



# “Strathmont”

## Disability Minister Rankine Clears the Air

**MEDIA RELEASE : Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011**

Disability Speaks is pleased to be able to distribute information on key sector issues

As always we are committed to distributing information from all key stakeholders to give a balanced perspective.

The comments below from SA Disability Minister Jennifer Rankine gives the SA Governments perspective on what has been an important debate

It is important to note her comments highlighting the SA government commitment to the “2009 Person Centred Active Support Model”

The future of Strathmont must be decided by the clients who live there, not academics, minority advocates or Disability SA employees

Whilst the Minister makes some very valid and impressive points many in the sector will look forward to the day when an announcement is made on the final redeployment of the sixty six clients still living onsite. Disability Speaks would like to thank the Minister and her media advisor John Fullwood for taking the time to draft this response below.

## Strathmont

The recent media attention on Strathmont regrettably confuses arguments on bricks and mortar with the level of care residents receive. Whilst the infrastructure was built forty years ago, the standard of care clients receive is higher today than it ever was.

I won't pretend Strathmont looks like many other government buildings built in the 1970's. In its heyday it catered for over 600 people, but since then a concerted effort has been made to improve the delivery of accommodation offered to South Australians with an intellectual disability. Most importantly, work at Strathmont is winding down.

In 2005, the Rann Government commenced Stage One of the *Strathmont Centre Redevelopment and Community Living Project*. This has relocated residents to purpose-built group homes in the community and also provided sustainment work on three of the five remaining villas. An additional

\$6.7 million in recurrent funds and more than \$20 million in capital funds was made available to assist people to move from Strathmont back into the community.

So far 146 residents have moved to purpose-built houses throughout Adelaide with 66 people remaining.

No corners are being cut on the level of care for the remaining residents. Whilst many have moved out, staffing levels have not been reduced at the same level. It means that, current staff ratios are higher than they have ever been and we intend to maintain them at that level.

Clients still living there participate in a range of activities during the day and early evening. These include vocational and pre-vocational programs and day options provided by non-government providers. Residents also enjoy a range of everyday activities in the community with support from staff, such as the cinema, dining out, indoor bowling, bike riding and walks in parks and beaches.

Volunteer services hold bingo, music, singing and "drop-in" sessions for up to 20 residents, 3-4 times per week with support from recreation staff.

More recently a new program has been brought in that tailors recreation and leisure activities such as ten-pin bowls, fishing and cooking according to the individual preferences of residents.

Since 2005, more than \$5 million has been spent on improving amenity for residents and ensuring all buildings remain habitable and safe. All residents now have their own bedrooms (originally residents slept in single, double or triple rooms), the common areas of the living and dining rooms have been redecorated and good heating and cooling systems exist. Over \$800,000 was spent on maintenance work in 2009/10 and over \$1 million will be spent this financial year.

A business case is underway looking at the most effective way to house the remaining residents in appropriate accommodation. Significant work has already been undertaken in assessing residents' support needs, compatibility, support infrastructure and housing solutions to develop capital and recurrent financial options. These options are being considered as part of the Department for Families and Community's Master Planning process.

I was very concerned about the content of the recent Sunday Mail article, which among other things contained photographs of disused areas where villas were demolished more than 10 years ago and is an area is no longer used by residents.

Of more concern is the media taking photographs of residents who are unable to give consent.

Strathmont is institutionalised care- a model that was acceptable in its day, but now considered inappropriate. I acknowledge that for some a different model of care is going to be needed, that isn't in dispute. As this matter progresses, my department will be working closely with families to deliver the best outcome for each individual.

The Government also embraces the delivery of services in a client centred manner. In December 2009, I launched the *Person Centred Active Support Model*. This ensures residents are involved in the day to day running of their house and the support which they receive in their home and community.

There is always more work to do to improve disability services- Strathmont is no exception. We must however not confuse an argument about bricks and mortar with the level of care clients receive. Whilst the brickwork comes from a bygone era, the standard of care clients receive within is higher today than it ever was.

End

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