



*Easy Read Edition*

# The Cycle of Institutions

## Part 3: The Start of the Cycle

# Words to Know in Part 3

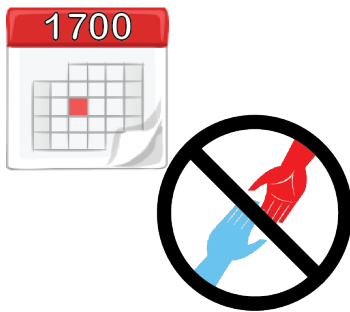


## State Schools

The first institutions just for people with intellectual disabilities.

# The Start of the Cycle

## How did institutions get started?



Before the 1800s, people with intellectual disabilities didn't get any kind of help.



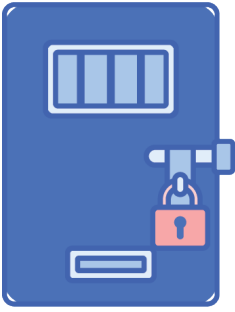
Other people didn't think we could think, or feel, or learn.



So they didn't know what to do with us.



We usually didn't get to go to school, or work.



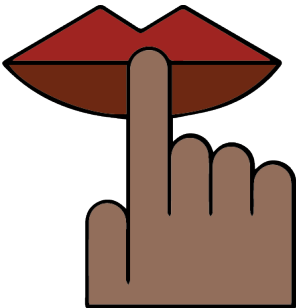
We got put in prison a lot.



Our families were ashamed of us.



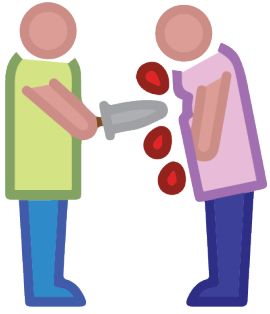
They didn't want other people knowing we existed.



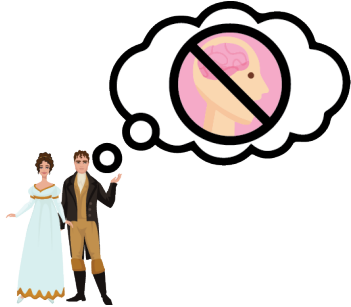
So we got kept secret by our families.



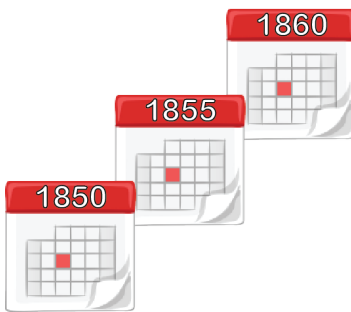
We might not have been allowed to leave our houses.



Sometimes, people killed us.



They decided our lives weren't worth living.



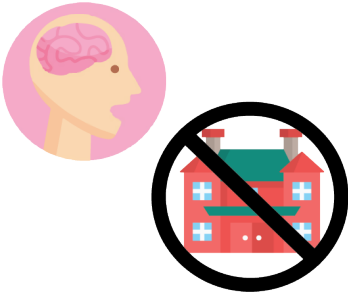
This started to change in the mid-1800s.



People made institutions for other kinds of disabilities.



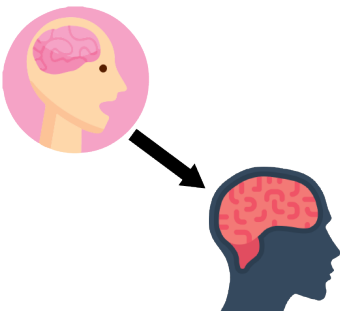
Sometimes, people with intellectual disabilities got put there, too.



But there weren't any places just for people with intellectual disabilities.



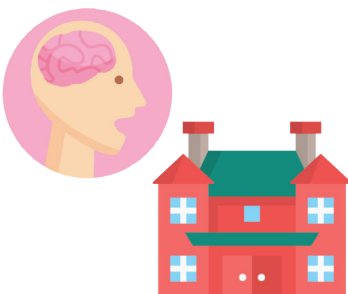
Some people started studying intellectual disabilities.



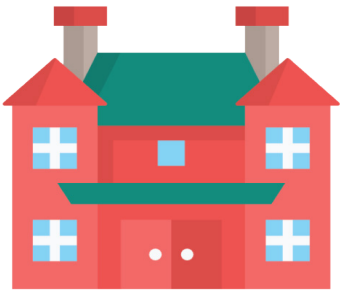
They wanted to make us as "normal" as possible.



They wanted to see if we could think and learn.



So they made institutions for us.



These places were called state schools.



**State schools** were the first institutions just for people with intellectual disabilities

For example:



One institution got made in 1848.



It was called the Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Youth.

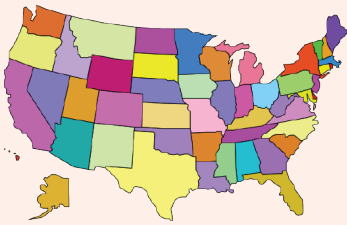


It got made just for people with intellectual disabilities.





A man named Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe made this institution.

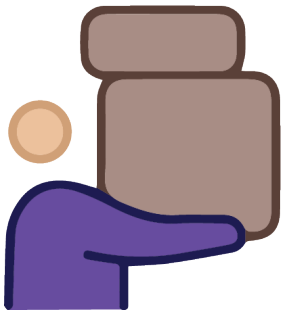


Dr. Howe helped open many other institutions around the country.

## What were state schools like?



People living in state schools got “training” to try and cure their disabilities.



They learned things like how to do hard work, like lifting heavy stuff.



The goal of the institution was to teach people with disabilities how to work.



That way, we could help our families and make money.



We could go back to living in the community.



Some institutions were big buildings with large groups of people.



Others looked like farms. People with disabilities learned how to do farm work there.



Others looked like a big group of houses.



People with the same disabilities would live together.



For example, people with epilepsy would all live in one house.



The people who studied disability worked with other groups.



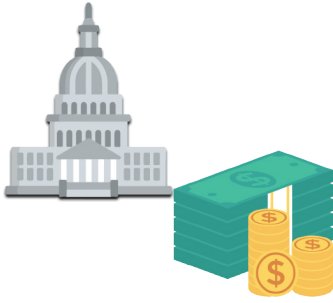
They worked with families of people with disabilities.



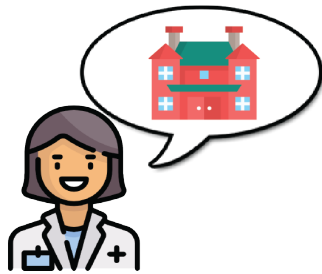
They worked with civil rights advocates.



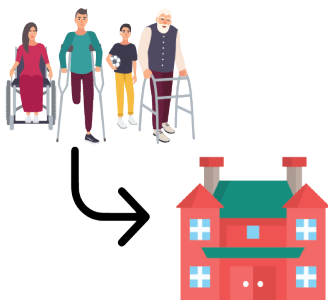
They talked with the government about institutions.



So the government started to pay for state schools to get made.



Parents got told that institutions were the only hope for their kids with disabilities.

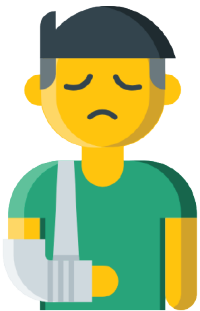


More and more people with disabilities got sent to institutions.

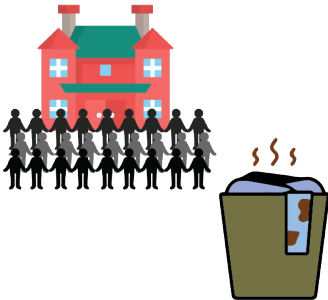
# How did institutions hurt people with disabilities?



Institutions got built to try and help us.



But they started hurting people with disabilities pretty quickly.



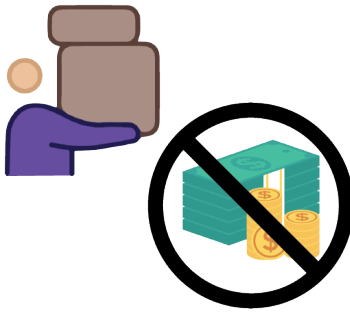
They got too crowded. They got dirty.



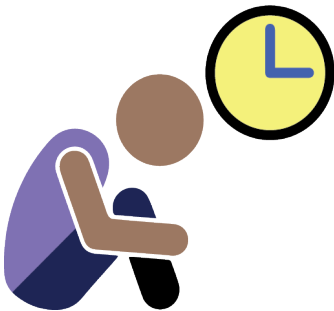
The staff at institutions didn't take care of us.



They made people with disabilities take care of each other.



Some of them made people with disabilities do hard work for free.



But most people in institutions did nothing all day.



They didn't get enough food.



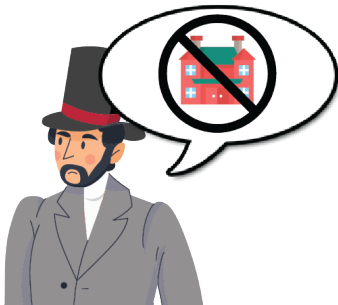
They didn't get help to eat or go to the bathroom.



Staff would yell at them or hit them.



Dr. Howe even realized the institutions were getting bad!



He told people to stop building them.

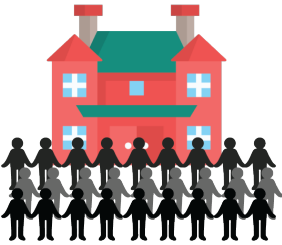


But it was too late.



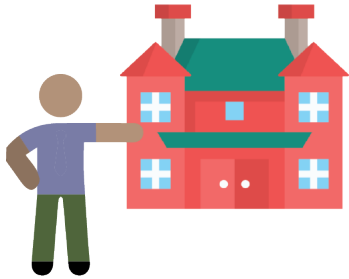


More institutions got built anyway.

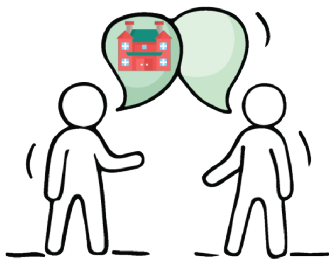


People kept getting sent to institutions.

# What happened when other people noticed how bad institutions were?



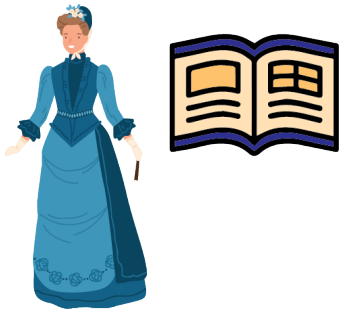
Sometimes, people would notice how bad institutions were.



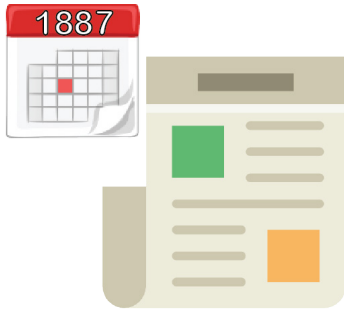
They would try and make other people notice, too.



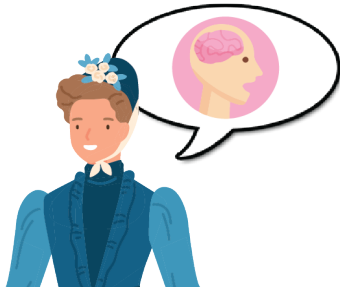
They wanted to make the institutions better.



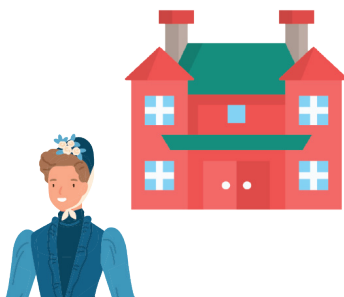
Nellie Bly wrote news stories for magazines.



She wrote a story about an institution in 1887.



She pretended to have a disability to write the story.



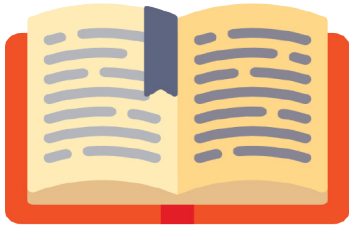
She got put in an institution called Blackwell's Island in New York.



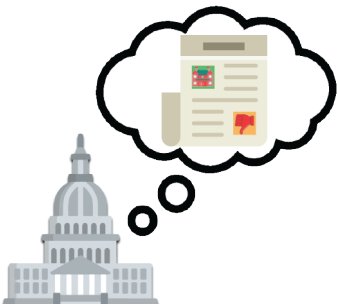
She saw how people with disabilities got hurt there.



Her story talked about how bad Blackwell's Island was.



It was called 10 Days in a Mad-House.



The government read Nellie's story.



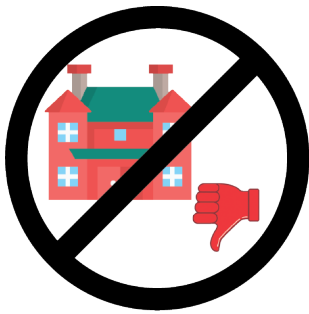
They decided to give Blackwell's island more money.



They hoped it would help the institution get better.



They also said the government would come check the institution more.



They would make sure it didn't get bad again.



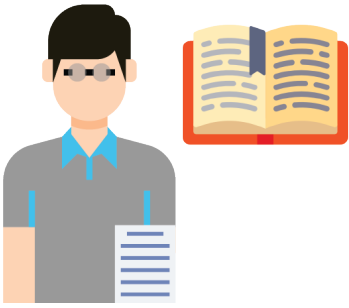
But then the money ran out.



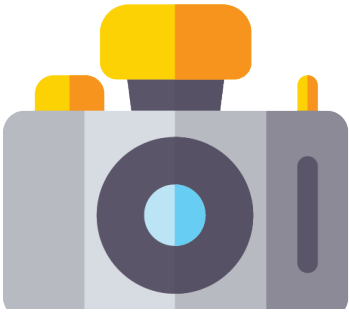
The government stopped coming to check Blackwell's island.



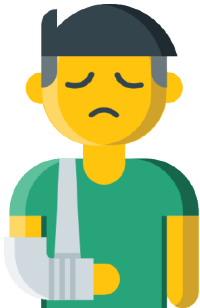
Things got bad again.



In 1948, Albert Deutsch wrote Shame of the States.



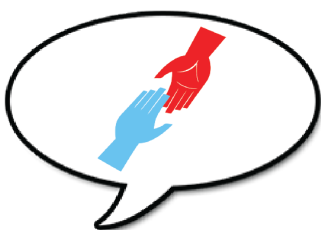
He went to 12 institutions and took photos.



He showed how the institutions hurt people with disabilities.



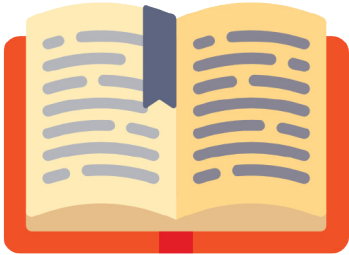
He said institutions should be more like a good hospital.



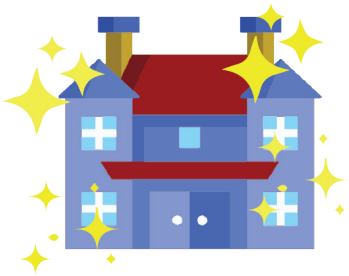
He said institutions should try and make people with disabilities better.



He said institutions should help us go back to the community.



A lot of people read Albert's book.



Some new institutions got built in the 1950s.



They were supposed to be better.



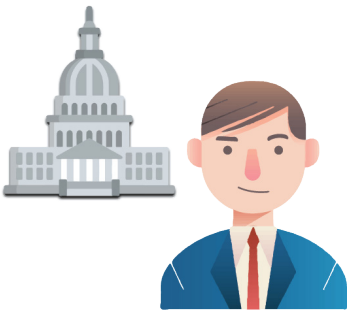
They were supposed to be like what Albert said.



But then they got worse again!



President John F Kennedy had a brother.



His name was Robert Kennedy. He also worked for the government.

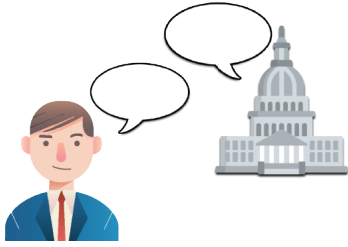


In 1965, he took a tour of an institution called Willowbrook.



He saw how bad Willowbrook treated people with disabilities.





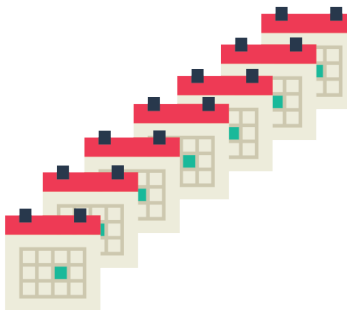
He talked to the government about Willowbrook.



He wanted to make sure people at Willowbrook got to go to school.



He wanted to make sure people at Willowbrook got taken care of.



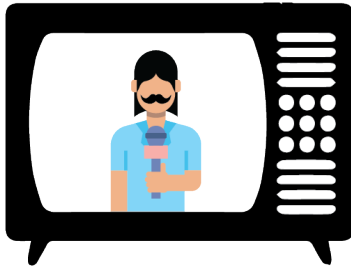
But not much at Willowbrook changed for 7 more years.



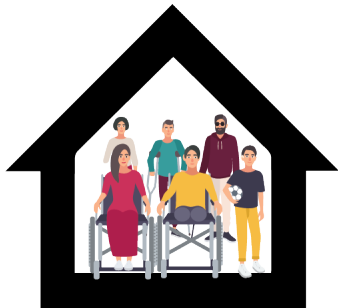
Things started to change in 1972.



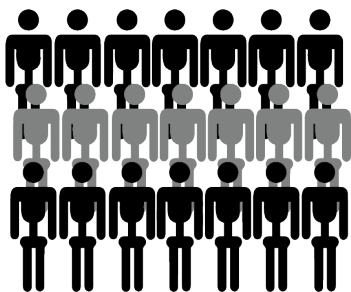
A reporter named Geraldo Rivera took some videos of Willowbrook.



He put the videos on the news.



It showed people crowded together in dirty rooms.



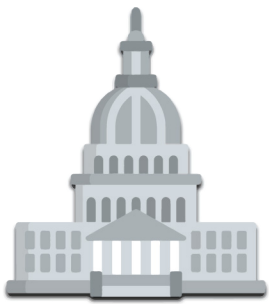
People were starving and very skinny.



Nobody was around to help them.



That is when everyone realized how bad institutions were.



The government decided institutions needed to be changed.

*Support for this toolkit was provided by The Community Living Policy Center at Brandeis University. Funding for this center is provided by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (grant number 90RTCP0004). However, the contents of this brief do not necessarily represent the policy of the federal government.*