

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY

“Adequacy of existing residential care arrangements available for young people with severe physical, mental or intellectual disabilities in Australia”



Name: Vicky Smith

I am happy for my submission to be made public

Signature:

My name is Vicky Marie Smith. I lived in a nursing home for twenty-three years. I finally got my wish, and was able to move into a house in Bendigo. The house is run by Healthscope, and I share the house with seven other people. Even though they are all males I don't feel out of it at all and I thoroughly enjoy living there.

I was involved in a car crash on the 29th October 1986, I was only sixteen. I have a brain injury, but I still have a brain – at least most of the time! After the accident I received a payout and that's how I am funded.

Term of Reference (d) the appropriateness of the aged care system for care of young people with serious and/or permanent mental or physical disabilities

The shock of going into a nursing home

I was 16 ½ when I went into the nursing home. I was scared and it was bloody awful. I was in a room with five other people, women and men. It was like a hospital room, three beds on one side, three on the other. There were just partitions between our beds. The others snored and I couldn't sleep. I was always crying. I thought how on earth am I going to cope. It was hard in the beginning. I was always telling the other residents to shut up, they were talking loudly because they were deaf, my hearing was ok, but they would yell. It was heart breaking, I felt really gut wrenched. I was feeling nervous, I was the only young person there.

Friendships and death



My first friend in the nursing home was a smoker, and of course I wanted a smoke, I could see her smoking so I got myself a packet of smokes and went and joined her, she was tops. That was how I started meeting people. I am the type of person who cares about people.

But every time I made friends with the old people, they died. The worst thing in the world was loosing friends who were in the same ward. When someone dies, you can smell death. It was so scary, loosing all your loved ones. You get to love all the old people, I especially loved my fiancé David who also lived in the nursing home.

A day in my nursing home life

I only had a shower every second day, I had a bed wash on the other days and had to share the toilet chair with others, it was gross. I never felt clean. I felt disgusting.

I went out every day, mostly next door to the shopping centre. I was hit by a car, four times over the years but that didn't stop me going out, you couldn't stop me going out! Rain hail or snow I went out! The staff didn't mind me going out so much, they couldn't wait to get rid of me! If I didn't go out at night, I was put to bed at 6:30pm, that was so boring, so I went out as many nights as I could. One morning I got home at 4am, I got really told off that morning.

Term of Reference (f) options, consequences and considerations of young people with disability moving out of residential aged care?

I went around Ballarat with a petition getting signatures – it said I wanted to get out of the nursing home and that there should be a place for young people. I got more than 200 signatures. I even went to the local paper.

It took many years to get out of the nursing home, but I'm a fighter through and through – you can't tell me no, I proved that. I was excited and overjoyed, as happy as a pig-in-shit when I heard I could move out of the nursing home. My only worry about moving was what would happen if the new place kicked me out?

Looking into the future

It hurts to know there are still other young people living in nursing homes, and waiting to go into nursing homes. I find that very upsetting. Why can't we think more about young people going into aged care facilities. I've been there and I know what it's like and I worked so hard to get myself out of the nursing home, and since that day came I haven't been happier. There need to be more places for young people to live.

I would feel relieved if I didn't have to worry about my funding. My payout was a lump sum and I don't know how far the money will get me. It's unfair that my accident happened before TAC came in. Its awful to think that the money may run out, and I live in fear that one day I will need to move out from where I am living because of this.

I hope that what I've written helps people see what it was like for me in a nursing home. I am not only thinking of myself. I do care about other disabled people, its shameful they are in nursing homes. I am fighting for not just me now but them too.

I have a digital story, which you can view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-N5vvxgh8Y>