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MR CARMODY



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PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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ADDRESS AT OPENING OF COMMONWEALTH REHABILITATION CENTRE, TARINGA

It is very good to be here today to participate in the official opening of this centre. Of course, in the great tradition of official openings, the centre is already well and truly operating. But this is still a good occasion for us to mark the notable achievements which have been made by all involved in rehabilitation of the handicapped, and the challenges which still lie ahead.

This centre is a fine example of what can be achieved with modern planning and technology - and \$3.5 million of your funds as taxpayers.

The rebuilding programme has significantly increased the capacity of the centre. Some eighty people can now reside here, and a further eighty can train and be treated here on a day-attendance basis.

This enlarged centre - and another like it at present being constructed in Townsville - will greatly improve the capacity of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation service to assist handicapped people in Queensland.

Another centre is being built in Hobart, and when that is complete the service will be operating at least one major training and treatment centre in every state, as well as rehabilitation casework teams in thirteen provincial centres such as Rockhampton and Townsville.

In all, the service assists some 3,000 handicapped people every year. But of course it is only part of the overall services and facilities, subsidies, pensions and benefits which the community provides to those of its members who are handicapped.

The Commonwealth provides a comprehensive scheme of pensions and benefits to maintain minimum incomes for handicapped people, and each of the state governments provides a range of services. An essential link is provided by voluntary agencies.

My Government firmly believes that voluntary social welfare agencies have a vital role to play - a role complementary to that provided by Government. Frankly, there are many areas in which Government

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can never match the service which voluntary agencies can provide. Voluntary agencies have an inherent flexibility, dedication and sense of personal commitment which makes them singularly well able to provide warm and compassionate help to those who are in need of help.

The Commonwealth Government is seeking to give maximum assistance to voluntary agencies which provide training, residential care, activity therapy and sheltered workshop facilities for handicapped people. For the three year period 1976-79 we have committed ourselves to provide subsidies of \$121 million to such agencies. The Commonwealth, the States and voluntary agencies are not competitors but partners in the challenge of providing effective and prompt help to all disadvantaged and underprivileged in our community.

What we must do is to achieve the most effective co-operation and interaction between us, and to do this, we must all be prepared constantly to re-examine our programmes to see whether we are doing enough, whether our programmes are really helping those most in need, whether long established programmes which we are used to, require fundamental redirection to meet changing community needs.

The Government in the past two years has been undertaking this challenging and difficult task. In many instances, we have made fundamental changes and extensions in our programmes to ensure that effective assistance actually reaches those who most require our help. We have done this in the area of children's services, in legal aid, and with such innovations as the Family Allowance. In the area of care for the handicapped, when we came to office we found that levels of assistance were quite inadequate, and we have moved to increase our assistance sharply. Even though this has been a period of severe restraint in Government spending, we have this year increased funds to the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service by 24%, raised subsidies to voluntary agencies under the handicapped persons assistance scheme by 30%, and allocated a further \$18 million for the handicapped childrens allowance - that is a rise of 65%.

First, we have amended the rules to make more parents of handicapped children eligible to receive the handicapped child's allowance. Previously it was necessary to show that the child was severely handicapped within the meaning of strict criteria laid down in the Social Services Act. We have now authorised the Director-General of Social Security at his discretion to pay the \$15 a week allowance to low income earning parents of less handicapped children if the expense of care is causing the family financial hardship.

Second, we have widened the scope of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Centre. For some thirty years, the service has been training handicapped people to enable them to take on jobs and become independent members of the workforce. But this system discriminated against women who did not want to take a job but wished to stay at

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home to look after their family, and needed training to be able to do this with greater ability and independence. We have now decided that the service will be extended to include disabled housewives and mothers, to increase their capacity to lead an independent or semi-independent life at home. This decision is in line with recommendations made in the third main report of the Poverty Inquiry, and with advice given to us from the National Advisory Council on the Handicapped.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Rehabilitation Centre offers to the many people who will pass through it, a renewal, a fresh sense of hope and purpose, of achievement and independence.

If that can be achieved, then the community's support in creating this new larger centre is an excellent investment indeed.

It gives me great pleasure to declare open these major extensions to the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Centre for Brisbane.

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