

**Parliament of Victoria**

**Inquiry into services for people with autism spectrum disorder**

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**Submission**

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[The opinions expressed are my private opinions.]

As a speech pathologist who has worked in rural Victoria for over 30 years with children and adults with autism, I think the following are three key areas which stand out to me when I think about services and issues for People with autism spectrum disorder and their families.

**Facilities**

MASS [Mansfield Autism State-wide Services] is a wonderful facility in Mansfield which provides life changing services for many students who attend there. Many students attend for a term and then return home with the support of MASS's Travelling teacher service. MASS also provides a range of services including education sessions on autism, a school camp, etc.

There is a waiting list for availability of a placement and the cost of a term's placement is prohibitive for many families.

Many students with autism "do not fit" into the facilities which are available in rural areas. This often results in students spending little time at school, being bullied in some instances and huge stress on the family unit.

*We really need more purpose built facilities to provide a range of education services and options for children and adults with autism and significant behaviours of concern.*

## **Services**

With NDIS being rolled out there are concerns about how students [school aged and adults] with autism and significant behaviours of concern will access intensive and time consuming specialised services from behaviour support practitioners and speech pathologists. The issues are in terms of how the services will be funded, but also whether the specialists needed will be available in the rural areas.

*We really need more behaviour support practitioners and speech pathologists [may be the same person!] to be available to provide a range of services and options for children and adults with autism and significant behaviours of concern in rural areas. There needs to be discussion and answers around how this group with complex needs will be able to access adequate services.*

## **Accommodation**

In rural areas there are major issues with many young adults [the majority being male] with autism and significant behaviours of concern who are living at home.

- Issues with parents trying to maintain employment but having to leave at a minutes notice to assist with the behaviour of their young person at the centre they attend due to assaults, property damage, etc.
- Issues for siblings who consider leaving home and living elsewhere so they can study during later years of secondary school.
- Issues with travel to day services on buses. Transport options [or lack of] are an issue in many cases.
- Issues with long distances to a day facility, some families have to move to be able to get access for their young person to a facility, others have family members who cannot work due to needing to transport the young person 3 hours a day or more.
- Issues with elderly parents waiting for permanent accommodation for their young person.

- Respite services for families are sparse and inadequate. Often respite beds are unavailable as they are being used for the emergency accommodation for a person who has been relinquished or needs accommodation due to an emergency, e.g. death of a parent. Often due to the lack of shared supported accommodation vacancies people can be in a respite facility waiting for a permanent placement for months in cases over a year.

Many families get to breaking point. As mentioned the wait for shared supported accommodation is very long. Many families look at the option of relinquishing their young person so they can get emergency accommodation for them.

*We really need more respite and long term accommodation options for children and adults with autism and significant behaviours of concern in rural areas.*



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