

# ABC TV Stateline exposes DHS Victoria

Stateline Victoria, December 4, 2009

Presentation by Josephine Cafagna : Report by Erin Cassar

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2009/12/04/2762673.htm>

*"Stateline showed how the public service uses its massive money bag to buy its way, not manage its way"*

A parliamentary inquiry into accommodation for disabled Victorians is expected to uncover a system in crisis. This parliamentary inquiry into disability accommodation in Victoria is due to hand down its report within weeks.

The inquiry heard countless stories from families in despair; among them are Mark and Ellen Modra. They've watched their autistic son, Luke, deteriorate to the point of self-harm, after spending hours locked in a room with little more than a bed and a toilet. This parliamentary inquiry into disability accommodation in Victoria is due to hand down its report within weeks.

Luke Modra spends around 20 hours of his day. Locked up and alone, his food is passed through a door. The 21-year-old is one of the most severely autistic people in Victoria.

Luke's parents blame inhumane care for his deterioration. His behaviour is now so challenging, taking him home is no longer an option. In his first placement, Luke endured physical and verbal abuse from staff. Since 2005, this has been his home, a DHS-run facility called, "The Crescent", in Mount Evelyn.

Even the department concedes it's letting Luke down. Last year an independent audit of "The Crescent" revealed high-risk non-compliance in relation to client management and environment. There are at least 2,000 Victorian families languishing on waiting lists as they battle for better residential care or improved in-home support, and for many, it's a fight that lasts years.

I don't want to be like other parents at the house where Luke is living, who are 75 and fighting harder than I am to get their sons out of that place into something better, Luke's father, Mark Modra, said.

We know we haven't got there yet with Luke, and I understand the family's frustration with that. We've offered an individual support package to the family and to Luke of over a half a million dollars annually to actually make sure that we've got a comprehensive response, Arthur Rogers, Executive Director, Disability Services, Department of Human Services, said.

I don't know if DHS want to wait for a pile of bodies to stack up before they listen to parents and listen to guardians and listen to advocates. Perhaps they do need that. A lot of us have lived through a lot of reports and nothing changes, Julie Philips, Anti-Discrimination Consultant representing the Modra family, said.

We've had families who say they're too afraid to die because they don't know what's going to happen to their family member with a disability. It's totally unacceptable that families are at this stage, Mary Wooldridge, Opposition Spokesperson, said.

Late this afternoon, March 4, 2009, the Department of Human Services agreed in principle to a \$1 million support package to transfer Luke to Yallambee for two years, Josephine Cafagna said.

**LISA Comment:** This is just the tip of the broad problem we have been highlighting for years. The traditional public service culture cannot provide consistent, meaningful and pro active care within the department's care policies, standards and values - or within commonsense family values.

Heather saw this effect most of the time she worked in DHS direct care, but the department is in total and constant denial of what she witnessed first hand, and of what we and many other caring parents experience.

The public service uses its massive money bag to buy its way, not manage its way! The police department's service areas, did this as well. When public service staff "refused" to work, management outsourced the work. So government paid twice, and no one cared!

With the DHS, outsourcing services is rare. If public service direct care staff do little quality of life care, and management do little or nothing about this (the norm), then it's the residents and their families who are disadvantaged.

Public service staff can say to their management/supervisor, "We don't want to do that, and you can't make us!" "If you try to make us do anything we don't want to, we will submit a bullying report".

**<http://www.lisainc.com.au/userfiles/file/HOUSE%20SUPERVISOR.pdf>**

In country Victoria, staff integrity seems much better. But services should not rely on staff integrity to replace management's right, obligation and ability to

properly manage services and ensure they are within the direction, intention and spirit of the department's care policies, standards and values.

As the public service culture is therefore not conducive to the implementation of the direction, intention and spirit of the department's care policies, standards and values - Governments should get out of direct service provision!

**Tony & Heather Tregale**

**LIFESTYLE IN SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION (LISA) INC.**

**Tel: 03-9434-3810: Email: [vk3qq@optusnet.com.au](mailto:vk3qq@optusnet.com.au)**

**Web: [www.lisainc.com.au](http://www.lisainc.com.au) : [www.lisa-aus.blogspot.com](http://www.lisa-aus.blogspot.com)**