

# Fury over plans to shut residential home

## Families to fight plan to disperse 76 from St Mary of the Angels

**PARENTS AND FAMILY** members who have loved ones living at St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort are willing to go all the way to court to fight plans to close the facility and move the 76 residents into bungalows and apartments around the county.

BY AIDAN O'CONNOR

Support for their campaign gained huge momentum this week as the public became aware of plans by the HSE and St John of Gods to close the facility.

St John of Gods - who run the facility in Beaufort - claim that HSE policy is forcing them to take the action. Since 2011, the HSE wants to move people with intellectual disabilities out of 'congregated settings' to 'community settings'.

The facility in Beaufort was designed for children but is currently home to 76 adults with physical and intellectual disabilities.

The plan for St Mary of the Angels is to move every resident out into the community, into 24 houses and four apartments scattered across the county.

Family members are terrified about the move and

what it would mean for their loved ones - many of them having made Beaufort their home for over thirty years.

Many of the 76 high-dependent adults have severe physical and intellectual disability but are getting superb care and avail of great facilities and supports at St Mary of the Angels.

Bernard Fitzpatrick from Cahersiveen is 40 years old and has been at St Mary's since he was five years old. His father Jack is both devastated and furious over the plans.

Bernard, he said, has made Beaufort his home and could not adjust to a community environment that would be totally alien to him. Neither would Bernard have the supports he receives at St Mary of the Angels.

"We understand that people with mild disabilities might benefit from a move

out to the community. But these 76 adults are at the highest end of physical and intellectual disability.

"If you scatter them all over the county, what services will they have? They don't even have a full-time doctor in Rathmore, not to mind the specialist services people like Bernard require," Jack said.

Jack Fitzpatrick said he has got legal advice and said he is now confident that the plans have no legal standing and that family members cannot be moved out of St Mary's without the consent of parents or legal guardians.

"The day will never come when we give them consent. Absolutely, we'll go all the way to court if we have to. Anyone who knows me knows I won't back down."

Jack also wants an investigation carried out into the handling of the proposals. At no stage, he said, were family members officially told of the plans. A number of family members have already been shocked having got telephone calls to be told their loved-ones are being moved out.