

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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

Geelong — 23 October 2008

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Witness

Mrs H.Cooney, program manager, Bayview Disability Services (MacKillop Family Services).

The CHAIR — The next witness I would like to call is Mrs Heather Cooney. Please explain what you do and what your organisation represents, and could we also have a submission from you?

Mrs COONEY — My name is Heather Cooney. I am the program manager of Bayview Disability Services, which is part of MacKillop Family Services in the Barwon region. Bayview Disability Services provides a range of support services for school-aged children and young adults who have moderate to severe disability, and their families. These supports include flexible support packages, planning and case management, home-based respite and part-time and full-time care placements with volunteer caregivers.

Many of the families we support are keen to keep their children within the family on a long-term basis once they reach adulthood, and wherever possible we provide support for them to do this. Indeed, prevention of family breakdown is one of the outcomes we work towards. A small number wish to plan for their teenager or young adult member to move to another accommodation type — —

The CHAIR — Excuse me. Can I cut in?

Mrs COONEY — Yes.

The CHAIR — We may not have time to go through the whole document. We will accept it as a written submission. If you want to clarify a few points, that would be good.

Mrs COONEY — The crux of my submission is that where the Disability Act places a high value on planning and on providing for individual needs and choices, in practice we have found that the system within disability services for allocating places in supported residential accommodation not only does not promote the principles of planning and individual choice but actually makes timely planning and choice impossible for families.

To gain access to supported accommodation, young people and their parents are forced to reach a crisis situation before they will be considered. I guess that is probably the crux of it — how unfair it is for families to have to reach that crisis situation before they can make those plans for their children.

My other point — on the second page I have given three case examples that we have been involved with over the past 12 months, which you can read at your leisure. One of the big service gaps from our point of view is the lack of supported accommodation for the teenage group. We have a number of families who really struggle with very challenging behaviours, mainly of teenage boys. We are told that in our region there is not an accommodation option for them. They are very difficult to recruit alternative caregiver families for. These families struggle on, experiencing physical and emotional abuse and psychological damage.

Our recommendation that in order to more adequately meet community needs we would like to see increased availability of supported accommodation houses; supported accommodation availability for young people aged 12 to 18 years with high support needs who are unable to remain with their families or be placed with alternative family placements; the capacity of the service system for families to plan for and access in a timely way supported accommodation for the young people without being forced into crisis; and greater availability of overnight out-of-home respite care, including for extended periods, in order to prevent parents from reaching crisis and relinquishing their children longer term.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.