

PLEASE HELP US SAVE CHURINGA My name is Sheevaun McGuirk, I am from Hurstbridge Victoria.

I am writing to you seeking support for my daughter Kristy and the other 160 adult children that attend a centre called 'Churinga St John of God Accord' at 108/130 Diamond Creek Rd in Greensborough, Victoria.

Kristy is 25 y/o however she only has the understanding of about a 6 y/o and if she is unwell then she's like a big 3 y/o. Kristy was born with a chromosome disorder, she is the eldest on record at the Royal Children's Hospital with this particular disorder.

Churinga is the only centre like this in the area for 'special needs adults'. Once they leave their secondary 'special school' setting if they are not capable of working then there are very few options out there for them. They are all intellectually disabled and a lot also have some form of physical disability.

All the 'Special Needs' people that attend Churinga are there because it is the only place we have been able to find that is suitable for our children. We don't have choices of multiply places as very few offer services for those with the lower I.Q. I know when Kristy 1st left school we tried to integrate her into some of the other programs that are being offered by other providers. She could not cope with the travel times and the amount of people that she had to interact with.

You wouldn't put a kindergarden child into a university setting, however that is exactly what the current board of management are trying to do.

Where Churinga is currently situated is on one large parcel of land. It is right off the road so it is safe for them to wander around is also safe for them to get out of a car or taxi safely without fear of being run over. It has multiple buildings and when we 1st started there all the programs were run from the one site.

A few years back a new board of management took over, since then they stopped maintenance on the buildings and grounds and have been outsourcing the programs. They have been slowly moving the programs to other outside providers. They promised us parents that they were going to re-furbish the current site, to bring it back to it's peak quality, hence the reason we went along with the re-programming.

However about 2 months ago we received a note home inviting parents to a meeting. Didn't tell us it was anything important so not too many attended. After much direct questioning the board representative a Mr Tony Holland, informed us that they're now going to close us down and move all our kids off this site to many small different sites. As parents we asked for the reason. Many different ones have been offered, 1st is was that there were not enough 'clients' (that is what they call our children), then it was the cost of transport was too high, then it was there are too many people to care for on this site, now it is that the state of the buildings are too old. Whenever we as parents have asked for information as to what can we do to help the board make this a better site we are being asked to wait. And then a month later told there is nothing we can do.

These 'children' will loose their friendship bases and their foundations. These groups have taken years to build up. These kids can't just get in a car and go to a social activity to meet new people. Their lives are challenging enough, just getting by each day, trying to understand why they can't do other activities that they see other people their own ages doing. You try explaining to your child why they can't drive a car like their sister and brother do, why another adult has to be with them everywhere they go, who "Santa" really is and have them believe you. Kristy still doesn't believe me on this one.

Society may think it is all inclusive but it isn't.

This centre was opened in 1966 to help support the disadvantaged.

These people are the disadvantaged but because they aren't little and cute they often get forgotten and downtrodden. Society doesn't have much to offer them except their own friendship groups that they participate in every day, and with their friends they also do some activities. This is what is going to be taken away from them. Splitting them up onto different sites many suburbs away from each other is not keeping the group together. There are currently about 160 'Adult Children' attending Churinga. There is no-where else large enough to take them all. Their ages range from 18y/o to about 60 y/o. A lot of them don't have anyone capable of standing up for them. Do you know that at Churinga some of the clients formed a band, they are the only group that has ever been invited to perform for the 'United Nations'. Churinga also has a very well known pottery program, selling their hand made pottery items all over Victoria. They have other unique qualities that are being lost by this forced eviction. These are skills that have taken years to build up. By moving the 'clients' they will de-stabilise them and put all of their development back who knows how many years. Please help us put pressure on the board to keep this site and re-develop it for use by our kids and others in similar need.

This area is near on of Melbourne fastest growth corridors and they are just neglecting us for a quicker 'buck' in the western suburbs.

Churinga is an adult placement day centre for the intellectually and physically disabled of our community and the community has not been informed as to what is happening. We started a petition and have already collected over 150 signatures, that is only from my small shop in Hurstbridge. The board of management have kept this a secret from the wider community. This has to be wrong, as they chose to enter the field of 'Special Needs', most people know someone that is touched in some way. This centre has been operating for almost 50 years and they are going to close it without letting the wider community know about it. Please help us spread the word. Other people that we have spoken to do care and do support this centre staying open. The St John of God Accord board of management should give the people & our government the opportunity to purchase it from them. Rather than the board selling the land site to overseas interests for them to make a quick dollar on more housing. Kristy has been in the media previously. Twenty years ago when she was only 5 years old and was going to start primary school the government of the day decided that because she was not a threat to any other child she was not eligible for integration funding. The fact was that she couldn't stand properly or walk without falling over and had very little fine motor control and lots of other stuff. But was very social so I wanted her to have the choice to interact with other children of her age so she could have the opportunity to copy and possibly learn more. So we did the fight, as back then she was very little and she only had 1 eye as she had a permanent eye patch on to try to help her sight, so she made good photo's. However now she is older I shouldn't have to keep fighting for her basic human rights. And this is her Basic Human Right, to attend a centre that she feels safe and secure where she has many friends and there is no outside judgement on their looks and actions. You can't get that 'safe' feeling just anywhere.

I know if this forced eviction does go ahead then she won't be attending at their proposed new sites ,she will be forced into solitary confinement at home watching T.V 5 days a week. That is not what she would choose for herself, however she is not capable of making her own decisions..

Thank you for your time.