

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

**Inquiry into the provision of supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability
or mental illness**

Melbourne — 22 October 2008

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Witness

Mr A. Baird, parent.

The CHAIR — I would like to call up the final witness for this morning, Mr Tony Baird.

Mr BAIRD — Thank you for allowing me to speak here. I am a parent of a child now aged 30. There is a common thread that has run through a few of the things said here today which has made me, while this was not a prepared speech, change what I had to say. I would like to start by saying I think we are pretty fortunate here in Australia that there is such support that comes to us as parents — principally the pension from the federal government and commonwealth rent assistance — but I suspect that most parents here who do not have their children in care get precisely nothing from the state government.

We have heard from people here who have got their children at CRUs. I used to think it was like winning the lottery to have my child at a CRU. In fact it is winning the lottery, because the cost several years ago was in excess of \$100 000 per resident. When I first heard that, I thought that the children were put up in the Hilton, because it would actually cost less. And guess what? If you are putting up a small proportion of the intellectually disabled in something that costs what the Hilton costs, you have got no money over for anyone else. That is option 1 in this state. If you are happy with the lottery you have won — you people who have got your children at a CRU — great, but it did not sound like you were.

There is a second option in this state, and that is called support and choice packages. To get these you have to pass the portals of DHS. If ever there was a Soviet Russian bureaucracy, it is that. Why? Because they will sit across the table from you, they will wring their hands, they will steeple their fingers and they will say, 'We wish we could help, but we cannot'. To get your child into a CRU in the first place you probably have to engineer a crisis, and some people here probably know of families who have done just that — engineered a crisis — to get their child in. If you want to get your child a support and choice package, you will rort the system, and that is exactly what we have heard. I am sure there are other parents here who know of certain parents who have been squeaky doors and they will rort the system. All I can say is — and the last speaker said it twice — that if this is Victoria leading the way, you have a shambles on your hands.

The CHAIR — Could people in the audience refrain from making comments and interrupting the proceedings.

Mr BAIRD — I am sure that they would prefer not to; however, I think it is ringing a bell. All I can say is that the whole system of getting a support and choice package, because we have tried, is entirely arbitrary and it is opaque. There is no way. DHS is judge, jury and executioner on these packages. They are available in limited amounts, and they certainly will not tell you the hows and whys of why your child may or may not be entitled. Let us go back to that major failure of a state government initiative called the Disability Housing Trust. It was trumpeted for six years that \$10 million were going to be there — magic bureaucratic words, like 'imaginative' and 'innovative' and so on — and as far as I know the money got passed on with almost not a dollar being spent, because there is no way that a house was going to get built and you would put your child in there unless there was a support and choice package, and it does not come from your government.

The third choice for those unlucky enough to live in Victoria but fortunate enough to live in Australia is that the child stays at home and gets institutionalised in a different way. That is the sad case. You simply get older with your child, and you are absolutely guaranteeing a crisis response when the parents die, because now you have got a child in their 50s or 60s, the parents have gone and they have got no knowledge of how to live out there in the community. They will win the lottery, but slightly late in life, and end up in one of the CRUs.

Let us look at any normal system. With the unemployed, the federal government guarantees a level of unemployment benefit. All you have to do to get that is to show a relatively small thing, which is that you are unemployed. Yes, there may be some rules, but it is guaranteed. The problem about approaching the state government for anything to do with intellectual disability is

that nothing is guaranteed. There is no base help that the state will give to the large proportion of parents whose children are not at CRUs and not getting support and choice packages under the current regime. We will simply have nothing from the state government system until we pass on, and then our children become CRU victims.

Let me just finish with a couple of comments which I have had. Again there seems to be a bit of a resonance from people who spoke here earlier about DHS, which is that management do one thing and staff another. A comment that came back to me from people within the lower levels of DHS, who did show some level of compassion towards children like ours, was that 'DHS' is an acronym but it does not stand for the 'Department of Human Services', it stands for the 'Department of Human Sacrifice'. In concluding, let me also give you the quote that came from the chairman of one of Melbourne's leading housing providers. He said, 'Your children are not your children, and they are not clients of the system; they are victims'. Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity of addressing the meeting.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your presentation.

Witness withdrew