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Thomas

Mrs. Karen Thomas.

28 Lalor Street,

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The Executive Officer,
Family and Community Development Committee.
Parliament House.
Spring Street,
East Melbourne. 3002.

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Dear Sir,

I wish to put this submission in for the Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability or Mental Illness.

My younger sister Jenny who is 49, is a resident at Colanda, and has been for about 22 years. She was previously at Kew Cottages, but after our mother had a massive stroke, we were fortunate to get Jenny transferred to Colanda. Colac is much nearer to us for regular contact with Jenny, and a much better environment.

Jenny cannot live in a smaller accommodation setting and have any quality of life or independence. Her quality of life at Colanda is great. She loves her home there, has more freedom on the grounds than she does with us when we have her home in Portland for a holiday.

When we have her with us, we have to lock the property up for her own safety. Jenny has no road sense, loves cigarette butts and would walk in front of any traffic to get one. Jenny also ransacks any homes nearby, she doesn't know any different, but most people would not tolerate this. Jenny cannot speak, would not put a coat on if it was raining or take off her jumper if it was 40C, she does not understand direction well. She needs help dressing, bathing, grooming, almost everything.

We bring Jenny home quite regularly, and she seems to enjoy her visit with us, but she cannot wait to get back to her life at Colanda. Colanda is her home, as it is for all the other residents there.

The quality of care at Colanda is very reassuring and comforting for all concerned.

Why can't Colanda be expanded with more facilities? This makes more sense than acquiring or erecting separate houses all over the state and then staffing them. Colac, where Colanda is situated, is not far from Melbourne, Ballarat, Geelong and surrounding country areas.

Colanda is established on a considerable parcel of land. More units need to be constructed. More clients need to be accommodated. There are desperate families trying to cope at home with their loved ones, some are at breaking point, some are elderly and not knowing what will happen to their child when they die.

Colanda needs to expand to give a home to more residents.

Units could be constructed at Colanda to cater for the young people mentally and physically disabled that are living in nursing homes for older people. This would give them a better quality of life and also free up the nursing homes.

We are always going to need places like Colanda. Birth problems, car and work accidents causing brain damage, diseases, operations that go wrong – which is what happened to my sister when she was a toddler.

We need to expand Colanda and similar places to cater for as many as possible.

Past State Governments have all dabbled with the mental health system, unsuccessfully. Perhaps this one can succeed for the benefit of all concerned.

Mental health is a big issue at the moment and we need to improve the facilities that we have not make things worse.

Closing Colanda, which is on the agenda at this time, would cause unnecessary upheaval for so many people. It isn't just the residents, it is also their families. Re - housing would split so many up from their 'blood families' and their 'residential families'. Colanda is their home! None of us have the right to evict them without cause.

I would not feel that my sister would be secure and happy in any other situation other than Colanda.

Expanding and updating Colanda would benefit many, many people, keep the residents happy, safe and secure, and have facilities for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Thomas.

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