

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

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

Geelong — 23 October 2008

Members

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Research Officer: Dr T. Caulfield

Witness

Mrs M. Kuchenmeister.

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**Mrs KUCHENMEISTER** — I am Marie Kuchenmeister. I am the parent of a daughter who is 38 and has an intellectual disability. I am also a service provider in an organisation that provides employment and training for young people with special needs.

I can obviously relate immensely to all the other speakers today, and particularly the parent group. I can relate to the impacts on families and the frustration and the exhaustion and the tiredness and everything. However, my batteries have not run out yet so I will keep plodding on. Twenty years ago when my daughter was due to leave school, she was in a special setting, I looked around for opportunities that were available for Prue to move into. We had the old-style sheltered workshop, which I am sure you can all remember and relate to, which was not very impressive.

So with a group of very spirited professionals and a parent group from Nelson Park School, we started a small business in Geelong that provided catering and a cafe and employment in hospitality. We started with four young people with disabilities and myself and two part-time supervisors, and today we have two very vibrant cafes, a huge catering business, we employ 52 young people with special needs and have a great management team. The best practice model of dal Gourmet Cafe and Catering is now being duplicated all around Australia, which is just wonderful.

My point with all of that is not for you to tell us how good we are but is to look at that whole model-type to be transferred into accommodation. It is about giving people lots of choices in their direction not only as far as their employment and training et cetera is concerned but also in their accommodation choices. I feel in Geelong we are fortunate to have such great service providers. You have heard from Gateways and Karingal and other organisations today. I think being a regional area — I know you alluded to this before — everybody is very community-spirited; I think the whole community takes a lot on board and is very supportive of that.

The other thing that I think has come out of today's inquiry is that somebody was asking about people putting money into providing accommodation for their own sons and daughters. There is a group in Queensland who is doing that just now — you have heard about it? They have been down to look at dal and employment options for their sons and daughters, too, so this group are real movers and shakers. Apparently, they are going to be building 11 units for their sons and daughters to live in, and what they are requiring from the government is to provide the support for someone else to live in one of those units to actually provide that ongoing support so there is support on-site.. I think that is something that is certainly worthwhile looking at.

I know one of the other parents today suggested being attached to a bigger organisation which I think is an excellent idea as well. To do it yourself as a group, obviously we parents are not going to be here forever, whereas an organisation that can auspice or be involved with that process is just a great idea.

I have had several conversations with Daryl Starkey — my husband and I are in our 60s now — and I am waiting for him to build this fantastic retirement village for people in their 60s who can take their disabled adult children with them. If that is what our daughter wants to do — and that is indeed what we would like to do — the three of us would live quite happily there for a while. One parent obviously would die but then she would still be there with the other parent, and then when that parent died, she would be able to move into a smaller part of that accommodation in a unit or something similar. That way, you do not have that huge impact when both parents are gone and the child has to move from the family home into some sort of accommodation. I think it has got a lot of merit and so I am still waiting for him to do that.

The other thing that I believe is important — I know we are getting away from having institutions and living in institutions and that sort of thing but people with special needs living together feel they have a support group of friends, and I find that at dal with social activities. They go out, go bowling and socialise together. They do a whole lot of things together. So if it is their choice to

live together as a group, I do not see there is anything wrong with that. A block of three or four units with people living in them — that is something that should be considered an option as well.

One of the main things we are finding is after people have been in shared accommodation — we have several people at dal who live in shared accommodation — is that when they get to a stage where they can move into independent living, somewhere along the line, their support is breaking down badly. Once they have left the service, often their funding is finished.

They do not have a case manager to make sure that they are being supported and that they are coping with living independently. We often pick that up ourselves at dal because we feel that we have a moral obligation to do so. We go back to whoever the service provider was and we talk to them about the possibility of putting services back in place. Sometimes it can take a long time for the service to get the funding reinstated but they are always still very supportive while trying to do that.

where I am coming from, with this particularly is there seems to be a lack of continuity with the person. They are not being followed through once they leave the shared accommodation where they have been trained up and well-equipped perhaps to be moving into independent living. They still need to have some support in place. We are finding people are in very vulnerable positions. They are not able to care for themselves properly or adequately; nobody is checking on that and they do not have a case manager to go back to.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, and please feel free to put in a written submission.

**Mrs KUCHENMEISTER** — I will do that. Thank you very much.

**Witness withdrew.**