

Big Test Looms in DHS Row

Sunday Herald Sun, Melbourne, Victoria

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February 20, 2011

The family of an autistic man with Down syndrome has launched a human rights test case against the Department of Human Services and three of its senior disability workers after specialist care was withdrawn, leaving the man unable to communicate.

Colby Hickey, 24, was able to shower himself, cook meals, study at TAFE and play football while he was receiving intensive one-on-one support.

His specialist care was withdrawn by DHS at the start of 2009 and he has been cared for by staff untrained in managing autistic behaviour and who do not know how to use his laptop to allow him to speak.

Mr Hickey can no longer shower himself, cook or participate in community life.

A complaint was lodged last week in the Australian Human Rights Commission, after negotiations broke down and DHS ordered Mr Hickey be removed from his apartment tomorrow and institutionalised in a group home.

The complaint alleges three senior DHS staff "abandoned their own internal policies".

The complaint also alleges an advocate of Mr Hickey's was told negotiations had ended because an antidiscrimination advocate had become involved in the case and his family called on the media for help

Mr Hickey's adoptive mother, Jane Hickey, has been fighting DHS through the courts for two years to have his specialist care reinstated. She said she felt she was being punished for advocating for the best life for her son, who was "terrified" of being institutionalised after previous, traumatic experiences.

"There's only a \$3 difference per hour between superb care and no care and, to me, to deny him that is madness," Ms Hickey said.

LISA Comment: The failure of DHS/DS/DAS management to properly manage their direct care services within the direction, intention and spirit of departmental care policies, standards and values, commonly sees the retention of the traditional minder care philosophy so common in institutional settings.

If Mr Hickey is moved into a traditional DHS group home, he can expect his quality of life to further decline where quality of life activities (interaction, developmental and social activities - person centred active support) takes a very second place to "Basic Minder Care".

Departmental supported accommodation group homes are almost totally dependent on direct care staff integrity, rather than management direction, for proper quality of life care. Mr Hickey would, therefore, be very lucky not to return to his previous traumatic experiences of institutional style basic minder care, if moved into DHS direct care services.

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NOTE: We are always interested in feedback and information; general, specific, good or bad. If you wish anonymously: Our mail address is 73 Nepean Street, Watsonia, 3087