

'Don't close St Mary of the Angels'

By SINEAD KELLEHER

A CAHERSIVEEN woman has made a passionate plea to save St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort, where her brother, Bernard 'Bubo' has lived happily for 40 years.

At the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters last week, Lynn Fitzpatrick – a long-time disability rights campaigner and advocate for her brother – pleaded with the HSE and the Government to allow her brother and others like him to continue to live in the homes that were built to meet their needs.

St Mary of the Angels is earmarked for closure under HSE policy.

Her heartfelt plea at the committee hearing, which has received a huge reaction on social media, has called for St Mary of the Angels to remain open.

"I put it to you that St Mary of the Angels is a community in its own right, with a proven track record of success spanning six decades. It is a residential care model that should be researched and replicated, not broken up and sold to fund community living," she said.

"In closing, I ask the Committee to support my request that St Mary of the Angels be immediately exempted from the Time to Move On, policy which should never have targeted it in the first place, let alone desig-



Bernard with his mother and his sister, Lynn.

nated it a pilot and priority site for decongregation."

The HSE's 'Time to Move on from Congregated Settings' policy aims to shut congregated settings for those with disabilities and move them to community-based accommodation. St Mary of the Angels is one of 72

such settings earmarked for closure. Lynn Fitzpatrick is a member of the St Mary of the Angels Parents and Relatives Association campaigning to save the facility. She said the HSE's policy goes against the rights of those with disabilities and limits their choices.

"This policy mandates that he move out to live in its preferred place of residence: 'an ordinary neighbourhood', and sets out narrow parameters within which Bubo can make choices. In this way, the policy denies people like Bubo rights afforded to them under Article



Lynn Fitzpatrick



Bernard Fitzpatrick

19 of the UN Convention."

She said that the essential services that Bernard and others like him need will not be available in communities, and such a move from the home they have loved and grew up in will have 'negative consequences' for them.

"For Bubo, moving to 'the community' means losing lifelong friends and having nothing in common with his neighbours," she said.

During the committee hearing, Lynn said she believes that "a full range of options" should be available for those with disabilities. Some may be happier in community settings, but for others like Bernard, this is not the solution.

Statistics show that, as of January 2020, 1,953 people remain living in congregated settings. This has since increased

because of admissions, and 76 per cent of them have high-dependency needs and are being pushed out into the community where many feel such needs cannot be met.

Lynn was also critical of the lack of information provided to families. She and her family found out that Bernard was to be moved to the community to a house in Milltown in 2016 – four years after the policy was officially launched, and without any consultation.

Her speech and debate at the Oireachtas Committee has been widely praised by the families of St Mary of the Angels residents and the wider community, all of whom have campaigned tirelessly to save St Mary of the Angels in recent years.

She said she and all families effected are 'exhausted' battling this policy.

