



Strathmont residents may be worse off?

MEDIA RELEASE: June 5th, 2012

Strathmont residents may be worse off?

It remains a mystery to many in the disability area but smart people know failure of disability services have rarely been about bricks and mortar.

Rather inadequate resources, poor management and lack of choice for disability service consumers has caused most problems.

Even today remarkably buildings are blamed by some of very narrow vision for disability service failures

The announcement in the State Budget last week, of funds to close disability accommodation Strathmont Centre by December 2014 regrettably means some of those clients will actually be worse off.

Some old fashioned advocates want to "drive a bulldozer through the last standing building" according to news reports but the concept of offering each client clear and absolute choice of who they live with, how they live and where they live is much more important and needs to be guaranteed by the SA government. This concept seems to escape some of the aforementioned advocates. The UN Convention on People with Disability 2006 demands no less than complete choice but such clear policy is even ignored by some who dwell ideologically in the past.

The disability community has been ideologically long divided.

On one side too often sit the academics, the experts and the know-it-alls who have held the power and broadcast loudly how people with disability should live.

On the other side the people actually with disability, their families and unpaid carers have long complained their much more personally enlightened view is ignored despite them being an overwhelming majority.

Strathmont is a large institution with a chequered past.

The phased devolution of Strathmont began with the first 30 residents moving in to the community in 2006. While successful for many unquestionably that move for other residents was not a success, with several in fact returning according to DSA internal reports

<http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=b4kGue9JNc0%3d&tabid=607>

Another report: Strathmont Centre Redevelopment and Community Living Project of the 221st Report of the Public Works Committee concluded "evidence has been given that the current model of community living is not appropriate for a small number of residents with exceptional needs....The Committee is aware that a similar situation is likely to arise as other institutions dealing with disabled clients move towards a community living model.

Accordingly, the Committee recommends to the Minister that... merit of an alternative form of "institutional" living to meet their accommodation and care needs" (is investigated)

Despite these recommendations the government appears committed to move the remaining residents from Strathmont into four bedroom group homes, located in some of the lowest socio-economic areas of Adelaide.

Given many of these residents have high support needs, are unable to independently access local services or transport and have limited communication skills the destruction of the clients social networks appears guaranteed

Loneliness and isolation is almost certain.

The government must learn from their errors of the past. Some of our most profoundly disabled citizens will never be suited to "an ordinary life in an ordinary street". They will not be able to access community swimming pools, and there will be nowhere for them to walk safely.

The government must stop pandering to advocates with philosophy from last century and take heed of what consumers are demanding: a new and innovative range of supported accommodation models. The development of such models was a key recommendation of the 2011 SA Strong Voices report. Parents who have provided full-time care for their children until their late twenties and know them best, are in fact demanding more contemporary models including congregate care options

Local trials of such new contemporary models are already delivering outstanding results

The current Strathmont Centre is not sustainable, but we mustn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Strathmont is home to some of our most vulnerable people.

Each of these clients must be offered the chance to

1. live independently or
2. live in a small group home situation or

3. live in a social and community situation as they have in the past

All three are more than doable particularly if the government

- enters into a genuine PCP process with each client and their families
- makes sure each client has an individualized funding package/ budget
- explores options with other joint venture disability service providers like Minda and Bedford to deliver planned high support needs service models including developing flexible and innovative new models that expand their social networks and are designed to suit this clientele

Disability Speaks will be petitioning public advocate Dr John Brayley to ensure that ideological zealots do not again over rule the wishes of these clients at Strathmont

In the end it is all about choice.

The current residents of Strathmont are entitled to make their own choices and must be supported to do so.

Ronni Wood

Board Member - Disability Speaks Steering Committee & Intellectual Disability Association of S.A (IDASA)

Mob. 0408 020 623

Web. www.disabilityspeaks.com.au

Email. disabilityspeaks@internode.on.net



Disability Speaks is run by the Intellectual Disability Association of South Australia (IDASA) and will distribute on behalf of any organization that meets suitable criteria online information that is of wide disability community interest via our database that now numbers nearly 4,000 recipients for Government, advocacy groups and other major disability organizations. We aim in the lead up to elections, state or federal; we can distribute policy and support information from political groups. Such distribution is not in any way endorsement by Disability Speaks. From time to time Disability Speaks will also distribute media releases commenting on developments in the disability sector. We strongly encourage you to forward all releases to your friends, clients and disability supporters and encourage them to subscribe direct. To do so simply send an email with the subject "subscribe" to the address below, to unsubscribe please use "unsubscribe" in the subject line instead.