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Patron Professor David de Kretser, AO, Governor of Victoria, and Mrs Jan de Kretser

Wednesday 15th October, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

Please find attached the hard copy of the Submission from the Victorian Deaf Society (Vicdeaf) to the Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability or Mental Illness as emailed to you on the 10th October 2008.

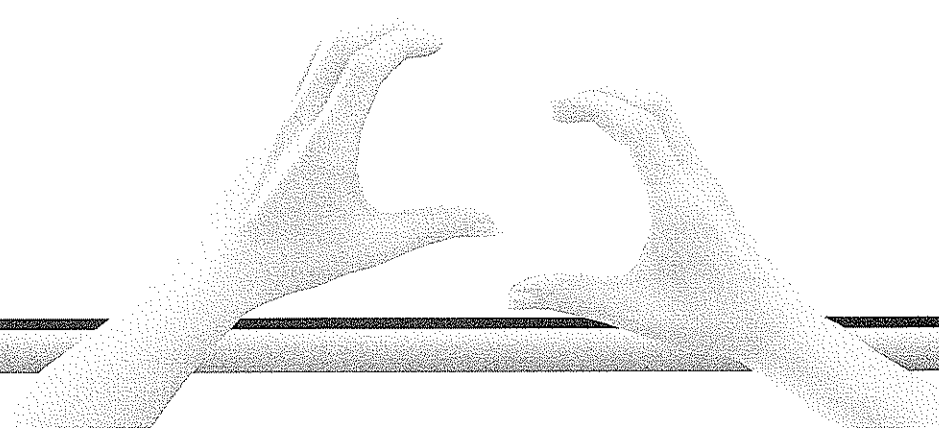
Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information if required.

Kind Regards,

Melissa Lowrie
Personal Assistant to CEO



Vicdeaf is certified to ISO 9001:2001
with Benchmark Certification



Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street,
East Melbourne, 3002

Submission from the Victorian Deaf Society (Vicdeaf) to the Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability or Mental Illness.

The challenge of seeking to provide Culturally Affirmative and Linguistically Accessible Services in this context.

Overview

Specialist supported accommodation for people who are deaf* and have mental illness is non-existent. Individuals who are deaf with mental illness are often 'shuffled' from one service to the next, with mental health services rarely assuming responsibility for the overall care.

The commitment to providing and culturally and linguistically relevant service means in essence two things: providing specialised communication support, with staff who use sign language (Auslan) and providing accommodation fitted with appropriate technology for communication and safety.

Current case management records at Vicdeaf show that there are a number of deaf clients with a mental illness who are at present living in substandard / unsatisfactory 'supported' accommodation. There are also clients who have been inappropriately housed in public housing without adequate supports. A significant contributing factor to this situation is the regionalisation of services.

Regionalisation has meant central decision making about statewide services for matching client need has been dissipated and has effectively prevented the rationalisation of services to meet the needs of smaller communities, such as the Deaf* community including Deaf people with additional disabilities including mental illness. Regionalisation has further fragmented this already small community with the result of reducing access to specialist services.

**Deaf – uppercase Deaf refers to a particular group of Deaf people who share a language Auslan (Australian Sign language) and a culture.*

**deaf – lowercase deaf refers to the audiological condition of not hearing, people who lose hearing because of illness, trauma, age.*

In this submission we wish to highlight the issues arising from our experience in operating a shared supported accommodation service (SSA) for people who are Deaf with additional disabilities and providing Case Management, Counselling and Independent Living skills services for people who are Deaf and hard of hearing (deaf) living in the community, many of whom also have mental illness.

Recent research indicates up to 40% of Deaf people experience mental health problems at some point in their lives compared to one in four of the general population.

'Living examples'

- ❑ Client 1. - deaf with mental illness living in 'supported accommodation' in reality a de facto boarding house type arrangement. There is only minimal staff support during meal times, the remainder of the day people are unsupervised. Staff are not trained specifically in mental health or have knowledge or understanding with regard to the issues/communication needs of deaf people with mental illness. Our client has been 'preyed upon' on numerous occasions by more street wise individuals demanding money and using his phone.
- ❑ Client 2 - Deaf (who uses Auslan) with undiagnosed mental health issues living in a private supported residential unit (SRS). The buildings / living conditions are squalid and low quality. Staff do not know Auslan and rely mainly on pen and paper to communicate. As a private facility it does not have resources to provide specialised technology such as flashing light/doorbell / TTY (telephone typewriter). Although this SRS is deemed by the client to be highly unsuitable, the few other alternatives for pension dependent people are of equivalent sub-standard or non-existent.
- ❑ Client 3 - Deaf, has suffered as a result of a neighbour with mental health and alcohol related issues who has been housed inappropriately in public housing without adequate support. Vicdeaf case managers became increasingly involved as issues escalated with courts and police involvement. (see attachment) Applications for intervention orders were ongoing for approximately 6 months. The client and staff witnessed the impact on an individual of living with mental health issues in vulnerable circumstances which resulted in her inability to maintain rental public housing.

Barriers

Discrimination

It is extremely difficult to find suitable accommodation. Some smaller supported housing services do not wish to 'overload' their services by taking on a resident with 'high support needs' such as someone who is deaf and has physical and mental health issues. This barrier to access is often explained as 'our service only has minimal staff for support'. Often they already have 1 or 2 people with dual disabilities and 'this is enough for our staff to cope with' - an unwritten quota! Clients become hard to place in accordance with their specific needs and thus discrimination ensues.

Limitations of private accommodation providers

Private providers are highly dependent on the commitment of the staff / manager of the facility. There is often high staff turnover which is very unsettling for residents. Some staff will 'look out' for more vulnerable residents and take action appropriately, however additional time is required to train and resource staff to work effectively with deaf/communication issues.

Lack of creative models of housing

There is a need for accommodation which provides:-

- choices in regard to daily living routine.
- housing options in local region
- needs based customised fit-out (flashing light doorbell/fire alarm; TTY)
- meaningful activities connected to local community
- cultural / language affinities
- appropriately trained support staff
- a challenge to boredom
- non-vocational rehabilitation programs when employment is unlikely
- the use of Auslan interpreters and/or staff trained in Auslan
- Flexible models, including semi-independent housing with varying levels of support available if required eg. for evening meals, medication. Currently this type of accommodation is normally attached to aged care units or in a SRS. A reserve of private funds is often necessary to afford such accommodation.

One deaf client who is currently in a boarding house type situation stated he just wanted to be somewhere where he could cook / make his own breakfast. Is this too much to ask?

Risks

Many people currently live in situations without adequate support where they can be taken advantage of by others and further lose control & choice over their lives.

More vulnerable people can 'give in' to threats, eg. a deaf person with mental illness living in 'supported' accommodation without any night staff, was woken night after night by another resident who wanted to use his phone. These experiences reduce any residual ability to cope, compound isolation and aggravate mental vulnerabilities.

Changing the Future

Vicdeaf is strongly committed to improving the lives of deaf people with mental illness and would welcome and support participation in any ongoing consultation seeking to redress the concerns expressed in this submission.

We urge your consideration of the issues raised and the impact of not acknowledging the particular additional consequences of lack of specialist accommodation and support services for Deaf people with additional disabilities including mental illness.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry

Yours sincerely,

Graeme Kelly
Chief Executive Officer
Vicdeaf

ATTACHMENT

Client 3 (Case Management Hours of Service)

DATE	NOTE	DIRECT	INDIRECT	TRAVEL	ADMIN	MISC
25-Sep-08	Telephone calls to Dept of Housing from 11/8/08 - 24/9/08 re neighbour issues.		120			10
25-Sep-08	Telephone calls from 13/8/08 - 25/9/08 in regard to legal matters, neighbour and partners's health issues.	360				10
17-Sep-08	Attended Moorabbin Justice Centre re return hearing for I.O. Application approved for 1 year I.O. Neighbour to remove belongings in next few weeks under supervision.	200	20	90	10	
10-Sep-08	Home visit re prep for upcoming court hearing on 17/9/08	70		80	10	
29-Aug-08	Made copies of relevant forms etc re application for legal aid.		90		10	
28-Aug-08	Assisted Client with completion of Legal Aid application forms. Sent to Monash Legal Service.	100			10	
28-Aug-08	Appt with Duty solicitor at Monash Legal Service re application for legal aid for court hearing on 17/9/08 at Moorabbin Justice Centre.	60	10	90	10	

13-Aug-08	Telephone call, Monash Legal Service re appt for return date to court for I.O. on 17/9/08		40		10	
7-Aug-08	Telephone call re court on thurs 7/8/08.		40		10	
6-Aug-08	Case discussion.		40			
1-Aug-08	Telephone call to client's father. Father is concerned that client wants to move house.		45		10	
23-Jul-08	Telephone calls from 23/7/08 until 9/8/08 re accomodation issues and neighbour.	180			10	
18-Jul-08	Work re accomodation (from 8/7/08 until 18/7/08)		80			
16-Jul-08	Letter received re client and ongoing accom issues.		35		10	
10-Jul-08	Telephone call. Dept Housing provided assurance that the neighbour will not be returning to the property (99%) Forwarded this info to client's cousin where client is currently staying.		45		10	
9-Jul-08	Tel call re accom issue.	60			10	
27-Jun-08	Tel calls/emails from a neighbour (CL) to client re issues with neighbour.		200		10	
DATE	NOTE	DIRECT	INDIRECT	TRAVEL	ADMIN	MISC
27-Jun-08	Telephone calls to Human Services, Dept of Housing re issues re neighbour.		300		10	
27-Jun-08	Case discussions from 4/6/08 - 27/6/08 re housing/neighbour issues	230			10	
25-Jun-08	Attended Moorabbin Magistrates Court with Client re Intervention Order against neighbour. Court to follow up with Dept of Housing re eviction procedures.	220		90	10	
18-Jun-08	Home visit re neighbour issues.	70		70		
14-Jun-08	Telephone calls with Client's sister re Client and their concerns.		80		10	
6-Jun-08	Telephone calls from 6/6/08 until 27/6/08 re neighbour and issues.	445			20	

5-Jun-08	Telephone call to a neighbour (CL) of Client re issues with neighbour		20			
4-Jun-08	Met with Client at Vicdeaf. Filed complaint to Housing Dept re neighbour.	150			10	
29-May-08	Telephone call. Dept Human Services (Housing) re concerns re neighbour. Breach of Duty notice to be enforced. Will outline process to Client.		60		10	
29-May-08	Telephone call to a neighbour (CL) re concerns about neighbour.		80		10	
16-Jun-08	Case discussion re a neighbour (CL), Morabbin Magistrates Court and Interpreter.	20	10			
16-Jun-08	Received a message from Morabbin Magistrates Court - "waiting for a booking form for an interpreter".	10	10			
16-Jun-08	Msned interpreting booking agency to let them know that Morabbin Magistrates Court will get in touch with them to book an interpreter for tomorrow at 2pm. Interpreting agency will get in touch with us once the interpreter has been booked.	10	10			
16-Jun-08	Telephoned Morabbin Magistrates Court to request for an interpreter for Client. Gave them the contact details of an Interpreting Agency and they will follow it up and let us know once the interpreter has been booked.	20	10			

DATE	NOTE	DIRECT	INDIRECT	TRAVEL	ADMIN	MISC
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16-Jun-08	Telephoned a neighbour (CL) to check with her if she has organised an interpreter for Morabbin Magistrates Court. She didn't as she had told the other CM involved to follow it up last week. We will get back to Court again	10	10			
16-Jun-08	Telephoned Morabbin Magistrates Court to ask for an interpreter but they said that neighbour (CL) is organising an interpreter. We will check with neighbour (CL) again.	10	10			
16-Jun-08	Telephoned a neighbour (CL) for the details of Morabbin Magistrates Court	20	10			
13-Aug-08	Case discussion re legal issues for both clients. The other CM involved will follow it up with legal aid.	30	10			
13-Aug-08	Home visit with the other CM involved.	90	10	70		
Total Minutes		2365	1395	490	220	20
Total Hours		39.4	23.25	8.1	3.6	0.3