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MEDIA RELEASE

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY DESERVE BETTER THAN NURSING HOMES

Young Australians with an acquired brain injury are more disconnected from their communities when living in aged care nursing homes than group homes according to new research published by Monash University and Di Winkler - Director of Building Better Lives.

Building Better Lives is a collaborative project that is raising awareness and developing alternatives to young people living in nursing homes.

Currently there are two service systems in place depending on how young Australians are injured. Those who sustain their brain injury in a car or at work have access to rehabilitation and life-time support, while those who sustain their brain injury from an aneurysm, stroke, near drowning, severe asthma attack, assault or drug overdose are dependent on publically funded health, rehabilitation and disability services.

The study compared 128 people with acquired brain injury (ABI) living in 'group homes' in the community with 61 young people with ABI living in nursing homes. Most of the people with ABI living in group homes were funded by the Transport Accident Commission.

The study found that the two groups had a similar level of disability. However, compared to those in nursing homes, the people living in group homes went outside more often, participated more often in community-based leisure activities and visited friends and family more often.

The findings of the study is highlighted in the case of Michelle Newland, who was 19 years old when she suffered a near-fatal asthma attack, which resulted in a severe brain injury. Michelle spent 18 months in an old age nursing home, most of her time spent lying in bed because there was so little to do. As a result, Michelle became increasingly isolated from her peers.

"Young people just don't belong in nursing homes," Miss Newland said.

"In Australia today we have a grossly unfair system that can mean a dramatically different outcome for anyone that has an acquired brain injury," Ms Di Winkler - Director of Building Better Lives said.

"Michelle demonstrates the potential of people with an acquired brain injury and the value of investing in them. Through her hard work and the tenacity and support of her parents, she has regained her continence, re-learned to talk, swallow, read, dress, walk and swim. She would never have realised her potential languishing in a nursing home and she hasn't finished yet."

Ms Winkler said the national insurance scheme for long-term disability care and support would assist to address the inequity in the current system.

The productivity commission is due to make recommendations regarding a national disability insurance scheme in July 2011.

Summary of findings

- Many people with ABI in group homes require a significant level of support with 48 people of people requiring 24 hour assistance or supervision.
- People with ABI in group homes were highly dependent on paid staff for many of their basic needs including continence management (41 per cent), communicating basic needs (34 per cent), assistance with meals (30 per cent) and assistance to move in bed (20 per cent).
- People with ABI living in group homes required a similar level of support to young people in nursing homes.
- People with ABI living in group homes went outside more often, participated in community-based leisure activities, and visited friends more often than young people with ABI living in nursing homes.
- There was no significant difference between the two groups in the frequency of visits to the facility from relatives and friends.

For further information or interview contact Di Winkler on 0412 248 519. Case studies and photos available. For further information about Building Better Lives, visit www.buildingbetterlives.org.au.

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