

I would like to share our experience with anyone that is hesitant about placing their family members at Lanterman into the community.

About 1975 my husband and I found it would be in Jennifer's best interest if we placed her in a group home at Camarillo State Hospital. It was a wonderful experience for her and she had wonderful people that really helped her. From there she was placed in two group homes in the beach area of Los Angeles. Within a few years she went totally downhill and suffered greatly, both mentally and physically. At the time, and from what people told us, it sounded like she was the problem. I now know that we should have removed her immediately. Her social worker was concerned and told us we should look into placing her at Lanterman. She went to live there and that is where she has been up to a few months ago.

At Lanterman she lived in three or four homes there until they found the right fit. All in all, it was a good experience until a few years ago. She started to go downhill and we felt it was because her father died and she wasn't adjusting well. The caregivers and teachers were good to her, but she just didn't seem right. When we were visiting she hardly knew we were there, it was like she had given up and lost her personality.

Over the years we dealt with her social workers and we had a lot of respect for their advice. With all the terrible experiences we had with community group homes, we insisted that she not be put back in one. When the talk of Lanterman closing started, they highly recommended that we place her in one of the Vagthol Care Centers. Seven months ago we checked it out and were very impressed. Her move there went very smoothly; from visiting, to weekend visits, to a permanent living situation.

Right now my daughter Anastasia (who is her conservator), and I could not feel any better than we do about her current living situation. First of all the care is phenomenal. Each time we visit we see her personality and humor coming back. They have gradually decreased her meds (with close medical supervision); she is on the road to be able to walk again; she is feeding herself (the food looks so good and is recognizable as food); a beautiful wheelchair that fits her, and a bedroom with special bed, all fit for a princess. Best of all she is happy and laughing again. The home is beautiful, peaceful, and everyone is treated like family. The effect of the care shows on the other clients too, most of which were at Lanterman with her.

This has been like a dream come true for all of us that love her. My advice for anyone that is resisting this move is to check it out, and give your family member a chance to get the care and attention that they need. I hope you are as lucky as we have been.

Bardy Anderson and Anastasia Wolff