

HOME FREE: Woman moves into Silver City house after escaping nursing home ‘prison’

Photos



Photo by Mike Gay | Taunton Daily Gazette

Cathy Hutchinson enters her new Taunton home.



Cathy Hutchinson suffered a brainstem stroke, leaving her mute, quadriplegic and in a nursing home. She had no control over any of this.

Now, after she acted as the lead plaintiff in a class action lawsuit against the state, Hutchinson has changed the system for herself and others with brain injuries.

Hutchinson, along with 86 others, has been approved to move from a nursing home and into the community as a result of the settlement, which was filed in May 2007 and approved a year later.

On Friday afternoon, Hutchinson, an Attleboro native, left the confines of a nursing home and went into an integrated community setting on South Precinct Street in Taunton.

“Thank you,” Hutchinson said, communicating using her eyes, with an assistant holding up a board featuring the alphabet. “This is wonderful.”

A smiling Hutchinson was swarmed by a cadre of photographers and reporters, who documented her arrival at house. Hutchinson had spent more than a decade in a nursing home, a setting she described as a “prison.”

Hutchinson suffered a stroke while gardening about 15 years ago, and collapsed in her Attleboro home. She was paralyzed from the neck down, and was taken to a nursing home, with Medicaid helping to cover costs.

“I feel isolated from the real world,” Hutchinson has said, about living in a nursing home. “I have little to no privacy. I don't want to live this way, and I can't think of anyone else who would.”

Hutchinson v. Patrick argued that the state was violating the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to provide adequate community services, in the form of community integrated assisted living. The settlement agreement involves the creation of two Medicaid home and community-based waivers, along with the transition of 300 class members — selected through a lottery — from nursing homes to integrated community living over the next eight years.

While taking strides for those with brain injuries through the lawsuit, Hutchinson, 58, has also been on the cutting edge of technology designed for the disabled.

In November 2008, Hutchinson was featured on news program 60 Minutes, demonstrating the use of a system called BrainGate. Hutchinson was one of the first people to be outfitted with a plug in her head, actually connecting her brain with a computer, allowing her to command a mouse with her mind.

Hutchinson has since stopped experimenting with BrainGate, but continues to communicate nevertheless. Either through an alphabetical pad — training her eyes on a letter, shaking her head in the affirmative

when an aid points to the right one — or by using a computer device, Hutchinson spells out everything on her mind.

To get around, Hutchinson uses eye glasses that are rigged electronically to her wheelchair, giving her power to navigate. The glasses also work with her computer, allowing her to direct a mousing with the position of her head.

Hutchinson was made to feel right at home on Friday, with directors of her new home giving her a tour.

Kathy Whipple is one of Hutchinson's four roommates, bringing a familiar face back into the fold. Whipple said she was happy to again see Hutchinson, who she calls "Hutch" for short, after living with her previously at a home in Middleboro.

Hutchinson's older sister Gery Baldasaro was on hand to welcome her sister into the new home.

"I'm so proud of her," said Baldasaro. "The very first thing when she first learned to communicate was that she wanted to help other people in her condition. I can't tell you how proud I am. I wish I was as strong as her."

A.J. Metea, director for the group home in Taunton, said that the South Precinct Street house will be a great place for Hutchinson to live.

"This is their home," Metea said. "They have a lot more privacy here than a nursing home. And the staffing at a nursing home is much less. There is much more attention and time spent with the ladies than in a nursing home."

Hutchinson said that she was glad about her new home, and thanked everyone for being there.

"Thank you everyone for sharing this special day and I am happy to meet all of you," Hutchinson said, before settling in to her new room.

To find out more information about the waiver program, visit www.biama.org. Contact the UMass ABI Waiver Unit at 1-866-281-5602 [begin_of_the_skype_highlighting](#) 1-866-281-5602 [end_of_the_skype_highlighting](#), or e-mail ABIinfo@umassmed.edu, for more information and to find out about the next open application period.

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