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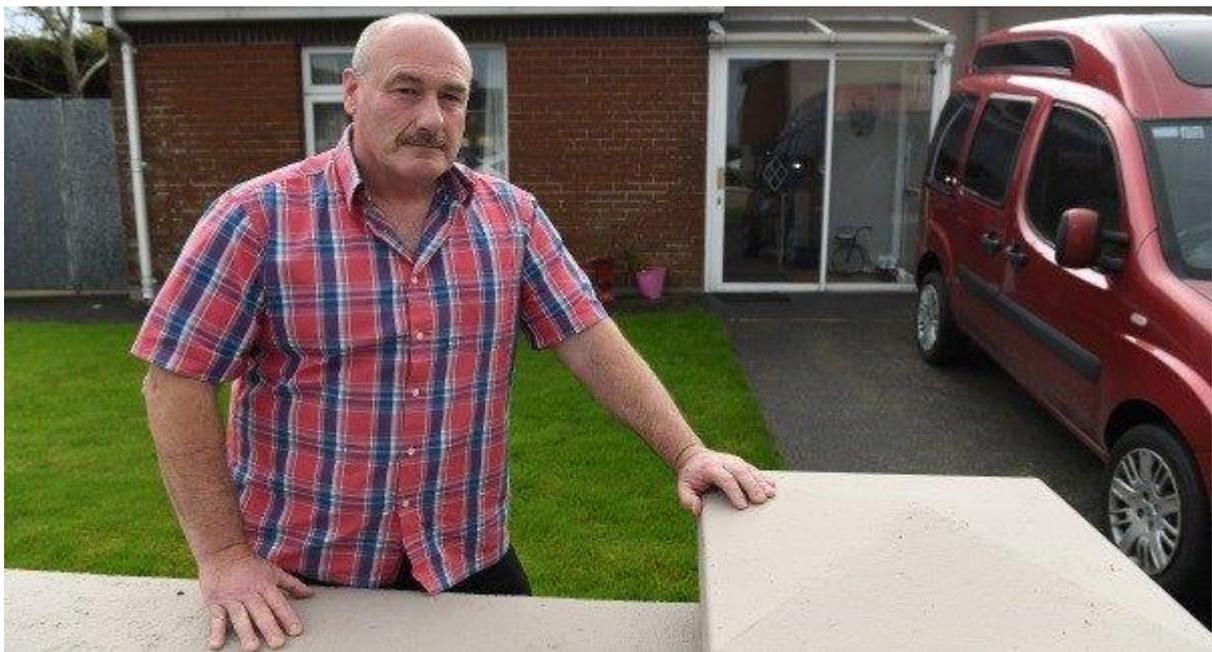
Anger at care home 'box-ticking' after relocation of over 70 special needs adults

Friday, November 18, 2016



By Claire O'Sullivan
Irish Examiner Reporter

Parents in Co Kerry who took part in a consultation process around the relocation of 77 adults with severe special needs into the community have described their involvement as “little more than a box-ticking exercise”.



Kevin O'Connor, Tralee, said that he had no idea about the function of the decongregation consultation committee.

A public row broke out in September between management at the St Mary of the Angels centre in Beaufort, St John of Gods, which runs the centre, and the parents of the adults who live at the campus over its plan to relocate residents into regular houses in towns across the county, a move known as decongregation.

The parents say their children are not suited to living in regular housing, as they have better access to services and care at St Mary's.

St John of Gods had expressed shock at this sudden resistance saying parents were aware of the plans since spring 2014 and that two parents took part in the Kerry Services Development Committee Report which formulated a blueprint for the relocation.

However, both the Tangney family and O'Connor family, who were asked to join the committee, say they had no idea what the committee was charged with when they received an invitation by post.

They also said they had little involvement with the workings of the committee and expressed reservations to the other members about moving children with high needs into regular community housing.

Kevin O'Connor, from Tralee, said he "didn't understand why he was being asked to join the committee", but later began to believe "that parental involvement was little more than a box-ticking exercise".

"I have nothing but praise for the service and staff at St Mary's but when I realised at the meeting what the committee was organising, I quickly told them that I wasn't a representative of the parents and was only there as a concerned parent of my own child. I warned them that I wasn't taking this all on my shoulders," said Mr O'Connor, 61.

"I'm not against decongregation if I knew my child would receive the occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, the activities that they have at St Mary's. But I know that these services aren't as available in the community. I can't sleep at night, I'm so worried about what's ahead for Hazel." the 61-year-old said. Hazel, Kevin's daughter, is 34 and needs one-on-one care. She has profound physical and intellectual disability and can not speak.

"The only thing she can do for herself is breathe," said Mr O'Connor, who said he only attended two meetings as he felt he "had no part to play" and wasn't asked to be part of any working groups.



Jimmy and Nina Tangney, Castleisland, said that they had no idea about the function of the decongregation consultation committee when they were asked to join it

Nina Tangney and her husband Jimmy also attended the committee but likewise only attended about two meetings as “they were never asked to do anything or never split into the groups that were set up to look at different issues”.

They said that their invite never specified that decongregation was the main focus of the committee.

A spokesman for St Mary’s declined to comment. He had previously defended plans to transfer clients into the community saying the campus is “not up to Hiqa standards” and is “inappropriate accommodation” for some residents who lack privacy.

He also said decongregation “would only be done if it improved the life of the individual”.