

# **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

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O/N 98328

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY**

**DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**MR J. PERERA MLA, Chair**  
**MR W. NOONAN MLA, Member**  
**MRS J. POWELL, Member**

**INQUIRY INTO SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION  
FOR VICTORIANS WITH A DISABILITY OR  
MENTAL ILLNESS**

**MS WENDY SHANKS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE,  
SHEPPARTON ACCESS**

**SHEPPARTON**

**10.26 AM, TUESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2008**

THE CHAIR: The next witness is Wendy Shanks. Is she here? Good morning, take a seat please. I'm Jude Perera. I'm the Chair of the committee and on my right is your local member of Parliament, Jeannette Powell, Deputy Chair of the committee, and on my left is Wade Noonan, Member for Williamstown and to my extreme left is Dr Tanya Caulfield, research officer of the committee and also on my right is Bridget Noonan, assistant clerk of the Parliament. All evidence taken at this hearings is protected by Parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, the Defamation Act 2005 and where applicable the provisions of reciprocal legislation in other Australian states and territories. Any comments a witness makes outside the hearings may not be afforded such privilege.

So we are recording the evidence and we will provide a proofed version of the transcript to each witness at the earliest opportunity. So please introduce yourself for the Hansard and also give a very brief description about your organisation and then follow on with your verbal submission.

MS SHANKS: My name is Wendy Shanks and I am the CEO of Shepparton Access. Shepparton Access is a community provider in the local community for people with disabilities. Our focus of our organisation is around community inclusion and we are funded through Day Programs, Futures for Young Adults and ISPs. I just wanted to preface anything that I say today that I did invite some families to attend. We have a number of families who are currently feeling disbanded and they didn't want to attend today because they thought that they would become too emotional and have given me some information. We've actually met and put some information together that they feel comfortable about sharing.

There are three points that I want to make. The first is in relation to the State Plan. The State Plan, over recent times, has focused on the changing of models of accommodation for people with disability and we've come a long way in the last 30 years and if we compare what we've done in Victoria to other places across other parts of Australia and throughout the world, we have come a long way.

The vision of the current plan focuses on an inclusive community with everyone having the same rights and opportunities. However, today many people with a disability still aspire to achieve their same rights and responsibilities and in particular they aspire to achieve accommodation. When we talk about accommodation, they are well behind other members of the community particularly in the guiding principles of the State Plan.

The second thing that I want to focus on is information about supported accommodation. At Shepparton Access we work with a large number of individuals and we develop and implement support plans on a yearly basis. Although we are involved in the provision of accommodation services, the priority of discussion in those plans is around accommodation and future accommodation. Families are continually asking us to provide information or asking us how to get information about accommodation. Due to the many and ongoing changes we're often unable to assist and we provide them with contact details for DHS.

Most regularly they return with the details that they're provided. They don't understand the terminology or they don't even understand the content of the correspondence, if they get any correspondence. The correspondence often refers them to the website and we looked at our families and over 70 per cent of our families do not have access to the internet. So by providing that information on a website and the website is continually changing, it is very difficult to actually get the information that they want.

I would like to see all families, whether they are wanting accommodation or not, have access to family friendly information which outlines the updated processes, the guidelines and the criteria. Many families who have not had case management for many years, believe that if something should happen to them then accommodation would automatically and immediately be available and we know that this is not the case. Other families have indicated that it is just too hard because of the continual changes and will not follow up accommodation options.

As well as information be provided, I'd like to see some transparency about the allocation of placements and packages. In my experience in working with families and completing applications and observing the results, the sector seems to be crisis driven and dependent on the deficits of families and I want to emphasise that. It is not about the person with the disability, it is about the deficit of the family and I have found that I have assisted many people write the applications. If we can exaggerate the situation and we talk about exaggerating the situation so it sounds so bad it is the only way that people will actually look at their application and we shouldn't be working like that.

We should be writing about the person with the disability and what their needs and their wants are for the future. We often joke in the industry that the families or others who have the most voice or cause the most havoc will get the first placements and I have been one of those and got a placement for a family.

The next thing that I want to talk about – and it is not something that has come up in a lot of the submissions - it's something that – we have a number of people who have young adults as family members and in the regular community children grow up and they become young adults. They leave home and they move in with others of similar ages and interests and they, you know, they achieve self-determination. Like if we had the ideal world, wouldn't it be great if this was the same scenario for people with disabilities but we're not in the ideal world. I see and families see and families come and say that there is an emerging need for housing options for young adults.

We can be proactive in this area rather than reactive. We can create business models which are sustainable into the future. We can come up with some new and creative ideas that could centre around new support models where support is related to need and as individuals become more independent, paid support can be decreased and in this way we would make those models sustainable and they wouldn't cost as much as they would do – they would cost more in the initial setting up stage but you would reduce your costs.

Now, if people say that can't be done, it can be done because we look at day placements and the model that we provide in community inclusion and we've looked

at this model and implemented this model into a community inclusion program and it works. We have people who support one another. People who can't go down the street and go to the pool independent because they can't cross the road. We have other people who can't go down because they don't know how to interact or get their ticket when they get down there but if you have a group of people who go on that task and they support one another, you might have – I don't mean a group like five or six, I mean say like three, each of them have different skills and they support one another and they teach one another the skills and these are the sorts of models that I'd like to see be moved into a supported accommodation model where people are taught the skills, they support one another and they independent in that home with the support that they need to meet their needs.

Just to reiterate some of these ideas I want to give you two recent examples of young people requiring accommodation that we've had experience with in the last period of time. Both these examples could have been supported in a creative supported model. The first one was a 20-year old male and we became deeply concerned about him. He was no longer able to live with his father and his father's occasional partner and he was taken in by a person in the community who introduced him to drugs and we went to visit him and he was living in squalor. When he could no longer pay an increased board, he was asked to leave.

A few days later we found him living in the bridge under the causeway and with an advocate we requested some individual support package to assist with the accommodation or some respite. Homelessness is not a priority for an ISP. They wouldn't even accept his application. Respite was not an option because he had not participated in an induction program. There was nowhere and no one would listen. He is now not living in the local area. We, as an organisation, had to source out other family members. He is living outside Shepparton with his grandmother who is gravely unwell and he can no longer attend day placement because there is no transport.

So his position with us has been ceased. He no longer has access to day placement anywhere at all and if something – his mother actually lives in a retirement village and has to support herself. I'm currently having issues around the accommodation needs for another young adult who is 23. He lives currently with his mother and sibling but he has been asked to leave the family home because his finances have now been taken over by the State Trustees. Mum no longer has access to his money. You know, where is he going to go? That's all I've got.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MRS POWELL: Thanks, Wendy. Wendy, you raise a number of issues, particularly for people living in country Victoria with an adult child with a disability. One of those issues is the issue of transport and allowing people who, even if they are living in independent living, or supported accommodation access to the type of programs that you have. What is your view of the transport options that can be used and is there some way to link it with accommodation packages?

MS SHANKS: I probably have a very different view about that. We have a number of people who access our service that don't live in Shepparton and we have come up

with a model of providing that service in their own community because people need to be known in their own communities because that's where they live and people work and recreate and do all those things. So what we've done is we've come up with a national support model. So if we get money for those people, we actually pay somebody in that community to work with that person, whether it be at a workplace, whether it be in a recreation place or whether it be whatever.

I can use examples? We have a young gentleman who lives in Nathalia. There is really not a lot of transport to come to Shepparton. He's never been to Shepparton. He knows no one in Shepparton. He doesn't know the local community and we approached a local school, St Mary of the Angels at Nathalia, and we actually partially paid one of their staff to support him to work as a groundsman come cleaner come whatever activities in that school. So he stays in his community. He's recognised by his community and he is a part of his community.

We do the same in Tatura, we use the community house as the support option and for others that need to travel to us we would be looking at more of those options. We do have some issues around transport. It's just an ongoing issue. We have a person who has an ISP of probably \$25,000 to \$26,000 come to us and because we have to transport her to and from the service – she lives a distance out of town – she can attend two days. The rest of her funding is taken up with transport.

MR NOONAN: Wendy, thanks for your submission. I gather you've been in this - working in this area for a little while?

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MR NOONAN: Is that – because you talked about perhaps looking at the evolution of this area over the last 30 years and from the description of your organisation you work very closely with individuals on their plans and you've identified the three potential funding sources for those individuals and their families. I wonder whether – because there's a lot of – the last submission we had of course talked about individual support packages and you've correctly identified that people are prioritising accommodation in terms of their thinking – I wonder whether or not you can give some indication, through the individual planning process that you take on with the individual and their family, or carers and how that is translating into accommodation which doesn't necessarily require 24 hour care.

MS SHANKS: I have got to be careful what I say. The allocation of the packages to me is the biggest issue, okay. We sit down – or the department and a range of people sit down and say, "What do you want and this is what you need" and then they go away and we write down all the things, we cost them all out and everything else, and they go away and come back and say, "You can only have these." Someone somewhere in the blue yonder makes a decision about what are the priorities for that person and I think that is something that the person themselves and their families need to stipulate. If I can't have all these, these are the things that I will have first and that doesn't happen. Someone else does that and we don't know, you know, they just come back on a piece of paper.

The other thing is that if we're planning for someone and we're looking at ISPs we need to determine how we're going to work out how much people get. Is it going to be about deficits, as I said before, so a person has all these deficits. Do we focus on them or do we focus on their needs and currently we're focusing on the deficits and the better we can get those, you know, the more opportunities people have. I see that as a real problem but I know that's a change of thinking and that's a cultural change all those things and those things won't happen overnight. But it is also: do people have entitlements or do they have a package of money. If they know in advance before we do all this planning that we have this much money on the table, let us plan around that much money. What can we get for our dollar?

MR NOONAN: I gather from what you're saying, talking about business models and support models, that you're very much focused on the individuals needs with their carer family. Are you broadly supportive of that approach though?

MS SHANKS: Yes. I think that if we could put the models in a lot earlier and people who make a determination that they are needing accommodation or wanting accommodation because of their family circumstances and the individual says it now, if we supported them when they're in their twenties, when they have the ability to increase their skills and things like that, it would be cheaper to support those longer term and you will have an increase in skills. And I also believe, and some of the families have actually said, that if that person – if they didn't have to care for them 24 hours a day every day, they would be still willing to put some support into that model themselves.

They would be willing to have their family member, you know, quite a bit or provide some support into that model, this, I don't know, a creative new model. When families get older they don't have the stamina or the resilience to provide that support but if we could, you know, reduce the support. They get tired. They get worn out. So if we could take that away and introduce a model that provides for it in some way shape or form, they will hold that stamina for a lot longer and provide support, you know, for as long as they can, a lot longer than they can now.

MR NOONAN: Thank you.

MRS POWELL: Can I pick up on that thought, Wendy. You were talking about how young people like to leave home just like everybody else does when they get to teenagers. One of the issues that we hear from the committee is that there's just not enough options for them when they move out into accommodation. There isn't the private rental market that will pick up people with a disability or pick up people – or a profound disability or pick up people with an intellectual disability. What we're looking for is models that we can make recommendations to the Government. Maybe what you were talking about was a transition model - - -

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MRS POWELL: - - - from when you move from home into somewhere else it is supported and then maybe independent living or - - -

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MRS POWELL: - - - some sort of support service for them.

MS SHANKS: Yes, because I don't think we've had the independent living model in place long enough to actually evaluate it to see whether it's worked or not but I know some of the people that access our service, that are living independently, it hasn't work because they don't have sufficient support. They don't have the skills. The person who has done the plan around the support model, did not know the person sufficiently or did not listen to the family sufficiently about the needs of that person.

MRS POWELL: And another question, on a different tack, I picked up the fact that you were saying that when families come to you for information about what support services there are and what options there are for their adult child, you don't feel confident enough, because of all the changes, so you get them to go to DHS, is that not right?

MS SHANKS: That's right, because we've been told we're not allow to provide that information.

MRS POWELL: Okay. So they go to DHS and they're not given that information in a way that they can understand. That's a real issue for us because what we need to make sure is people can understand the options they've got and you said that 70 per cent of your people don't have access to a website and they're directed to a website. Is there an opportunity for groups like yours to actually do a pro forma of what should be going to some of these families to assist them in letting them know what the options are to make them family friendly.

MS SHANKS: We've had a number of meetings around families because we've had some complaints from families that have gone to the commissioner from our organisation and when we met with – also I made a complaint around some of this myself – and we met with some of the department's staff, we requested that when they ring up and make an appointment with families that they provide a follow-up letter because the families get a phone call out of the blue. They don't really know what the person is – who the person is who is ringing them initially and then they don't really understand why they're coming to see them. So we asked specifically could – if they did that, could they provide a follow up letter explaining who they are and why they're coming and what they will be discussing. Well, that hasn't happened. Just simple things like that.

The families feel that they don't – and also, a lot of families don't like people from the department coming to their own homes but they don't feel that they have the ability to say, "No, I don't want you in my home" because they're not – I mean, people have always had this odd feeling that they're coming to snoop or to see how they live or to do all sorts of other things, you know. Some of them will ring and ask me can they meet at our place but, you know, and we always allow them to do that but, you know, they become a catch 22 because they're scared if they say no to something that anything that they've got now will be decreased or anything they want in the future will not be available to them. Families feel very threatened by bureaucrats, by government and it is not a friendly interaction between families and the department.

THE CHAIR: You said you would like to see transparency in allocation places, what is your recommendation how transparency - - -

MS SHANKS: We would like to see what are the criteria for – I mean, we don't need to know who goes where or whatever but it would be nice to say that there has been so many places filled in the region in six months, these were the criteria that we used to fill those places so then you can say to families, okay, some others have gone placements based on those criteria. Yes, you've got hope. You know, what is the criteria that is used to make those decisions? I don't know.

THE CHAIR: Also earlier on at the outset you mentioned Victoria has come a long way compared to other jurisdictions and then you were talking about not enough places and so on. So what you mean - - -

MS SHANKS: We've come a long way in models, I think.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MS SHANKS: And we're innovative in those models but in terms of placements, you know - - -

THE CHAIR: So what you're saying is basically believe the framework is right but not enough funding, is that what it is or what?

MS SHANKS: I think funding is not the only word that we need to use, it's resources. You know, whether that be housing stock or whether that be funding, whether that be knowledge and skills about developing some of these so resources is probably a broader term that I would like to use about what needs to go into it. I'm not sure what all those resources are.

THE CHAIR: But you are happy about the policy framework - - -

MS SHANKS: I think – how we've come – you know, we've come a long way from the institutionalised models and the way that the institutions ran to, you know, to the de-institutional process to the community living and now we're looking at individual. Like, a lot of those processes weren't necessarily based on these, they were based on decisions that were made in the community or by politicians or whatever but now we're really looking at – we seem to be going down the path of looking at individuals and I think that that's a really promising step.

I mean, there's not many other places in the world that have taken that step in terms of some of their housing. You know, I think the biggest example of the way housing has changed is the in control model in England and when you read about it it sounds terrific but if you get down to some of the case studies, it's not really about the person having all those decisions that it appears that they have.

MRS POWELL: Just to follow on from that, you were talking about the institutions and the fact that we de-institutionalise people, put them back in the community and

that was a good step. What is your view now – I mean, you say that the independent living hasn't been evaluated so we don't know if it's actually working in the person's best interest - what would you see as acceptable, if we're looking at a cluster model or a model of say 12 people in there, with all the support, not classed as an institute but with all the provision provided to whoever needs it - - -

MS SHANKS: The keyhole model?

MRS POWELL: Probably the keyhole model, yes. What's your view on - - -

MS SHANKS: I think some of those models would be terrific and I think that putting people independently in a unit or things like that – people don't want to live by themselves. You know, none of us live by ourselves so why would people with a disability – they go from a home environment or a housing accommodation environment where, you know, there's lots of people around, there's lots of noise, there's lots of activity to going out by themselves and then they have to make decisions about how to recreate, how to go out, how to do all those things. They haven't had the skills to do all those or the opportunity to do all those previously and when they get out there they don't have the skills and, you know, some of those placements fall over.

MR NOONAN: Can I ask a question about sort of efficiency in terms of service delivery. You're Shepparton Access.

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MR NOONAN: And you work in partnership with, I assume, families, individuals. Do you work in partnership with other agencies as well and if so, who are those agencies? How broad is your links in terms of partnerships?

MS SHANKS: We have enough – we have partnerships and we also have relationships.

MR NOONAN: Yes.

MS SHANKS: We have a number of partners in terms of systemic service delivery and then we develop relationships based on individuals. So if we have a person who wants to do something in the community we develop a partnership with – we identify who could provide what that person needs and develop a partnership with that business or whatever that person wants, whether it be a business, whether it be another person in the community or whether it be another community organisation.

MR NOONAN: So how many partnerships and relationships might exist with Shepparton Access?

MS SHANKS: At any – we would have four or five, maybe more, partnerships in our organisational partnerships but we have 55 people that attend each day and over half of them would have a relationship and some of them would have more than one.  
MR NOONAN: What do you think of that situation?

MS SHANKS: They love it.

MR NOONAN: And how does it work for you as an organisation to have – what I am trying to come to terms with as a sector whether or not that is working, all those partnerships and relationships, or whether or not there is a need for some rationalisation or whether or not there is a need for expansion?

MS SHANKS: We go out to the Shepparton East Bowling Club as a group and one of our young gentlemen was identified as being really good at bowling so now we've developed a partnership with them and they pick him up, take him bowling at the weekend and stuff like that. So, I mean, so that partnership has been based around his needs and his wants and things like that and that lasted for a bowling season. When the bowling season finished, he – that partnership stopped for a period of time and then we looked at other ones. You know, it's around what people want at the time and they can change their mind.

MR NOONAN: I'm glad – I'm really glad you've told that story because what you've alluded to is the community inclusion aspect of your work.

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MR NOONAN: And it's not something that our committee has actually heard a lot about of how we link, necessarily, what might broadly be called "community" into the whole issue of accommodations or of accommodation and the services. I think what you're suggesting very strongly is that there is room for this but it tends to just happen at ad hoc arrangement rather than any structure to it.

MS SHANKS: Yes.

MR NOONAN: But it is positive, that is what you're saying?

MS SHANKS: No, ours is very structured.

MR NOONAN: Okay. You might talk us through that then.

MS SHANKS: When people do their plans they say they want to do this, that and the other and if people – like we have a lot of young people and one of them said, "I want to work in a hairdressers. I want to spend time" and if the family said, if my – I mean, this person is not - middle functioning range, you know, can't cross the road independently or things like – couldn't do any of those sorts of things, even at the lights – and the family thought if that – if my daughter could work in a hairdressers one day a week I would be happy for life and so we approached hairdressers and we've learnt the types of business that we can approach. You know, we've had a lot of businesses that have not been supportive of what we've been doing. So we approached a local business that we could actually see from our front door.

MR NOONAN: That's handy.

MS SHANKS: And that was one of the reasons and we then taught her to cross the road, go to the hairdressers and a staff member spent, I guess, five days with her

teaching her the skills and that was quite hilarious because if anyone knows Scot from our place, him working in a hairdressers was – he's probably six foot three, you know, washing the rollers and things like that was quite funny. We went, you know, took photos. But that was the model. That's what happened. Anyway, now, this is probably some months later, she goes across the lights with a friend who also goes out on that day.

They get themselves across the lights together and support each other. They go to their little places where they go and do their activities. They meet back on the corner and then they go out and have lunch and then they come back at the end of lunchtime and that's been a real learning process for both of them because neither of them could use money before. Neither of them had a wallet before. Neither of them could cross the road before and neither of them could interact with others before.

MR NOONAN: Now, it might be a little stretch, but what is then the link back to accommodation in that instance?

MS SHANKS: Is that if you can identify the things that people want and you have a specific goal, you can teach them to do that. For example, in that thing, like, we often have people coming in to some of the models to do the cooking. Well, you could actually teach those people to do the cooking. If you had a period of time you could teach them to actually do their shopping list and in a couple support – one may be able to handle money and one may be able to read but not necessarily do both. So one will make the list up, you know, from the cupboard and read the recipes, and the other will help with the money and the shopping.

You know, so it's about using the skills that two people have or three people have and supporting each other rather than having a staff member there to provide that support. You would need a staff member in the initial phases but you can put in place – and then you only need to do regular checks and follow ups so you reduce your staff component.

MR NOONAN: Thank you.

MRS POWELL: Do you have a view of who should support or who should provide supported accommodation? We have had a number of people say to the committee that the Government should stay out of it. They provide the funding. They should provide the monitoring and the training but they shouldn't provide the accommodation.

MS SHANKS: I don't have a view. I think that if it works well and, you know, that's fine, you know.

MRS POWELL: So you think that as long as it's working well, it doesn't matter who provides it?

MS SHANKS: If it's what people need and what they want, you know, there are providers and there are providers. I don't have a view that it should come out of the Government sector. I don't have a view about that at all.

MRS POWELL: Now, this is your opportunity to say to us what you really think is needed as far as accommodation goes because if there is a lack of or you think there's a certain area that the Government are missing out on, we need to know that information.

MS SHANKS: Look, there is a lack of accommodation, I will say that but we have to be realistic about some of the things too. We, as a community, and as, you know, a State of Victoria, do not have the resources to give everybody everything that they dream and want. You know, I'd like a whole lot more, you know, and that can't be provided. It's got to be within a resource stream and so we need to do it better and in different ways so that we're not going to need to – we can use other resources but not necessarily monetary resources. I think that's the way that we need to explore some of those other ways further.

MR NOONAN: Such as?

MRS POWELL: That was my question. I was going to ask that.

MS SHANKS: I think that we can – we've got families who are willing, when they are able, to provide some support and how do we do that and how do we support them to do that? We look at other people and – you know, it's skilling up people with disabilities and seeing them as real members of our communities and having expectations that they can do things, because they can. Not saying, you know, we need to support them to do this and we need to support them to do that. Say, "Yes, you can do it" and we'll find out and work out how you can do it and then you're looking at different resources. You know, we can't afford to provide residential care for every person who puts up their hand, I don't think. Do you?

THE CHAIR: No.

MS SHANKS: So there's got to be, you know, some other creative ways of doing it and whether that be looking at some of the UK models or the models that have been done in Sweden or in Canada, you know, and seeing how they work and implementing those or trialling one of those, you know, but what we need in real communities is vastly different to what we need in metro.

THE CHAIR: Do you have a preferred option or any other model you prefer?

MS SHANKS: I would like a model where we keep families close by. You know, that's one of the most important things. If there's a – if we have a family in Shepparton and there's a residential place within Seymour becomes available, you know, it's hard for the family to say, "No, I don't want that residential placement" but how do they see that family member, you know, on a regular basis. You know, that family member will feel cut off and isolated and abandoned because of the distance of travel. You know, people with a disability also have to have a say who they want to live with. You know, a placement comes up. The person on top of the list goes into the placement. We have a whole lot of placements that are inappropriate and unacceptable.

THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you very much for your submission. Thanks a lot.  
We will take a five minute break.

**ADJOURNED**

**[11.56 am]**