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978-0-521-62569-2 - Deinstitutionalising Women: An Ethnographic Study of Institutional Closure

Kelley Johnson

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DEINSTITUTIONALISING WOMEN

An Ethnographic Study of Institutional Closure

An ethnographic study of deinstitutionalisation, this book explores the lives of women living in a locked ward within a large institution for people with intellectual disabilities. Kelley Johnson describes, in rich and carefully-observed detail, the lives of the women in the institution largely through their own stories and experiences. The closure of this institution gave her a unique opportunity to closely examine the impact of deinstitutionalisation on these women. The book raises a number of broad questions about our understanding of disability. It considers the role of professional views of intellectual disability in shaping perceptions. It also looks at the process of deinstitutionalisation, with its paradoxical discourse of rights and management. Finally the book's feminist analysis brings insight to the ways in which institutionalised women are not only locked out of society, but out of their lives as women as well.

Kelley Johnson is Senior Lecturer in Deakin Human Services at Deakin University in Melbourne. She has published widely in the area of intellectual disability, and has worked extensively in advocacy for people with disabilities.

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*For Ben
and for the women who lived and worked in the locked unit*

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Note to the Reader

To protect the confidentiality of those who took part in the research for this book, all names of institutions have been changed. Because the book focuses on the women who lived in the locked unit, they have been given pseudonyms. Care has been taken to exclude information which could be used to individually identify the women living in the unit. Staff and managers are identified only by initials which in no way reflect their real initials.

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The Women

BRIGID ANDERSON was institutionalised at birth and was 26 at the time of the study. She had spent all her life in institutions and more than eight years in the locked unit. She had no family or advocate. Brigid's first Client Consultation on Relocation (CCOR) preference was a metropolitan house, her second a metropolitan institution and her third a country institution. She was unmatched and went to live in a country institution.

DORA CRAIG was 43 and had been institutionalised for thirty-one years from the age of 12. She had lived for eight years in the locked unit. Her parents visited her irregularly. Her CCOR preference was undecided, and she was matched to a metropolitan institution and went to live there.

UNA HARRIS was 40 and had been in institutions since she was 18. She had spent approximately five years in the locked unit, and was visited regularly by her sister. All three of Una's CCOR preferences were for a country house. She was matched to one and went to live there.

IRIS JAMES was 43 and had spent nineteen years since the age of 24 in institutions. She had lived in locked units for over ten years. Her sister visited her regularly. All three of her CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, and she was matched to one and went to live there.

LENA JOHNSON was institutionalised at the age of 64. At 72 she had been living in institutions for eight years, and half of this time had been spent in the locked unit. She had an appointed guardian and visited

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her elderly mother regularly. Lena's three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, but she was matched to a country house and went to live there.

KIRSTEN JONES was 39. She had entered the institution at 20 and had lived there for nineteen years, spending approximately thirteen of those years in a locked unit. She had no contact with her family. All of her CCOR preferences were for metropolitan houses. She was matched to one and went to live there.

BETTINA JUNISOV was institutionalised at 6. At 25 she had spent nineteen years in the institution, with eight of those years in the locked unit. Her parents visited her irregularly. Bettina's three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house in the community, which was also the matching decision and her final location.

JANE KING had spent periods in the community, but had been admitted repeatedly to institutions since the age of 6. She was 30, and although she had been in the locked unit for only six months, she had lived there previously. She had a guardian. Although her first preference was a metropolitan house, Jane was matched to a metropolitan institution and went to live there (her second and third preferences).

ILSE LANE was 56 and had been in institutions since the age of 6. She had lived in the locked unit for eight years. Ilse had a citizen advocate but no family. All three of her CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, and she was matched to one and went to live there.

RHONDA LEE was 37 and had spent thirty-one years since the age of 6 in an institution. Rhonda had been in the locked unit for six years, and her family visited her regularly. Rhonda went to live in a metropolitan house early in the institution's closure and did not go through either the CCOR or matching processes.

ROSALIND MAITLAND was institutionalised at 5. At the age of 53 she had spent forty-eight years in institutions. Twenty of those years had been spent in locked units. Rosalind had a citizen advocate but no family. Rosalind's three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, but she was matched to a country house and went to live there.

JUNE MILES was 46. She had been institutionalised for twenty-three years since the age of 22, and had spent seven years in the locked unit. She had a citizen advocate but no family. Although all of her CCOR

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preferences were for a metropolitan house, June was matched and sent to a country house.

Laura MITCHELL was 57. She had lived in institutions for thirty-three years since the age of 24, and had been in locked units on and off for thirty of those years. Laura had no family. Her three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, a country house and a metropolitan institution respectively. She was matched to a country house and went to live there.

Faye MORRIS was 10 when she was institutionalised, and at 47 had spent thirty-seven years in an institution. She had lived thirty of those years in a locked unit. Her sister visited her irregularly. Faye was initially matched to a country house (her first preference), but concerns about her behaviour led to a change in the matching decision. She was matched to a metropolitan institution and went to live there.

Inge ROBERTS was institutionalised at 9, and at 41 had spent thirty-two years in institutions. She had lived ten of those years in the locked unit. Her father visited her irregularly. Although Inge's first preference was for a house on the grounds of a metropolitan institution, she was matched and went to live in a metropolitan institution (her second and third preferences).

Jodie RYAN was 45 and had spent twenty-three years in institutions after first being admitted at 22. She had spent seven years in the locked unit. She had a citizen advocate friend but no family. All three of her CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, and the matching committee approved this and she went to live in one.

Doris SMITH was institutionalised at 3, and at 56 had spent fifty-three years in institutions. She had spent eleven of those years in the locked unit. Her sister visited her irregularly. All of Doris's CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan institution. She was matched to such an institution and went to live there.

Elaine STONE was 61 and had spent periods in the community since she was institutionalised some thirty-three years earlier at 28. She had lived in a locked unit intermittently for thirty years. Her brother visited her irregularly. Her three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, and she was matched to one and went to live there.

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KATE SURREY had been in institutions since she was 28 and had spent fifteen years until the age of 43 in the locked unit. Her mother visited her regularly. Kate's three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house, and she was matched to one and went to live there.

JOYCE THAMES was institutionalised at 8. At 39 she had spent twenty-three years in locked units. Joyce's parents visited her frequently, and Joyce had regular home leave. Her three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan institution. Joyce was matched to one and went to live there.

VERA WATERS was institutionalised at 16. At 59 she had lived in institutions for forty-three years. It was not possible to discover from her records how many years she had spent in a locked unit, but estimates ranged from seven to twelve years. Vera had a citizen advocate as well as a sister who visited her regularly. Vera's three CCOR preferences were for a metropolitan house. She was matched to one and went to live there.