

# Who cares for abused?



Watsonia couple Tony and Heather Tregale are behind disability support and lobby group LISA.

## AT A GLANCE

- According to the Department of Health there are 163 registered privately operated supported residential services in Victoria.
  - Services in supported accommodation include household management, personal care and personal hygiene.
  - People living in such accommodation must meet criteria set out under the Disability Act.
- Source: Department of Health, Department of Human Services.

Picture: SUSAN WINDHILLER N16DV900

## RISING VIOLENCE IN DISABILITY HOMES A CONCERN

By Megan Bailey, Diamond Valley Leader

A disability support and lobby group says it needs more members to make its voice heard.

For families of disabled people living in care homes, many of whom can't speak or communicate, there can be a nagging fear that their loved one is not being looked after as they should be.

This is why Watsonia couple Tony and Heather Tregale believe their group, Lifestyle in Supported Accommodation, is so important.

The group aims to empower families of people with disabilities to fight and expose abuse and other problems in the system.

After their autistic son Paul, 36, went to live in supported accommodation, Mrs Tregale spent years working "undercover" in the disability sector and said she saw many cases of ill treatment and abuse.

"A lot of the problem is that people are afraid of intimidation, families fear for their family members behind closed doors and what will be taken out on them if they complain," Mr Tregale said.

Mary Dight's 50-year-old son has lived in a care home since he was 26. She said she joined the group after a government-supported parents group she was part of fell apart.

Mrs Dight, from Sunbury, said she wanted the Government to be more pro-active in dealing with complaints, as it could take years to resolve an allegation of abuse.

"One thing I am hearing a lot from parents is that they are afraid to die; they think 'once I am gone, who is going to be the watchdog?'" she said.

The Community Visitors Annual Report, which was released last Wednesday, found the incidence of violence, abuse and assaults in supported residential services had increased 66 per cent from last year.

The findings came from volunteers who made 924 visits to 171 facilities (Eight had since closed since the start of the year). Community Visitors are empowered by law to enter Victorian accommodation facilities for the frail/aged and people with a disability or mental illness.

Community Visitors chair Colleen Pearce said: "SRS (Supported Residential Services) do not provide nursing or high-care support, nor are they mental health facilities, and yet many accommodate people with complex physical and mental health needs without funding or support."

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