



To: United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
From: Georgia Children's Freedom Initiative (CFI), comprised of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Institute on Human Development and Disability, the Center for Leadership in Disability, and the Georgia Advocacy Office

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments related to people experiencing disabilities. The Children's Freedom Initiative (CFI) encourages this body to take a strong and affirmative stance against the institutionalization of children.

Children and youth thrive when they live with families in permanent, loving homes; children and youth do not belong in institutions. Institutions negatively affect a child's social development, interaction with others, and negatively affect the formation of emotional attachments. Decades of research show that institutionalization of children and youth with disabilities results in further social, emotional, and developmental delays. (Beren & Nelson, 2015). Additionally, being institutionalized is linked to poor cognitive performance and language deficits. (Browne K, Hamilton-Giachritsis C, Johnson R, Ostergren M. Overuse of institutional care for children in Europe. *Child-Care Health and Development*. 2006; 32(4):502). Most importantly, institutions are not safe. Children and youth are isolated, enabling mistreatment to continue undetected. (Natan, 2010).

Reasons for institutionalization vary and have changed little since 2003, according to Browne's research. In Western European countries, 4 percent of institutionalized children were institutionalized because they were abandoned, another 4 percent because they were disabled, and 68 percent were institutionalized due to abuse and neglect. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, children were more likely to be institutionalized because of disability (23 percent), abandonment (33 percent), and because they were abused or neglected (14 percent). ([Browne, 2009](#)).

For 15 years, the CFI has worked closely with families and stakeholders to advocate for access to home- and community-based services so children who experience disabilities remain with family or live in another permanent, loving home. Children and youth staying with family leads to other benefits of community living such as relationships, education, and employment. (CMS/SAMHSA, 2013).

By investing in home-based community support including natural supports, personal care workers, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, behavioral therapists, and cognitive therapists, governments could profoundly alter the trajectory of youth who are institutionalized. States that focus on home- and community-based services, redirecting funds away from institutional settings, see well documented, positive outcomes. (CMS/SAMHSA 2013). By supporting children in the community, youth grow to lead meaningful and productive lives rather than increasing dependence upon scarce resources.

Children belong in loving homes with supports necessary to grow and thrive to their potential. There should be no exception to this rule. CFI encourages the national stage and international community to continue to advocate for adequate supports so that children can grow and mature in loving homes.