

Australia is John Wayne country!

(survival of the fittest)

"If you have any form of disability or care for a person with a disability, you are out gunned every time by the all powerful bureaucrats!"

There appears few eminent and/or influential people in Australia able or willing to balance and challenge the overwhelming power-over-people enjoyed by the all powerful and totally out-of-control captive market bureaucrats!

We tested three eminent and influential water holes, and found them all dry! Australia is certainly a dry and unforgiving country if you have any form of disability or care for a person with a disability!

The three eminent and influential areas were: The Governor General of Australia, the Lyceum Club and the Melbourne Club. Although Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC acknowledged the letter below, neither of the respected Melbourne establishments made any attempt to do so. Clearly, people with a disability and their families are well down the social order of things, and the bureaucrats are well up the social order in Australia!

26 September 2008.

73 Nepean Street,
WATSONIA 3087.

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC
Governor General of Australia
Government House
Dunrossil Drive
YARRALUMLA ACT 2600

Your Excellency, Ms Bryce,

We noted your appearance on the ABV TV 7:30 Report, 23 September 2008, where we were delighted to hear of your proposals to help implement social change. It is truly wonderful to see society being promised support by those with so much experience and influence.

In the UK, there are a great many groups of influential ladies and honoured people who assist the disadvantaged to challenge the bureaucrats - to help even the playing field a little. With our very limited resources, we have been unable to locate or access similar assistance here in Australia.

Our quest over many years has been to improve the quality of life of those disadvantaged by intellectual or multiple disability, and who are living in group homes in the community - following the Institutions being closed here in Victoria.

The efforts of most families and groups to ensure those with little or no ability or meaningful communications have a right to quality of life care in accordance with the very extensive and comprehensive care policies, standards and values of the Department of Human Services (DHS) is severely limited by Victoria having no effective complaints processes.

At a meeting with the then Minister for Community Services, who happened at that time to be our local member, Ms Sherryl Garbutt acknowledged that the then complaints processes were little more than “public servants checking on public servants”.

Reviews by the present state government resulted in the “Office of the Disability Services Commissioner (ODSC)” being recently established in an attempt to provide a complaints avenue external to that of service providers, especially the direct service provision of the DHS.

Disappointingly, the ODSC has been established within very restrictive legislation which permits it to do little more than offer “Conciliation”. It has no power to ensure service providers, especially DHS direct services, provide service within DHS care policies, standards and values.

Apart from families, the other service monitor here in Victoria is the “Community Visitors Program” under the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) and the Disability Act 2006.

Although the intention of this program is first class (we were CVs for six years when the first legislation was enacted in 1987), it is limited in the ability of its volunteers to understand the “covert service provision complexities” which determine quality of life care or minder care.

When the DHS told us we did not know what we were talking about when we complained about our son’s quality of care in one of their group homes, Heather did 12 months full time TAFE, got her ACRACS (Cert 4) qualification, and worked for four years at both DHS and NGO service points – hands on in group homes. Heather was like police working under cover. Much of what she witnessed in DHS facilities was shocking – similar to that depicted in the very current book on Kew Cottages entitled, “Bye, Bye Charlie”.

When Community Visitors visit a group home where the residents have no meaningful communications, they speak only with the service provider staff. There is no obligation on them to contact families following their visits to group homes. For a number of years, our son was in a shocking DHS group home, for which we provided extensive documented evidence. Yet CVs constantly gave the home good reports.

Many (elderly) caring parents with a family member in a group home, consider they will need to live for ever to monitor the service being provided for their very vulnerable family member. Like young Mum worries about her little-one at the Kinder/Childcare, but more so. As a regular 3 year old often has more intellectual ability than a 33 year old with ID.

Very elderly parents still caring, 24/7, for their family member in the family home worry, (a) what will happen to their very vulnerable family member when they are no longer around or able to provide care and, (b) that their very vulnerable family member will receive little more than very basic minder care if they ever get a group home offer. Many parents we know, consider they would rather commit dual suicide than have their family member go behind the closed and unaccountable doors of a DHS group home!

In conclusion, there is a need for a complaints process which is totally independent of government, but with the legislative authority of government to take positive action. A process where those on the panel are from outside industry not associated with care services. Like, for example, having executives or senior managers from say, BHP, Telstra, Motorola, Myer, David Jones, Coles, etc, etc. Usually, organisations of this stature are happy to provide pro bono support to such a community service.

Forwarded for your consideration please.

Yours sincerely,

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