

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

Ms A. McArthur, carer.

The CHAIR — There are a few people registered to make very brief comments or very short oral presentations, and I will call upon them. We only have until 1 o'clock, so it would be appreciated if you could make your presentations very brief. Thank you. Please state your name.

Ms McARTHUR — Alison McArthur. I co-share my grandson's care with my husband and my grandson's mother, who is a single mother. He has many complex needs. At 11½ years he has no speech and no self-help skills. He is incontinent, and he has no understanding. He works at a 9 months to 14 months age level. I will give you an example of our day yesterday.

His specialist school sent him home, thinking that he had chicken pox. He did not. He had bites on his bum, but that is all right. We had him at home. Our home is Hugh-proof. Doors are locked, fridges are locked, and taps are turned off in the sink because water attracts him. At 10 past 3 yesterday afternoon he was with us. At a quarter past 3 I was ringing the police. He had somehow got out of the house. My husband ran one way, my friend ran another way. We had four police cars looking for him. The school was telephoned. We had teachers looking for him because we thought he would respond to a name.

He is a child who has never been off my hands. When we take him out we have a strap around him and we tie him to us. A woman — a nurse — was asleep in a house. She heard footsteps on her front veranda. There was nobody there, and she went back to bed. She felt there was something wrong. She looked out into her backyard and in her swimming pool was a head. The pool is behind two fences. He has never climbed in his life; we do not know how he got in there. This pool is about to be demolished; it was like mud. He was frozen stiff. She rang the police and to her horror four police cars converged on the house as one and everybody came in. The use of resources yesterday afternoon was phenomenal, but we live in an institution and our grandson escaped from our institution.

As a family we all live in an institution because we cannot go anywhere with him. His needs are so high because he is an 11½-year-old boy working as a baby. But he has this adoration for water, and I cannot praise the Rainbow Club in Geelong enough. The priority for Rainbow swimming club is teaching survival skills. He can keep his head above water — we think he ate quite a bit of it, but that is besides the point — and he can get himself to the edge. He is just like Chairman Mao: you see a head, but you do not see any movement in the water. But he can get to the side. Yesterday was the most horrific day. He has never, ever been outside without us hanging onto him like grim death. How he got out and managed to escape, we do not know — how he got over two fences, how he went down 50 houses away and found a pool within 5 minutes — we do not know. But that is the life we lead.

We get wonderful help through Gateways and through MacKillop Family Services. His behaviour is horrific; he is a high-needs child who escaped. The police had calls over their phones. It was Geelong Cup Day yesterday, it was muck-up day. The policeman who was with me at all times said, 'Don't worry about that; Hugh is our priority now'. He had just come from transit and he was the transit policeman who had dealt with the autistic child who had a fascination with trains and was killed earlier this year because he was looking at trains. Hugh has a fascination with water. From now on we will have to have more locks. We will all have to be in our own institution for much longer. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.