



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

LIVING WITH DISABILITY
RESEARCH CENTRE

It's A Lonely World Out There

Deinstitutionalisation and the Closure of the Kew Cottages

Dr David Henderson and Professor Christine Bigby

Introduction

The Kew Cottages is the last of Victoria's 19th Century institutions for people with intellectual disabilities and it belongs in the past.

Jeff Kennett. *The Australian*, 7 September 1999.

Deinstitutionalisation in Victoria

- Evans Report – 1978. Recommends complete reorganisation of services for people with intellectual disabilities. Urges the Victorian government to commit to the ‘provision of residential services other than in large scale institutions’.
- St Nicholas – First institution to close. Closed in 1985.
- Caloola (Sunbury) and Mayday Hills (Beechworth) closed in 1992.
- Aradale (Ararat) closed 1993.
- Janefield and Kingsbury closed in 1996.
- Pleasant Creek (Stawell) closed in 1998.
- Between 1978 and 1999 the number of residents living in large scale congregate care facilities fell from 4,439 in 1978 to 873 in 1999

St Nicholas – A precursor to the closure of Kew Cottages

Four guiding principles underpinned the closure of St Nicholas:

1. People with intellectual disabilities had the right to live in the community.
2. Irrespective of the level of their disability that right should stand.
3. Such people should have access to a day programme located somewhere beyond their place of residence and access to generic services (as distinct from specialist services) wherever possible.
4. Care provided by staff in any newly established community residential unit (CRU) should be family-like, rather than custodial.

Bracks Government – Commits to closure

- Announcement of closure of the Kew Cottages – 4 May 2001.
- 462 residents living on site.
- \$100 Million redevelopment.
- Every cent made from the disposal of this property would be channelled back into disability services
- ‘Closing the Kew Cottages will be a fantastic step on the road to deinstitutionalisation’. Steve Bracks. *Herald Sun*, 5 May 2001, 7.

Parent Opposition

The Kew Cottages has become an epic battle ground for one of the great social conflicts of our time. On one side is the Victorian government and numerous social policy experts who are in favour of institution busting, and who are seeking to dismantle the last vestiges of an era when disabled people were hidden away. On the other side is a group of parents concerned about their children, and about whether they can ever live a good life outside the cloistered walls of Kew.

The Australian, 6 August 2003, 6.

The End of Era

- The process involved with closing the Kew Cottages and relocating its residents into the community was not dissimilar to the process of closing any other institution.
- *Kew News*. Keeps stakeholders up to date with progress of the redevelopment
- 6 October 2002. First group of residents relocated to a new home in Doncaster East.
- The whole process of relocating 360 residents to new homes in the community took just over four years.
- The final group of residents – five men in their 40s and 50s – moved into their new home in Ivanhoe in August 2006.

Conclusion

‘If we had waited to get everything right it might never have happened at all’.

Alma Adams, interview with Christine Bigby, 2007.

‘I’m very happy here... I’ve got my keys and my own bedroom’.

Ralph Dawson, former resident, interview with Corrine Manning, 2006.



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

LIVING WITH DISABILITY
RESEARCH CENTRE

THANK YOU