

## **NO CHOICE OF SERVICE PROVIDER EQUALS "MINDER AND AT RISK SERVICES"**

Long term residents taking up respite places, and the despotic and total control of the DSR (Disability Support Register) by the Department of Human Services, has seen more incompatible people forced on their own group homes, and those of Community Sector Organisations.....

### **Autistic boy 'raped' at residential care house Carol Nader, *The Age*, March 18, 2009**

POLICE are investigating an allegation that a 12-year-old boy raped an eight-year-old autistic boy living in the same house while they were in the care of the state.

It is alleged that the rape occurred at a residential care unit where four children in the state's care were living in Coburg at the end of January. Despite having a history of behavioural problems, the 12-year-old boy - who has his own history of trauma - was placed by the Department of Human Services in a house with two young autistic boys and a 13-year-old girl. He was moved from the house a few days after an incident report was given to the department.

The report was made after the girl, also living in the house, told a staff member that she saw the alleged incident.

The distressed mother of the boy who was allegedly raped told *The Age* yesterday that if the 12-year-old boy was charged by police, she would pursue legal action against the department.

The woman, who next month will go to court in a bid to have her son returned to her care, said it was not safe for young children with disabilities to share houses with older children.

"Disabled children should be in a house allocated for disabled children," she said. "They've got disabled children living and sleeping in the same house with children from dysfunctional families that are running away. They shouldn't be living there at all."

While the 12-year-old boy has been moved, *The Age* has been told that staff had repeatedly expressed concerns to the department about his behavioural problems months before the alleged incident, and cited an inappropriate mix of children living in the house.

A report by a WorkSafe Victoria inspector last month cited 91 incidents related to the boy since he was admitted to the house in July last year.

- "The reports indicate alleged verbal, physical and sexual abuse to both staff and clients sharing the facility, alleged property damage, alleged dangerous behaviour and absconding," the inspector's report says.

The inspection followed a provisional improvement notice issued by a union health and safety representative last December.

Community and Public Sector Union state secretary Karen Batt said the department had an obligation to provide a healthy and safe work environment for all staff.

"The system is failing everybody," she said. "The staff have a right to a healthy and safe working environment and the department should not try to sweep this under the mat."

*The Age* has published a series of stories in recent weeks highlighting the problems with inappropriately mixing children in residential care.

But Community Services Minister Lisa Neville has persistently refused to talk about the issue, citing a current State Government review of out-of-home care.

Her spokeswoman said: "The minister is aware of the allegation. Any allegation of this kind is taken seriously, and is investigated by the appropriate authorities."

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare chief executive Coleen Clare said if it was known that a young person had a history of inappropriate behaviour, the first concern must be for the safety of the other children in the house.

"The young person would need to be placed in possibly a one-to-one situation until there can be some very careful assessment done," she said. "There's not enough funding in the system to make the appropriate placements of young people."

A spokesman for the department said it acknowledged the difficulties experienced in the placement in the Coburg house, and the "young client" had been moved to another placement.

**Tony & Heather Tregale**

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

**Tel: 9434-3810.**