



29th April 2011

Commissioner Patricia Scott
Inquiry into disAbility care and support
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

By email: disability-support@pc.gov.au

Dear Commissioner,

Disability care and support

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge this submission to the draft report, Disability care and support.

Submission by Abbeyfield disAbility ACT (Inc.)

Your draft report includes as a "Cameo" the case of Emily a 27year old with Down Syndrome who is currently living with her mother.

This submission specifically addresses the issue of housing for one category of people with disabilities. In doing so it highlights a new option for accommodation support for people with disabilities, whose situation broadly compares with that of Emily.

Background

In 1999 a group of parents in Canberra who until that time had a child with a disability living at home, met to consider future housing models for their child. Most of the parents were aged over 60 and were concerned that their increasing age was real issue in the context of future housing and care for their child. The "children" at the time were aged from their early 20s through to approaching 40. Some, as with Emily, had Down Syndrome and the experience you reflected upon in the draft report of Emily could certainly in some cases be considered broadly similar. All had an intellectual and / or physical disability at birth and had lived with their parents since that time. Their capacity in some ways reflect that of Emily in that they are able to take care of personal hygiene, have employment generally in a sheltered environment and are able to use the local bus service to travel within Canberra

The group considered various models for future housing and identified the Abbeyfield Australia model as likely to be the most suitable and sustainable. Until that time Abbeyfield Australia had only been involved in the provision of affordable aged care housing and two of these houses were already established in Canberra. As a consequence the group sought formal affiliation with Abbeyfield Australia (Inc), and formed Abbeyfield disAbility Act (Inc). The Abbeyfield aged care housing model has been operating in Australia and overseas for many years. It originated in the UK in 1954 as supported housing for older people, and has spread throughout the world. Today there are Abbeyfield houses in many countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Europe.

The Abbeyfield model typically consists of a large dwelling that has 10 ensuite bed sitting rooms, a guest room, and a housekeeper's flat. There are also common areas that include kitchen, dining room, and several shared living areas. This flexibility allows residents to have privacy if they wish or be sociable if they wish. The housekeeper prepares or cooks one or two meals per day, and

keeps the larder stocked. The housekeeper is also responsible for the upkeep of the shared areas of the house. Residents are responsible for preparing their own breakfast, maintaining their own rooms and washing, and for all other aspects of daily living. Funding of the model involves residents contributing a fixed percentage of their Aged Pension entitlement.

Following incorporation with Abbeyfield Australia, Abbeyfield disAbility ACT (Inc.) proceeded to:

- Seek land and funding for the construction of a house for 10 disabled adults, based on the premise that when construction was completed the ACT Government would hand the day to day management of the house to Abbeyfield disAbility ACT (Inc), and as such provide no further financial or administrative support to the house;
- Develop a detailed framework and associated manuals that would support the operation of the house. This included an ongoing financial framework;
- Encourage wider community involvement in the development of the framework for the house.

In 2004 the ACT Government through the then Department of Housing agreed to provide land and funding (approximately \$1.3m) for the construction what was the first house of its kind in Australia. The house was constructed in a quiet suburban street in Curtin and following a formal selection process, 10 residents moved into the newly completed house in late 2006. The house offers support only and no care. Residents must be able to look after themselves and care for their own rooms. Because the residents are deemed to be living in their own homes, they are eligible to access all types of community supports, including Home and Community Care services.

The former Chair of the Management Committee Jacquelyn Landos was appointed to the Board of Abbeyfield Australia in 2010 and is currently a vice Chair of that organisation.

The house has attracted wide interest from groups of parents all over Australia, who see the model as meeting a need that their own sons and daughters have for secure but independent living. The residents are proud to show visitors around their house. Visitors to the house have included groups from Narrabri NSW, Leichardt NSW, Goulburn NSW, Marion South Australia, and Mornington Victoria. The Chief Minister of the ACT, Jon Stanhope, as well as former Federal Disability Ministers Tanya Plibersek and Bill Shorten have visited and had tea with the residents. The NSW Government has agreed to fund construction of a similar house in Goulburn.

Our Experience

The house has now been operating for over 5 years and can be regarded as highly successful in terms of meeting the needs of the residents and their parents. There is a Management Committee that meets 10 times per year and the financial model developed is proving to be sustainable. The funding model is based on each resident contributing around 65% of their Disability Support Pension plus 100% of their Housing Allowance. The income generated is sufficient to pay for all expenses, including utilities, food, housekeepers wages, and to allow for any future maintenance. Some of the residents access community services for transport, home help or other needs.

Since the house has been in operation, parents and the Management Committee have been delighted at the increased level of independence and community access that the residents have attained. It is as though once they have been given a taste of running their own lives; they have grabbed the chance with both hands. Some residents are now doing things that their parents would never have thought possible. Parents credit the supportive nature of the house for this. A care model possibly would have done things for the residents rather than allowing them to try to do what they can for themselves.

Discussion

The Abbeyfield model is an extremely suitable housing option for people with disabilities who do not require extensive care. Residents in an Abbeyfield house are offered support in their daily living, allowing them to be part of their local community, and to live their lives as they wish. The Abbeyfield model is not one that is suitable for all people with disabilities. However, it has proven itself to be an excellent model for mild to moderately disabled people.

The development period leading to the establishment of this house was characterized by strong support from the ACT Housing Department. At the time the ACT Disability Department regarded any house with more than six bedrooms as an institution. Abbeyfield disAbility's view is that an institution is not a building but rather an attitude or state of mind. The ACT disability house is anything but an institution. Its residents come and go as they please. Most of the residents work part time, either in supported or open employment. They all have social activities of their own choosing. They use public buses or other transport to move around according to their wishes. It is interesting that no-one calls the Abbeyfield houses for older people "institutions", and yet the disability house is managed in exactly the same way.

Based on our experience we would support the view that Housing Departments are better placed than Disability Departments to meet the needs of housing for the disabled because of their broad experience in providing housing across a wide range of situations. It is chastening to realize that if funding for the house had been sought from the Department for Disability rather than Housing, then the house would not have been built.

The Abbeyfield House in Curtin would be happy to arrange for an inspection and discussion with the Productivity Commission, as we believe the model which involves a parent / community / Government partnership has considerable merit.

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Yours Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Landos, Vice Chair
The Abbeyfield Society disAbility (ACT) Inc
5 Bannister Gardens
Griffith ACT 2603
Telephone: (02) 62956158