

persons in Canada living in institutions because they have been identified as having a mental handicap (Richler, 1991). The Canadian Association for Community Living estimates that there are at least an equal number of people living in nursing homes, chronic care hospitals and private institutions. In addition, a 1991 study conducted by CACL reports that there are over 114,000 children and youths in segregated education programs, the vast majority of whom have a mental handicap. Furthermore, tens of thousands of working-age adults who have a mental handicap are excluded from competitive employment. Instead, they attend sheltered workshops or job-readiness programs or are excluded from any activity day after day (CACL, 1991).

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSION**

Just as other minority groups in Canada have struggled for inclusion in the mainstream of society, so people who have a mental handicap, their families and their friends have engaged in a long campaign for inclusion.

The first organized activities began simultaneously around the world immediately after the Second World War. Learning from the rehabilitation services which assisted disabled veterans, parents of sons and daughters who had a mental handicap came together to develop rehabilitation services in the community. These services were their alternative to placing their children in large, custodial institutions. The parent groups evolved into associations which took the lead in creating opportunities for their sons and daughters with mental handicaps.

Because their children were denied entry to public schools, the first priority of the associations was usually to begin a class, and then eventually a school in which to teach them. The teachers were often volunteers, or, if paid, were not professional educators because the teaching profession had not yet accepted that children who had been labelled