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# *Irish* Voice

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# Families Furious

FAMILIES of adults with special needs living at Beaufort's St. Mary of the Angels are reeling after being told their loved ones will have to leave the place they have called home for decades and move into houses in towns and villages they are entirely unfamiliar with.

News of the shock move has heightened fears among other parents and families that the St. John of God's service, which owns St. Mary's, is escalating plans to move more and more residents into the "community" -- essentially single unit housing in towns and villages across the county.

This is in line with the Health Service Executive's national strategy providing for the transfer of people living in what the executive describes as "congregated settings" into "community settings," a policy that was rolled out in 2011.

St. John of God said it is "obliged to comply with national policy."

But parents are deeply critical of this model in respect to St. Mary's. They describe the center as a wonderful facility staffed by deeply caring workers in what they believe is a community setting already, rather than a congregated setting of the traditional institutional kind.

Parents and families affected have been left heartbroken by the development.

"We got a phone call a week ago to tell us our son would be moving to a house in Milltown," Cahersiveen man Jack Fitzpatrick said. "We were given no choice and are, like the other parents, just devastated."

His 40-year-old son Bernard, who has profound special needs, knows no other community, having lived in St Mary's since he was five.

Wrenching him from one community for the sake of following a care-in-the-community model could have catastrophic consequences for Bernard, sister Laura said.

"It is so maddening...the thing is that Bernard is extremely happy where he is. He is surrounded by trees and flowers, knows everybody there, everyone knows him," she said.

"This is his community, and if he ends up in Milltown or anywhere in the greater community he will lose everything he has. Bernard will think that all his friends have died."

Portmagee woman Noreen Devane received a call on behalf of management at St. Mary's on Friday, September 16, to inform her that her daughter Tracey, 43, a resident of 40 years, would be moved into a house in the Cromane area.

"They can't just come along and do this. We don't understand it, why can't they build more houses there and leave the children where they are?" she asked.

"It's a fabulous place. Tracey is very happy where she is. When she was moved to one of the chalets within St. Mary's a few years ago it took her a long time to settle. What would it be like for her going down to Cromane, a place where she knows no one?"

St. Mary of the Angels was founded as a residential center for children with disabilities by the Franciscan Sisters in 1968 on land donated them to by local couple Denis and Mary Doyle in 1964. The service was amalgamated with St. John of God Community Services Ltd in 2005, by which time St. Mary's was long recognized as one of the best examples of a centre of its kind in the entire country. Seventy-six adult residents live there today, most in bungalows on campus.

*The Kerryman*



# Lesbian Couple Chased

A LESBIAN couple have revealed they were forced to flee their home in an estate in Limerick city due to repeated threats and intimidation over their sexuality after they became a couple.

The pair, who are both in their early 30s, said they were threatened that they would be "burned out" of their home in an estate, which they do not wish to identify.

They were forced to leave their residence a year ago and now have received alternative accommodation through Thomond House, which provides a refuge for women who are at risk of becoming homeless.

However, the move has also led Lisa and Dawn O'Driscoll to be separated from Lisa's five children -- all boys -- aged three, six, seven, nine and 12, who now live in a two-bed apartment with Lisa's former partner.

The couple, who are both in receipt of disability allowance, are now desperately pleading with Limerick City and County Council to find them a suitable home where they can live with the children.

"We had to leave our home over a year ago now. We suffered abuse. We were hit with stones, called faggots. We were told we would be burned out of our home, with my children inside. The boys were bullied, and one of them was even kicked in the stomach one day," explained Lisa.

Lisa and Dawn have been together two years and married in Limerick City and County Council year.

Limerick City and County Council that it does not comment on individual cases.

"The local authority makes every effort to house people who are on the waiting list in an efficient manner in accordance with the provisions of national and local policies," said a spokeswoman. *Limerick*

# Prison Suicide Prevented

THE death of a Strathroy box in Maghaberry Prison last year has been prevented, according to a report published by the Prisoner Ombudsman.

Patrick Kelly, who was 46, died after appearing to have hoarded tablets and used them to overdose. He died two days later on March 2.

In the extensive report, the Ombudsman concluded the overdose was "foreseeable" and that it was "preventable."

When remanded to Maghaberry on he asked not to be allowed his tablets as he was afraid they would be taken from him all at once.

However, after four days of "swallowing" he was returned to prison status without any precautions to mitigate the risk of overdose.

He appears to have hoarded tablets then used them to overdose several days later at outside hospital.

Prisoner Ombudsman Tom O'Connell offered his sympathy to Kelly and described the case as a "preventable" one which had provided considerable lessons about medication management.



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