Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing to highlight the crisis of long term accommodation for people with disabilities in the South West of Victoria.

We care for our adult son with severe Autism who is non-verbal, not toilet trained and has the intellect of about an 18 month-2 year old. Caring for him 24 hours a day assisting him with all daily needs, with constant supervision for his safety and our physical exhaustion leaves us unable to function like a normal family. We run a farm and also have 2 other daughters, one of whom is at Uni. Over the years they have had to go without and ‘normal’ things like a family holiday are non-existent.

Many parents are full time carers and are ageing and struggling to support their sons and daughters who have high support needs. The role of caring leaves them exhausted emotionally, physically and financially and will require permanent accommodation for their child, now or in the near future. Many parents we know are currently suffering from depressive symptoms and also taking medication daily just to cope with day to day pressures.

Parents facing the desperate plight to meet the physical and emotional needs of the disabled child often have difficulty expressing their needs to governments or appropriate departments. Facing the probability that no permanent ongoing accommodation is, or will be, available is adding to the pressure of an uncertain future.

Younger parents battle to keep their families and marriages together, protect siblings from neglect and discrimination and run a ‘normal’ life. With the responsibility of full time care of their disabled adult son or daughter, they have little time to focus on their other children or have time to themselves.

In Hamilton, there are currently no vacancies in Community Residential Units. The only time a vacancy occurs is if someone passes away, or moves away to a different area. We find this to be hard to comprehend, as there are currently around 60 adults who attend the adult disability day programs operated from the Mulleraterong Centre in Hamilton. Many of these clients will be needing supported accommodation immediately or in the very near future. There are also many children attending the SDS in Hamilton that will flow onto the adult centre at Mulleraterong over the next few years, and make this situation even more urgent.

I am the co-ordinator of our local support group of Parents Support Group of Children with a Disability, Hamilton Group, and know first hand the pressures some of our families are trying to cope with. They simply need more support and understanding from those able to make a difference for them to survive, both emotionally, financially and in their relationships.

We, as parents of an autistic son, urge you to use the funding allocations in current budgets to address this issue as soon as possible to create better outcomes for people with a disability and their families.

Please, please, please help us!!

Yours sincerely,

Mark & Robyn Tonissen