



Communication**FIRST**

Because communication is a human right.

See Us, Hear Us Film Screening & Chat with Bob Williams & Forest Haven Survivors Ricardo & Donna Thornton

[Full Webinar Youtube Video](#)

On October 15, 2024, CommunicationFIRST Policy Director Bob Williams hosted Donna Thornton, Ricardo Thornton, and Rebecca Salon in a discussion about Forest Haven, the District of Columbia's long-time institution for people with developmental disabilities. The discussion followed a screening of CommunicationFIRST's newest film in the [See Us, Hear Us series](#), this one featuring Bob Williams.

In this [90-minute webinar](#), Forest Haven survivors Donna Thornton and Ricardo Thornton discussed their experiences at Forest Haven and their lives in the community afterward, including raising a family, working in advocacy, and more.

We are pleased to share the open-captioned, ASL-interpreted recording of the event, along with a [transcript](#) and [audio-only version](#).

Participants

- **BOB WILLIAMS** is CommunicationFIRST's [co-founder and Senior Advisor](#). He co-founded CommunicationFIRST in 2019 after a distinguished four-decade career in federal and state government and the nonprofit sector, most recently as Director of the US Independent Living Administration at the US Department of Health and Human Services. He is a nationally recognized leader on policy issues relating to supporting people with the most significant disabilities to live, work, and thrive in their own homes and communities. He has a degree in urban affairs from George Washington University and helped close Forest Haven.
- **DONNA THORNTON** is a dedicated disability rights advocate and a survivor of Forest Haven. She was a member of Project ACTION!, Washington D.C.'s self-advocacy coalition, and serves on the Board of Directors of Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities, among other advocacy organizations. Alongside her

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husband, Ricardo Thornton, Donna has been featured in national media, including the televised movie [Profoundly Normal](#) and a segment on [60 Minutes](#).

- **RICARDO THORNTON** is a lifelong disability rights advocate and a survivor of Forest Haven. He has been actively involved in the Special Olympics DC (SODC) for over 40 years, also having served on its Board of Directors. He currently represents SODC as an international ambassador. Ricardo has testified before the U.S. Senate committee during hearings on the Americans with Disabilities Act, using his story to promote policy change. He also serves on the Developmental Disabilities Council, Quality Trust's Board of Directors, as well as many other organizations. Alongside his wife, Donna Thornton, Ricardo has been featured in national media, including the televised movie [Profoundly Normal](#) and a segment on [60 Minutes](#).
- **REBECCA SALON** has worked as an advocate for and ally to people with developmental disabilities. She helped people to leave institutions like Forest Haven and Willowbrook in New York. She also works to create services that allow previously institutionalized people and people at risk for institutionalization to thrive in the community. Rebecca is the Principal Investigator and LEAD Center for the National Disability Institute and the Program Specialist and Contractor for the DC Department on Disability Services. Her work in advocacy spans more than 40 years, having served as the Executive Director of Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute and Board member of the Board of Directors of Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities.

AUDIO FILE: [See Us. Hear Us. Forest Haven Audio](#)

TRANSCRIPT (PDF): [Transcript](#)

Bob William's See Us, Hear Us film: [See Us. Hear Us. - Bob Williams \(English\)](#)

Spanish-subtitled version: [See us. Hear us. - Bob Williams \(Spanish subtitles\)](#)

More About the Thorntons

- [From Lives Apart to Lives Together: The Thorntons](#) (8 min film)



- [60 Minutes piece](#) about the Thorntons
- [Profoundly Normal](#) (96 min film)

More About Forest Haven (and Willowbrook)

- [The Trouble They've Seen: The Forest Haven Story](#) by Noor Tagouri (19 min film)
- [Four-part public radio series](#) on the closing of Forest Haven (text, audio, photo, and video)
- Reporter Geraldo Rivera's [videos on Willowbrook](#) include three films of various lengths about a former institution in New York state

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