

My name is Kirrily Hayward, am 27 years old, and am living in a nursing home, merely to receive treatment for a stage 4 pressure wound, that until now, health services have not taken much responsibility for. I was born with spina bifida, a neural tube defect of the spine, and have used a wheelchair since the age of nine as a result. Up until my admission into hospital, and subsequently into a nursing home thereafter, a place for which I have remained for over 2 and a bit years now. An environment, where as a young person in her 20s on a daily basis, witnessing end of life circumstance, intimidating challenging behaviours of older residents, and loss of dignity and privacy to a large extent.

As we know, there are over 6500 young people Australia wide stranded within the aged care system, and more that are potentially at risk of admission. In Geelong alone, there are over 120 young people living in aged care. This situation, in this day and age, in the year 2015 is completely and utterly unacceptable. I am lucky in the sense that I am well and truly able to access my community, albeit via means that to a point take away my independence. Yet, I see many young people that can't altogether, or need extensive assistance in order to do so. Most dwindle away in princess chairs, or isolated and hidden away in their own rooms, bored and suffering from loneliness. One recent case I've witnessed, has absolutely broken my heart. Hearing the story, of someone who had lost communication with family and peers, due to lack of understanding (sign language). Yet, seeing this young person's smile and laugh when enjoying a meal I cooked for the residents warmed my heart.

To in part, quote the famous Martin Luther King quote. I have a dream. I have a dream that all people with a disability can eventually live in an equal and just society, recognising us as one in the same. To live a life free of most hardships, discrimination and so forth. I dream of a society that we all have equal opportunity, to be the best versions of ourselves and reach our full potential. To be fully included within society, making meaningful contribution to the world around us, via our individual interests and hopes. I have a dream that we, as people with disabilities can feel free to be ourselves, and to express ourselves, feelings, thoughts and most importantly, be free to be who we are, without fear of judgement or harm. Most importantly, though, I have a dream that people with disabilities and those with long term illness can live in appropriate housing, that supports all needs, that is safe, and that people can have a close and meaningful connection to and within their community, enabling them to maintain family connections, relationships and friendships. For young people to have the aspects that are taken for granted in one's life, such as, the right to privacy.

The time is now for change, a revolution of sorts. Young people have dwindled far too long in inappropriate living conditions. We hear constantly of 'budget emergencies' and so called 'deficits'. We, as young people with disabilities are no longer interested in excuses that continue to hamper the efforts of the cause at hand, for many decades. The implementation of ideals in amongst the concept of institutionalisation at such a late stage, is horrendous, and quite frankly terrifying.

I sincerely hope, that as a voice for these marginalised groups, that from this submission, we not only see recommendation, but strategies implemented in order to create the revolution. I repeat, the time is now, we are counting on you, the government, to be a solid ally in this war.