

Embargoed until 11:30am, Thursday 26 August 2010

People with disabilities and the closure of residential centres

In 1998, the NSW Government announced that all residential centres housing people with disabilities would close by 2010. Today, over 1,600 people with disabilities in NSW continue to live in residential centres, also known as institutions.

The NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, has today tabled a report that examines this situation and its impact on the lives of people in those centres.

The report draws on extensive work by the Ombudsman in looking at the circumstances of people living in centres operated by Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC), and finds that people with disabilities living in these facilities do not have the same basic rights as other members of the community.

‘People with disabilities are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as the rest of us,’ said Mr Barbour. **‘This includes being able to live in and be part of the community, to choose the way we want to live our lives, and to participate in decisions that affect us.’**

‘However, I have found that this is not currently the case for people with disabilities living in residential centres. The nature of institutional care – including the housing of large numbers of people on one site; segregation of the centres from the broader community; and structured and inflexible routines – restricts fundamental rights and opportunities.’

‘The Government’s decision to close the residential centres is sound, but progress over the past 12 years has been too slow. This situation needs to change as a matter of priority.’

In June, the Ombudsman and the Disability Council of NSW hosted a community forum to discuss progress in closing residential centres, which was attended by close to 300 people. The report outlines the critical messages from the forum that should inform government planning for closure of the centres and the provision of opportunities for people with disabilities to receive support in, and as part of, the community.

The report notes the clear message from people at the community forum that there needs to be genuine partnership with people with disabilities and their families; and real choice from a flexible and wide range of accommodation and support options.

'I note the considerable work underway by ADHC and the NSW Government in planning for the second half of *Stronger Together* – the Government's 10-year plan for improving disability services,' said Mr Barbour. **'The work of my office indicates the critical need for this planning to include the closure of residential centres, and expansion of the range, availability and flexibility of accommodation and support options in the community for people with disabilities.'**