

St Mary of the Angels to close

THE ST MARY of the Angels facility in Beaufort which is home to over 70 residents with severe physical and intellectual disabilities will eventually close.

BY AIDAN O'CONNOR

Minister of State with responsibility for disability, Finian McGrath, visited the centre last week to meet residents, family members and local politicians over the controversial plans to move all residents out of the facility and into the community.

However, Minister McGrath said he is committed to the HSE policy of ending 'institutional-type' care and wants residents like those in Beaufort living in communities.

The HSE and the minister have promised that no resident will be moved without consent or consultation with family members.

However, no new residents will be taken in and the facility will eventually close after the remaining residents either leave or pass away.

It is planned to maintain a maximum of four bungalows in Beaufort for local residents.

"My objective is that within two years time every child with a disability in the State will have a service from the cradle to the grave," the minister said.

The group campaigning to keep Beaufort open want St Mary of the Angels to be kept open into the future and developed as a centre of excellence.

They don't believe that 'de-congregation' works in every case and they see the Beaufort facility as a real home for their loved ones.

They are compiling a plan for the minister to push their case to keep St Mary of the Angels open and develop it long into the future.

'The biggest worry for parents is the future'

Family campaigns for respite care for autistic son

THE FUTURE FOR Michael O'Sullivan and his loving parents and family is looking bleak, as they battle to access the services the five-year-old autistic child needs.

BY SINEAD KELLEHER

The recession has left vital services for those with disabilities cut to the bone, and the latest battle for Jean and her husband, Ted, who live in Dromoughty in Kenmare is for respite care.

Since Michael began attending St Francis Special School in Beaufort, the family no longer have access to respite care - meaning they supply around-the-clock care for Micheal, who is severely autistic.

The little boy doesn't sleep, can't speak, gets enormously angry and self-harms out of frustration.

Jean has two other children - Ciarán who is 14 and who is also autistic but his condition is less severe, and Rebecca (8).

Jean is one of the many parents in Kerry fighting to keep St Mary of the Angels open in Beaufort for future admissions and respite care.

Parents have won the first battle not to have residents moved out of St Mary's without consultation and

permission - but this does not guarantee the future of the centre.

"Michael is five now. We have to think ahead and be realistic. I never thought about residential care and it is a long way down the line but Michael will need care," says Jean.

"The community system won't work for Michael."

When Ciaran was first diagnosed with autism over 10 years ago, he got three hours three times a week of early intervention.

But Michael only gets 1.5 hours, one day a week, Jean said.

She said they are not looking for much - just some free hours to spend with the rest of their family especially during school holidays.

"Families are struggling. Everything seems to be cut. Respite services are not there. We were told there is a long waiting list and now we have to worry about the future of St Mary's," she said.

Jean is campaigning to get St Mary of the Angels open for respite care and for future admissions for children like Michael.



Teddy and Jean O'Sullivan from Kenmare pictured at home with their children Ciaran, Rebecca and Michael.

"The biggest worry for parents is the future," she says.

Jean and the St Mary of the Angels campaign group is urging parents like Jean, who have no access to respite care, to contact them.

They want to put a plan to the Minister Finian McGrath to use St Mary

of the Angels for respite care and also to open it up to new admissions.

"We want the Beaufort centre to be a centre of excellence for respite to secure the future of St Mary of the Angels," says Donie O'Sullivan of the Save St Mary of the Angels campaign.

"At the moment the centre

will eventually close once current residents leave or pass away but we want to secure the future of this centre.

"Everything is here - so why not make it a centre of excellence?"

Parents are asked to contact Donie on 086 780 7871 or Laura Fitzpatrick on 085 2818715.