

# Keep Churinga open!

Parents fear hub plan 'unstable'  
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By Raelene Wilson, June 1, 2011

The parents of 140 disabled adults are fighting to save a Greensborough employment centre from closure.

St John of God Accord last week confirmed plans to close its Churinga centre which caters to adults with an intellectual disability, and move clients to smaller "hubs" at St Helena, Greensborough and South Morang.

Chief executive Tony Hollamby said the organisation wanted to modernise its service and move to integrate clients into more community-based centres over the next 18 months.

"The model for disability services has changed in the past 10 to 20 years," Mr Hollamby said. "The delivery of programs in these kinds of centres, seen as valuable in the past, has not been community inclusive."

Jim Pilakis, whose daughter Renee, 25, has attended the centre for four years, said Churinga had the potential to be a "premium" centre for disability services in Melbourne.

Mr Pilakis said parents had appealed to Accord management to keep the centre open in a bid to provide stability for their children. "Most disabled children don't like change," Mr Pilakis said. "Under this plan they'll be moved into an unstable environment and will be separated from their friends. "There is not a single parent who wants this."

But Mr Hollamby said most of Churinga's clients already worked off-site, with only 30-40 attending the centre daily. He said the centre's buildings were in poor condition and that it would take a "significant injection of capital" to redevelop the 8.65ha site.

Any decisions about selling the site located on prime real estate at the intersection of the Greensborough bypass and Diamond Creek Rd, rested with the organisation's board of management, he said. Mr Hollamby guaranteed that all existing staff at Churinga would keep their jobs.