

Submission to Productivity Commission for Mental Health, 29 March

I would like to bring to your attention a situation where an organisation sub-contracted by [REDACTED] is misusing limited rural resources and ignoring local community concerns and fragility.

I am a resident of a small local farming community [REDACTED]. Our community has faced considerable hardship as a result of the drought and some of us are in a very vulnerable mental state for a number of reasons.

[REDACTED], a group home provider contracted (by [REDACTED]) to provide housing for high care [REDACTED] recently secretly bought a house [REDACTED]. They have acted in a manner that can only be described as grossly negligent for a number of reasons I will attempt to outline below:

I am aware that the job [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have is a very difficult one and that you both perform vital roles with limited resources. This however is not a reason for either organisation to cut corners and not have adequate policies and procedures in place to ensure the best outcomes for [REDACTED] in need and not adversely affect community stakeholders.

First and foremost, [REDACTED] have a contract with [REDACTED] to role out these facilities in [REDACTED] which are large regional centres. An isolated property between [REDACTED] is NOT [REDACTED] or in its immediate area. This area simply does not have the access to services that are required by this facility.

[REDACTED] recently purchased a house in our quiet isolated lane without any community consultation or due diligence given it is a rural area with very different issues and concerns. They have acted in a manner that can only be described as grossly negligent for a number of reasons I will attempt to outline below. They have not previously rolled out a service in an area surrounded by working farms and after our meeting with them on [REDACTED] night it is clear they have limited understanding of what significant issues this raises.

We are a small local farming community [REDACTED]. Our community has faced considerable hardship as a result of the drought and some of us are in a very vulnerable mental state for a number of reasons.

The [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] stated in our meeting on [REDACTED] night that this house was purchased quickly, without any risk assessment for reasons I am unable to understand as it had been on the market for a considerable time frame. [REDACTED] advised us that they look for 'quiet', 'homely' [REDACTED] houses and was not able to give us any reason why such a house close to [REDACTED] was not chosen. There are many available and they would not result in all the extra concerns [REDACTED]. A [REDACTED] bedroom house close to [REDACTED] would also be a much more efficient use of limited resources such as the therapists required by this facility.

Some services required by these facilities are simply not available in our community such as a local 24 hour manned police station, a hospital, crisis support, therapists, mental health out of hours services. Our lane is difficult to locate on some GPS's [REDACTED], these factors are exacerbated at night. What happens if a house manager needs urgent back up crisis support in the middle of the night and the local [REDACTED] police

station is unattended? This is a significant risk and concern for the [REDACTED] clients, staff and surrounding residents.

The nearest hospital is in [REDACTED], should a [REDACTED] or staff member require one. Given the difficulty people often face finding our house at night on their GPS systems, I would not like to depend on a timely response if an ambulance is required to be dispatched from [REDACTED]. This is also made complicated if we are lucky enough to have received significant rain which can make our [REDACTED] difficult to manoeuvre.

The water supply of this property is unreliable, this will need to be trucked in, this is an extra cost [REDACTED] did not consider prior to purchase as the [REDACTED] was unaware of this at our meeting.

The area surrounding this house is surrounded by working farms which pose many risks for [REDACTED] in care that both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] representatives indicated to us at our meeting they had not yet considered but are still happy to approve the house and forge ahead with the decision and for all we know may already have approved the location, again without any adequate risk assessment:

1. If/when a [REDACTED] jumps over a fence and disappears, it is very hard to locate them. This is a farming area where, just last year a [REDACTED] had a psychotic episode and was not found for nearly [REDACTED] days with police and community looking for [REDACTED]. This is not a major risk factor in residential areas.

2. If/when a [REDACTED] leaves the premises un-supervised they could be on any nearby farm. Whilst guns are required by law to be locked away. Some of these [REDACTED] may have ways and means of breaking into these empty houses. This would not be a significant concern in a residential area.

3. The working farms surrounding this property, routinely shot pest animals at night, is this a therapeutic attribute for the traumatised [REDACTED]? Again, at our meeting with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] no-one had even considered this.

4. The surrounding working farms in our immediate area have the following easily accessible hazards that are not present in a residential area: unfenced dams, poisonous chemicals in un lockable sheds, farm machinery, chainsaws, quad bikes, tractors, farm utes etc. These are working farms, farmers routinely leave the keys in vehicles because of our isolated location. This does not appear to be of concern to [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] staff who are relying on their policies and procedures to be water tight which we believe is totally unrealistic and putting these at risk [REDACTED] at further risk of harm. Again this was not considered before the purchase of the property as the [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] in the meeting [REDACTED] nights ago was obviously very unfamiliar with how working farms operate. Are the local farmers liable if a traumatised [REDACTED] cuts themselves on a fence or drowns in a dam?

These are all valid reasons why a property closer to [REDACTED] with back up support services should have been purchased to best meet the needs and safety of [REDACTED] clients and staff of the home. There are many reasons also why our rural, isolated location poses unique risks to the community stakeholders surrounding the property:

1. We are an area of working farms, many city people do not realise that the reality of this is that farmers work ALL day. In practice this means primary aged school children get

themselves to and from school bus stops, in to their houses after school ALONE. This is not ideal and it would be wonderful if farming parents were being supported more to get through these tough times but this is the harsh reality. This however is usually an ok risk as these are sensible farm kids mostly who know how to look after themselves. They are not however equipped to deal with traumatised [REDACTED], who may stray from this [REDACTED] house. Who is there in our government who actually cares about our innocent farm kids? Should a facility such as this be on a remote rural school bus route? [REDACTED] have communicated to us that these [REDACTED] could have violent histories or even pose possible sex offence risks?

2. These [REDACTED] will be issued with mobile phones, which given our remote location makes us very vulnerable to and associates that are called and subsequently brought to [REDACTED]. These risks and concerns would not be an issue for a community closer to services. We do not have a 24hour police station if anything happens out here. My house does not even have phone coverage inside the house when the unreliable internet is down. What am I meant to do to protect myself and [REDACTED] if a violent [REDACTED] hops over the fence? What if they call undesirable friends in [REDACTED]? Staff at the property are given a 'panic' room, what are we given? Many neighbouring properties are old, easily broken into farm houses.

3. Because we are a farming area, many farmers are severely stressed with the drought. They are struggling to pay enormous debts. If one troubled [REDACTED] wanders onto their property next door and even simply leaves a gate open for stock, this can mean a whole years income is lost. Will [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] pay compensation to farmers who suffer financial losses due to this operation?

4. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have shown no concern or compassion for the fact that there are [REDACTED] childhood trauma victims directly affected by this proposal. My neighbour was the victim of a horrendous crime when [REDACTED] a child [REDACTED]. My own childhood left me with severe trauma that I was coping with prior to this situation causing severe impacts. I have included below for your reference my early correspondence with [REDACTED] which they proceeded to ignore. Please bear in mind that as a result of their actions I was in a very fragile state of mind when I wrote them.

[REDACTED] continued to hide from our local community for [REDACTED] weeks before being coerced by our small local council into a meeting with immediate residents. In the meantime this has caused enormous stress to be placed on an already very fragile community. The last [REDACTED] weeks have been resulted in a mental crisis for me personally do due my childhood trauma and requirements for a very specific 'safe' place to live. This group home directly violates my right to feel safe and [REDACTED] at great risk of a cycle of fear not being broken. Prior to [REDACTED] purchasing this property I was able to re-assure myself in difficult moments that I live [REDACTED], where I know all my neighbours, why on earth would anyone choose [REDACTED]? Now I will have every reason to believe all sorts of scenarios some of which people will say are not rational. Anyone who has personally experienced severe childhood trauma knows it is not rational and that each and everyone of us finds our best way to cope with the damage we are left with. Mine is this home, this community and I am doing my absolute best to give my children the childhood I didn't have. [REDACTED] are fully aware of this and have communicated to my husband that it is not their job to care for the neighbours whilst the operate their business, stating that this might be 'my journey'. I [REDACTED] am facing an enormous struggle on a day to day basis as a direct result of their inappropriate and

under-researched purchase of this property. Is this really the type of organisation we should be trusting with the care of those [REDACTED] in a vulnerable state?

Our local [REDACTED] Priest has great concerns for our small community as he is acutely aware of the consequences this drought is having on people in this area. He rang the [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] to express these. He stated to them that he has more appropriately located houses available that they could use but the [REDACTED] ignored this offer and proceeded to ignore his concerns.

Should [REDACTED] be allowed by [REDACTED] to waste precious funds, cut corners and destroy small communities without any government ministers holding them to account? Does it take more farmers pushed to the brink to commit suicide before someone in a position of power does something? Who is making sure organisations are making efficient use of limited resources and not causing more harm than good. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This organisation has purchased a property in a remote rural location without any due diligence and with total disregard for the local farming community. Our small community has been battling the drought and other issues and has been pushed to our very limits by [REDACTED] and the failure of [REDACTED] to act and respond to any of our concerns.

[REDACTED] complaints simply refer us back to [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] representatives sent to our meeting on [REDACTED] did not even both to take notes when legitimate concerns were raised. They have not been able to address the vast majority of our questions and concerns due to our rural location and seem to be 'making it up as they go along'. What is the point of having policies in place if [REDACTED] does not hold their service providers to account. At the meeting the [REDACTED] representatives indicated that they are so desperate that they would accept 'any house' from [REDACTED], whilst I recognise their desperation is this really how they should be operating. Surely they should be demanding that [REDACTED] as a service provider, conducts meaningful risk assessments, access to services and area evaluations prior to randomly purchasing properties that are simply not appropriate or safe for the staff and [REDACTED] in care. It appears that someone in [REDACTED] made a quick and unprofessional purchase decision and they are now trying to come up with safety policies and procedures to try and make the best of a bad decision. They should however acknowledge that there are many factors they failed to take into account prior to purchase and put the property back on the market. Then they can find a more suitable property without the additional risks and complications, close to [REDACTED] with access to the services they require as their contract with [REDACTED] is meant to require.

[REDACTED] gave [REDACTED] this contract to be rolled out in regional centres like [REDACTED] because these centres have resources. They did not specify small rural farming communities with our local village [REDACTED], no public transport, no hospital, a one man 'sometimes police station', a stop on demand train station (recently opened) and two pubs.

No amount of community consultation will undo what damage [REDACTED] have already done. It is far too little too late and they need to have someone hold them to account and make them walk away from this ill informed decision. I have genuine fears for the mental state of myself and others in my small community and I am not sure we can bear being pushed any further by this ruthless organisation.

I really hope you are able to give this situation the proper consideration it requires. I apologise if I have rambled a bit, I am severely sleep deprived at the moment.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,
yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]