

When our first son, Doug was born, we were filled with joy and anticipation of all it would mean for us to be a family. We envisioned soccer games and cub scouts; progressing through school, graduating and going on to college to prepare for a rewarding career; falling in love, marrying and starting his own family, meanwhile enriching each others' lives with love. As Doug grew, we started seeing a lack of progress in developing language that concerned us and we started the round of doctors to find out what was going on with our little boy. He was tested at Children's Hospital; they said his development was delayed, but they could go no further in diagnosis. We took him to the University of Washington's children's center; they said he was mentally retarded, but "no known etiology--no prognosis." Not only were we grieving his condition, we felt adrift. Then we were directed to Bremerton's Frances Haddon Morgan Center.

When he was four years old Doug spent a morning with the staff at FHMC and they were able to diagnose and prescribe that morning. We, as parents, were able to see other children who moved, sounded and acted just like our little boy. Knowing didn't change the situation, but now we were not alone and we had the support of professionals who could help us learn how to best help our son.

Not only was our son non-verbal and not potty-trained, he also had no sense of danger and needed supervision 24 hours a day. You could not take your eyes off him for a minute, or he would be out the door and gone. We bought a house with an apartment so we could hire someone to live with us and help us with taking care of Doug. After several disasters, we gave up on that idea and continued to care for Doug at home. We fenced the yard to keep him safe, we only left home occasionally and then tried to hire great babysitters. In spite of our best efforts there were times when he escaped and we spent agonizing hours with family, neighbors and police searching for him.

In the meantime we had two other children who also needed our time and occasions when they got mom and dad's direct attention. When Doug was twelve years old, we were able to schedule some respite time when he was able to stay at FHMC for a week end or a week so we could get away from the house. He would return from those respite visits happy and we were relieved to know that he had been safe and cared for by people who knew his special needs and never took their eyes off of him.

As Doug grew older, as much as it broke our hearts, we knew there would be a time when he would need a residential setting. We tried out a group home and they said his needs were too great. They could not give him the level of care and supervision he needed. We tried a large institution in our state. It definitely didn't work out. Eventually, a space opened at Frances Haddon Morgan Center and Doug moved there when he was 15. He finished school in the Bremerton School District. The staff at FHMC worked with him and he stopped needing diapers! The medical staff and the house staff supported him through some health issues related to his condition. They have built a special secure patio so he can go outside and run in safety.

Doug has now lived at FHMC for almost 20 years. As parents we are terrified that well-meaning people who don't understand his needs and the needs of the others who live at FHMC will close this facility and take him away from his home. We have experienced well-meaning, but misguided efforts over the years that have posed dangers to Doug. If there were a better place

for Doug to live, we would support that, but we have tried the other options and they don't work for our son. This is the best place for him: he needs stability, he needs freedom within a high level of vigilance; he needs trained, loving staff who get to go home every night and refresh themselves to come back another day for the high level of care he needs; he needs nursing support available for his special needs.

I know it sounds over-dramatic, but the closure of this facility feels like a death sentence for our son. He is helpless to protect himself and I fear closing his home puts him at great risk. Closing Frances Haddon Morgan Center does not save the state any money; closing his home has almost no benefit and creates great risk for some of our areas most vulnerable citizens. We urge the state to reconsider their decision to close our son's home.

Sincerely,  
Ken and Arcella  
Camano Island