of infamous 133-year-old Woodlands School in New Westminster.

Photograph by: Jason Payne, PNG, Vancouver Sun

Goodbye and good riddance, said dozens of survivors of Woodlands School as they watched the demolition Tuesday of the 133-year-old centre block tower, the last remnant of an institution known as the Provincial Lunatic Asylum when it was built in 1878.

"Today is a triumphant day for me. It's a dream come true," Carol Dauphinais, a Woodlands survivor, told about 150 people who came to watch the New Westminster building being torn down.

"I thought I'd never see the day when this place was knocked down," she said. "It will put memories in the dirt where they belong."

Dauphinais said later during an interview that she was put in Woodlands when she was 16 after being in a series of foster homes.

She was told by staff that she was retarded and would never be normal, she added. During a trip out of Woodlands to visit a relative in 1963, she ran away and proved everyone wrong.

"I got a job and worked for 33 years," she said, adding that she became a union shop steward during her years working in hospitals.

She said she still would like an apology from the government for the fear and abuse she suffered at the facility, which closed in 1996.

The cellblock tower was the last remaining major building at the site, which housed almost 1,500 mentally disabled children during its peak. Investigations found about 20 per cent of them suffered systemic physical, mental and sexual abuse at the facility.

The asylum name was changed to the Provincial Hospital for the Insane in 1897. In 1950, it became known as the Woodlands School, when it began housing mentally disabled children, as well as runaways, orphans and wards of the state.

The site now is being redeveloped for residential use.

Survivors of the school filed a classaction lawsuit in 2002, and 850 former students were expected to be eligible to receive compensation.

The provincial government agreed in 2009 to settle with Woodlands survivors for between \$3,000 and \$150,000, depending on the level of abuse each person suffered.

The courts have excluded survivors who suffered abuse before Aug. 1, 1974, which is when the Crown Proceedings Act took effect, giving citizens the right to sue the B.C. government for wrongdoing.

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