

*For the first 3 months of 2004, Lester and Barb traveled to all parts of Illinois meeting with small groups of folks to listen to their concerns for people with disabilities in Illinois. For some it was their children, for others it was fear for those who had been institutionalized and fear of being institutionalized. Lester tried to get a sense of what people's hopes and dreams were for those with significant disabilities. What kind of lives did people want to lead or have for their loved ones? What was needed to live those lives? How did Illinois get beyond institutions to real choices and real supports in the community?*

*All these questions swirled in Lester's head as he formulated a strategy to pull together various advocates from around the state for a meeting held on April 1, 2004 at the Thompson Center in Chicago. It was an historic day, because none of these groups had successfully worked together before. By the end of that day, the group had come together to unite in the common goal of closing down Lincoln Developmental Center, and thus the Campaign for Real Choice was formed.*

This is Lester's opening statement:

Our purpose is to begin to change the way Illinois funds its services for people with disabilities. We need to change to fund people – real people with real choices. That change starts today. There are two ways to change. 1) With money. 2) With the power of numbers. We obviously don't have money, but we have numbers and a good story to tell.

We need to get organized. People are here from all over the state. Even though we come from different backgrounds, we all are stubborn, and will do what it takes.

**Our Mission is: To make Illinois fund PEOPLE, not institutions and nursing homes.**

*Letters from Lester*

*Chairperson, Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities (2004-2009)*

“We have a long way to go and many challenges lay ahead. But challenges can inspire dreams of ‘what could be’ that, in turn, raise expectations and motivate real change. I believe that the degree of expectations will largely determine the degree of progress in Illinois.”

- Listening to Dreams, Committing to Change (March 2005)

“While the obstacles sometimes seem overwhelming, they present a unique opportunity: The responsibility for making change rests on all of us. Instead of only asking why something can't be done, we should be asking what can be done to make it happen.”

- Lighting the Spark of Change (March 2006)