



Spand

6

PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SATURDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 1981

ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF A NEW HYDROTHERAPEUTIC COMPLEX
MINDA HOME, ADELAIDE

I am very pleased to be here with you today for the opening of Minda's newest facility, this splendid hydrotherapeutic complex.

The work of Minda is well-known as is its determination to improve the condition and lives of disabled people. Minda has a long history of service in this field. I believe it was originally established in the 1890's. This new facility will offer those who come to Minda for help both new therapeutic opportunities and an avenue for recreation - where their participation may have been limited in the past.

The Commonwealth Government is, of course, very much aware of the work of Minda and we have welcomed the opportunity to provide financial support for this project. The initiative and the drive in these matters is of course your own, and it is because we regard such dedication and enthusiasm as one of this country's greatest resources that we have made help available.

Since 1976 the Commonwealth Government has provided over \$12 million towards the costs of providing services at Minda and I think you will agree that this represents a sizeable commitment towards the welfare of disabled people. We hope that this support for your efforts to provide more effective services will improve the opportunities for personal development of our disabled citizens. The Government believes that people in the community such as yourselves generally know best the kind of services that are needed, and are frequently the best placed to operate these services.

1981 is of course the International Year of Disabled Persons. Only a decade or so ago, the idea of having such a year would have been unthinkable. We now recognise that disabled persons have a contribution to make to the life of the world. Remarkable changes have occurred in community attitudes in a comparatively short time. Of course there is still far to go.

Sometimes people find it difficult to appreciate the needs of the handicapped person. John Hickman in his book "One Step at a Time" tells a story about the 1972 election which illustrates this very point.

.../2

When Mr Hickman was going to cast his vote in the 1972 Federal elections, he spoke to the Returning Officer.

"Good afternoon. My name is John Hickman and I'd like to cast my vote for the election".

"Certainly, sir, I'll get you the forms and a ballot paper and you can fill them out at once".

"Yes, well that is fine but I can't write you see. That is why I brought a friend", I said, indicating my companion. I was hoping that it would be all right for him to fill out the ballot paper under my instructions.

"Oh, that makes things a little complicated. You cannot even write down the numbers in the ballot boxes".

"Not in any recognisable form I am afraid".

The official disappeared and came back a few moments later bearing a sheaf of forms.

"That is quite all right sir, your friend can fill in your ballot paper in accordance with your instructions and all you have to do is to sign this statement on this form declaring that you cannot write".

I am confident that the activities of this year will be a worthwhile contribution in helping to achieve more understanding and practical responses to handicapped people and in removing the old ideas and myths. This year has served to concentrate attention on future directions in services for handicapped people.

There is growing support for less paternalistic or protective services for disabled people, for a greater measure of control over their own lives, and for freedom to pursue their own lives and interests in surroundings as normal as possible. The need to consider such philosophies of care places a heavy responsibility on organisations such as yours, in deciding how best you can serve the needs of disabled people. Minda has provided a lead in this debate, in sponsoring workshops to discuss normalisation of services.

The Government believes that disabled people should be encouraged to develop their capacities to the fullest possible extent; that they should be enabled where possible and desirable, to live with their families in the community and to use community facilities as do the rest of us. Many disabled people are already living their own lives, more or less independently, in a way which no-one would have believed possible only a few years ago.

Today, we recognise that society has thought too long only of people's disabilities, not of their potential for all levels of skills : both society, and disabled people, have lost as a result. Today we want to see disabled people being encouraged to take on and cope with the tasks of everyday living to the fullest extent of their abilities. Disabled people need the opportunity, where

they so wish, to live independently or with support in the community, and have the maximum freedom of choice over their style of living, regardless of where they may live.

Australia has supported the U.N. Declaration on the rights of disabled people, and I would like to read to you one paragraph which exemplifies our goal in ensuring that disabled people enjoy the same opportunities for a meaningful home life, the same choices, as other Australians.

"Disabled persons have the right to live with their families or with foster parents and to participate in all social, creative or recreational activities. No disabled person shall be subjected, as far as his or her residence is concerned, to differential treatment other than that required by his or her condition or by the improvement which he or she may derive therefrom. If the stay of a disabled person in a specialised establishment is indispensable, the environment and living conditions therein shall be as close as possible to those of the normal life of a person or his or her age".

We recognise of course that there is no simple or single response to the needs of handicapped people. People with disabilities need a wide variety in facilities and services, ranging on the one hand from intensive nursing care for the aged or the very profoundly handicapped, to completely independent living arrangements with support services as may be necessary.

Many disabled people, particularly the older people, may not feel capable of overcoming the obstacles posed by everyday life, and that right of choice should be respected. The question which is faced by all those concerned with providing facilities for the disabled is now to ensure that their facilities are geared to operate with sensitivity to the needs of those who use them. We have to bear in mind the importance of acknowledging individual needs and facilitating choice. We need to provide a range of options for handicapped people, so that they can, for themselves exercise the maximum freedom of choice. We need to provide an environment which recognises the right to maximum personal development, regardless of whether the bricks represent a big institution, or the average family home.

I understand that you at Minda, are experimenting with a number of new approaches. I applaud these efforts and initiative. Your programme of independent living hostels, such as those at Mile End and Goodwood, is an example of what can be achieved in encouraging disabled people to live and work in the community. I understand you are considering a pilot programme which will place handicapped children with foster parents with appropriate support, and I am informed that the Department of Social Security is sympathetically considering the possibility of assistance for this project. At Craighburn you are expanding the training and independent living opportunities and I am pleased that we will be able to provide assistance next year with accommodation and other costs.

I particularly applaud your "respite" scheme, which provides short term care for anyone with the care of a handicapped child. The benefit of this kind of scheme cannot be over-estimated, in supporting the large body of devoted parents who are bringing up their child within the family. This facility will help those who use it to grow in confidence and will encourage them to participate as full members of society.

It will give further substance to the theme chosen by the United Nations for the International Year of the Disabled - "Full Participation and Equality".

And after this special year, there will be need for consolidation of the gains that have been made, and an appraisal of further directions and further gains which need to be pursued in the years ahead. Minda's projects and programmes demonstrate what can be done when members of the community, with dedication, initiative and energy address the problems confronting us in the forthright manner that you have done.

The Government is pleased to have been able to assist Minda along the way and I am confident that Minda will continue to be an outstanding example of co-operation between community and government. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today to declare the hydrotherapeutic pool open, and I have much pleasure in declaring it officially open.

---ooo000ooo---