

Inquiry into the provision and regulation of supported accommodation in Queensland

Submission No: 194

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Publication:

Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

█████ was put in institutionalised care in 1978, when he was 2 years old, as his parents decided he would be better off in Brisbane because there were no appropriate services in Central Queensland.

From the age of 2 until 18, █████ was “imprisoned” in a children’s home for children with cerebral palsy run by Choice, Passion, Life – formerly Cerebral Palsy League (CPL). █████ said that, during this time, he didn’t have the right to have friends visit and did not have the right to privacy because he was housed in a room with 6 other children. █████ said that there were pros and cons to the situation but the older he got the worse it got. To this day, he does not eat leftovers or burnt toast because he was made to eat stale food 90% of the time at the home. █████ said that they used to make him eat food that was powdered, and every meal consisted of the staff asking the children whether they were going to use the bathroom. Children were also made to say grace each mealtime – if they didn’t, they were sent to their room without dinner. Showers were not private as 6-8 other people were showering in the same space at the same time. He said that he was forced to share a room with 6 other people who were supported to go to the bathroom on commode chairs at 2 in the morning. Staff would turn on the lights waking everybody else up.

█████ said that CPL claimed to have a duty of care over him and used to tell him what to do because they were white, and he was Aboriginal. As he got older, he had less and less contact with his family. His mother only wrote him four letters throughout the time he was there and never phoned him.

█████ said that the physical punishment he used to receive did not bother him, but the emotional punishment really affected him. He ended up living with well over 4000 kids from his early life to 18 years old and the emotional toll got harder as he got older. The children’s home was a 72-bed facility and the closest thing he had to family connection during that time was sharing the experiences with other people in similar situations.

For the majority of his schooling, █████ went to a “special school” that opened up across the road from the home. █████ said that he hated school with a passion and never did any homework because he was not supported to do so. █████ said that the result of merely walking across the road to a school full of other children with disabilities meant that they just became a part of an entrenched cocoon like community – he never got to leave the facility besides the pathway to and from school. He also said that he was not prepared or assisted to prepare to transition from special school to mainstream school – he “left one set of friends and wheeled himself into a hornet’s nest”.

█████ said that he asked for guidance with transitioning between schools from the staff he lived with and asked to speak to a child psychologist, but he was denied this request. He said he did not like people staring at him or talking about him. He spoke about being driven around in a vehicle that was labelled “Queensland Spastic Vehicle”. He did not like being forced to be included in things. He spent most of his time rebelling and doing things he was not meant to do because he knew he could get away with it. He spoke about becoming friendly with kitchen staff at 10 years old because they could make the food better for him. He spoke of mainly eating fruits because it was the freshest foods he had access to and most food they were served was frozen in June and served the following February. He knows of at least 50-100 people who were force fed, some of whom are no longer living, some are. Some are still being treated that way by their service providers. At the children’s home, CPL staff would hold their head back by the forehead by pushing their eyelids to force feed mashed food. There was no dignity in that. Most of the individuals who were treated like that were non-verbal, which allowed the perpetrators to get away with it. There were also only 2 staff for every 20 people so there was never enough oversight. Despite this, █████ always wanted to get to know the staff because that was his only connection to the outside world.

█████ was physically abused in institutions and said that he felt targeted because he was Aboriginal – others would feel that he was getting preferential treatment because of being Aboriginal. His belongings were constantly stolen, and the staff never did anything in response. He said he was also severely physically assaulted by one of the Matrons of the home.

█████ said that there were enforced community outings where they were packed into the buses at 7am regardless of weather (raining or windy). They went to places where the kids did not want to be, and he felt that they were being stared at because there were 72 people with disabilities with horrible mats and volunteers. Instead of trying to get to know the people they were supporting, volunteers participated because they wanted to feel good about themselves and they always spoke to the children in a very patronising manner. █████ said that he had all of his food pureed because the staff “Were not sure how he would go with chicken bones” because of his disability. He said that he picked up the plate and dumped the food on the ground and he had to explain to the principal that he was not happy with being forced to eat pureed food while his classmates were treated differently.

Girls and boys were separated in the home, and they were not able to speak to each other because the staff were concerned they would talk about sex. The girls and boys had 2 bathrooms each. The girls’ hot water system would break down often and the 72 children had to pile into one bathroom.

█████ said that the boys could not walk past the girls’ bathroom without permission because the doors needed to be left open when you showered. That meant that the kids could not go to their bedroom because they would have to walk past bathrooms with females in it with open doors.

█████ said that they used to charge him his entire pension to live there and eat “that crap” (food). He spoke about being moved to a supported living across the road when he was 20, which CPL owned as well. He spoke of there being 4 units but only 2 were used. He said that he had no idea how to pay bills because he was never taught or shown, and he had never been able to try steak. He said in high school he was left to his own devices, but he was still under the thumb of an institution. He spoke of how people are still being charged 90-95 percent of their pension to cover the costs of accommodation, food, and services. He said that back then, CPL was a little better but feels that now it has gone downhill based on what people contacting him are letting him know. He spoke of people who have died in the care of this provider in the last 6 months. He said that people are surprised that he is able to live independently without being connected to a provider. He said that he has a plan manager to assist him, and he authorises the payments. He said he only employs contractors and never accesses anyone from an agency – he doesn’t even trust small groups. This is a direct result of having lived in the CPL home. █████ commented that people in group homes don’t get to leave on their own to even get a coffee and they don’t have a choice in who is employed to be support staff. █████ also raised concerns that support workers don’t have good enough standards and don’t even have the minimum skills to cook meals.

When █████ turned 16, he was moved to a CPL run complex in Fig Tree Pocket. After this he lived in housing commission and then with different friends, including in the garage of a friend’s family home. He only had a support worker every other day to shower, change and eat, but █████ advised that even this was preferable than living in the group home.

█████ spoke of not doing much with his time in his adulthood because he doesn’t like spending time with people, after his time in the group home. He said that he is focused on changing the system for other people so that no one else has to deal with what he went through. █████ has tried to get away from his past but he never can.