

## Introduction

I moved here in the mid 80's, and I had been working in the disability sector in Victoria for a few years and was actually back then, I was actually in the middle of what was called my mental retardation nursing certificate, which was a three year registered nurse course. It was a medical based, you know, obviously a medical model and so I was undertaking that. Now, I worked and trained at Kew, and Kew was, at that time, the largest facility in Victoria, the largest state run institution in Victoria, and before I left there would have been around about 800-900 people living there. There were 31 units from memory. So I had come from that system but slightly different in that things like every person that lived in Kew, it was legislation that everyone had to have a yearly holiday, at least a week's holiday a year, away from, and I don't mean a holiday in another unit. And that everybody had to have a certain number of hours per week of recreation or educational time away from their unit, so x amount of hours per week, and that was actually legislation. So we were quite heavily into developmental training as well. While it was still a medical model, it was kind of at that time when we were shifting into a much more developmental model and there was much more, huge emphasis on learning and what we used to call data base training and all of that sort of stuff. So, I had come from that system.

I moved here, not because I wanted a job at Royal Derwent or Willow Court. I moved here because I wanted to live in Tasmania, and at the time, I thought well I will find work in the disability sector but I don't want to go back to an institutional setting. I actually want to look at something different. So I did the rounds and found there was pretty much nothing around. There was very, very, very, little in terms of supported accommodation, like a group home sort of facility, or anything like that. There was Willow Court, there was the state-run, government-run respite centres, and a couple of other bits and pieces. I ended up having to come here basically because I needed the work. My partner was working in the area and worked here at the time and I felt I needed to. So, I started here in '86.

## Entering Glenora Ward and Meal Times

Funnily enough this was my, this ward Glenora House, G-Ward – it was actually the first place I worked. This was actually the kitchen, this was the kitchen/servery. This was actually the dining room of Glenora and I guess, I mean I am assuming we will go up to Carlton House but the kind of thing that I would talk you through is, kind of what a day was like. I worked here for about 9 years in a variety of different places. This particular unit was for housing, men and women at the time that I was here, and it was people whose disability was predominantly an intellectual disability. Some had a dual diagnosis, some had mental health issues as well. They would have been, generally the people who lived here were people that had fairly significant or severe disabilities. As I said mixed, and age ranges probably in your mid, from thirties to mid 50's, anywhere in that kind of range at the time.

So, as I said this was the dining room area. In terms of meals, it was my least favourite time of the day probably, was meal time in somewhere like Willow Court. It was a fairly manic time of the day, it didn't matter whether it was breakfast, lunch or dinner. It was pretty manic. So, you would have people that were either out in this area here, or in this area here – these were what were called day rooms and at different meal times there would be staff designated to run the kitchen for the day, but basically the doors were opened and 30-odd people would come bolting into the room. There'd be x amount of tables around and stuff. For 30-odd people meals could be over in about 5-10 mins. It was a case of either get it in as quick as possible before someone takes it off you, often. And I mean that in term of someone sitting at your table might decide to reach out and grab your cuppa or your meal or whatever. So, yes, so meals was, I wouldn't say a dignified process.

*Q. Sounds like it was a shovel it in affair?*

It was. There would be people that could manage their meals by themselves, in terms of getting it in themselves, and there were others that wouldn't. So the staff would be dotted around at different tables and depending on, you know if some people tended to get up and make a run for somebodies food, you would grab that. There was no, there was very limited, very little, back then, intervention sort of stuff in terms of pro-active, positive behaviour intervention stuff put in place. It was a case of just, it was almost like survival of the fittest for everybody. The meals would be over and everybody would just sort of be gone, it would just be gone.

## Bath Time

Bath room. Oh dear, this is a bit creepy for me. I haven't actually been in here. So the bathroom, I always sort of say to people, I ask people what's the first thing you notice when you come into the bathrooms (something inaudible) but also it's the lack of privacy is just, you know, you've got a couple of tokenistic shower curtain and stuff. I'm just thinking that I said meals time was not my favourite time of day, but then neither was having to do the bathing, some places had showers. People were bathed every day but again, in some places, in some units – I'm not going to say all because it may have been different – but basically the doors were open and you would have 30-odd people in varying states of undress wandering around all over the place. Trying to have some water, and trying to create an environment where people could have some privacy and stuff was almost impossible. In fact, you would often find two people in a bath.

*Q. Did they get their own bath water?*

Nah, oh if you were lucky. Depends who bathed them.

*Q. Could any of them bath themselves?*

Look, some people could and would, but the bottom line is, in an institution everything runs on a clock, you know. You're here for a 12-hour shift, you started at 7 and you finished at 7 or whatever it was. You were here for a 12-hour shift so we've got until this time to finish the bathing. Do you know what I mean? And you have to get x amount of people through, so it's kind of like a bathing process on speed or something, where everybody just gets shoved in, shoved out. I've seen 2/3 grown men in a bath together and then you'd have them again, in various states of undress.

## Day Rooms and Small Stature

That was another, two day rooms. So what you would do, you would find that the building was divvied up, the rooms would be divvied up depend on the persons, or groups of people's disability types or needs. It was just barren. So, what you have to kind of imagine – this was an office, from memory. I think this was the charge nurses office. Just having a flashback of charge nursing. This was a day room, the room on the other side was like a day room. There's a day room out here. So, the building would be broken up into, depending on, you know if you had people with more significant needs or who were incontinent might be stuck out in the back room, in that particular room. And then, there might be certain males who might be stuck in there. Somebody asked me recently what was it like, and the only way you can explain working in an institution is, it's just soul destroying. It's just.....and you know I did it for many years but it is at the end of the day, soul destroying but that doesn't mean that they aren't, that there isn't a sense of community in them as well. Many people that lived here would probably in lots of ways have actually more freedom than they do now. They knew the local area, they knew the community, the site, many had actual jobs. One woman, for

example that I know, would go into a couple of units and she would do the dishes each evening. She would come in, and she would get paid to do the dishes at different places, and she would wander around and chat to staff and chat to other people that lived here. She knew that, people would as I said go up the street. The shopkeepers knew them. The local community knew them. Generally, they were safe and that sort of stuff, but it doesn't come back to the fact that 12 hours is a long day for anyone. And there was very little in these rooms. Like, it's amazing. That bar, that would have been there for kids, I reckon but that's been there for ever and a day, and there was very little else in this room except some cruddy old vinyl chairs that would go around the outside of the room. That one out there barely had any chairs in it. There were chairs out in this area here, but again they were all like, crappy old vinyl covered 1940's. There was no money either to purchase anything decent.

*Q. Is this a swing here?*

Yeah, I think it must have been. But I think it must have been maybe when there were kids here, and when I was here there were adults. The kids were actually, lived on another unit up the top of the site, now privately owned. It used to be called M-Ward.

*Q. I can remember because of nutritional issues, most of the people who went here actually never really grew fully in stature.*

Yeah, probably.

*Q. A lot of the stuff was kept fairly low simply because of that. I know one particular man, he had three visits to Royal Hobart Hospital because of malnutrition. He was visually impaired, quite often would sleep under the table, and didn't know it was meal time, so he'd miss out on his meal quite often.*

## Boat Person and the State of How It Is

Again, when I first came here I was given some information that was kind of, like put me, I suppose kind of let me know where things were at. And I had done a quick walk around with the director of nursing at the time, to kind of have a look, and he showed me around. He was saying that, at the time – so we're talking about the mid '80's – the government of the day had a priority listing for funding. And there were about 76 areas on their list, areas of need. The Royal Derwent, Willow Court, was 75<sup>th</sup> on the list at that time. He also told me that, at the time, that their budget for maintenance – so this is both sites, it had split by that stage, but the budget at that time was \$5,000 for the year. That was the maintenance budget. Just the maintenance budget was only \$5,000, and that's for both sites – the Royal Derwent site and for the Willow Court site. When I came here there was probably 3-400 people still residing just in the Willow Court site and all the Royal Derwent units were full as well, and Millbrook Rise and stuff. So, it was kind of a case of, okay, so this is a really poorly funded institution. It was still heavily, heavily entrenched in a medical model. In fact I think, don't know whether it was here or maybe the unit next door where it was burnt down, where I actually talked about running some programs around getting people to support, teaching people to use a knife and fork and feed themselves, and was shot down in a fairly significant blaze of being a – as I was called then – a boat person coming across over here, telling us what to do. That's what I was referred to. I was affectionately known as a boat person.

*Q. But the thing is, you can't understand the culture of this unless you understand the culture of the interaction between this and the community and the levels of people living, generation after generation came and worked here.*

I would work with fathers and mothers, and then their daughters and sons, and aunts and uncles. And for me, I came from a really big centre where there'd be you know, I didn't even know maybe 10% of the staff, to coming to a much, much smaller environment where everybody knew everybody in the town. At the time Boyer Paper Mill was still operating, so it would also, these were the two main employers of the town. You had the Royal Derwent and Boyer, were THE employers of the town.

*Q. Was it a big staff?*

Look, I'm not exactly sure of the numbers, there must have been quite a few hundred because it was a fully operating centre. Everything from the old kitchen and the upholsterer and your dry stores building, and you know, there's a church still over on the Royal Derwent site, and a swimming pool, everything. It's a one stop shop. It's a village in a village, a community in their community. And the institutions create sub-cultures and coming here was like going, being in a sub-culture within a township type sub-culture. It was a really.... I think I was naïve. You know, obviously I was just really naïve. I was 21..22 or something, and it operated so differently that what I was used to. I had not come from a system where we wore uniforms, for example, and they said, you'll have to go get your uniform from the uniform shop. And I was horrified, mortified – Why do I have to wear a uniform for? And you know, the medical model....da di da dah daa...I eventually bucked that and when I started night shift, I refused to wear a uniform. In the end, I think it created a wave of revolution, people stopped wearing uniforms

*Q. You were a trouble maker from the main land?*

Yeah, I was a bit. I was kind of known as that a bit. And at its time, in its day when Willow Court was set up and Royal Derwent, it was actually a model institution. Like this was a seriously good, a good model.

## Holidays and An Old Man's Story

But you know things like holidays were just, forget it. People, things like learning opportunities were just non-existent. I felt like I had walked through a black hole and into a time warp. I really did, and I don't mean that to be rude or negative or denigrating to the state but it really was stuck in some weird time warp.

*Q. No children in these wards?*

There were children, not in this one. There were still children here when I came here which again was quite surprising to me because Kew hadn't had children for many years. Obviously there were people here that had been here from birth and many of the older, especially women who, will actually tell you about, that they used to nurse the babies. That they would look after the babies. But similarly in Kew, Kew was the same, because people would drop the babies off at the front door in baskets and there was like a nursery and some of the older clients

*Q. Because they didn't want them?*

Yeah, or just can't manage them. There was a fella here, that I can't talk about that was from a rural area in southern Tasmania who when I came here was in his early 70's, pretty, bit of a character, nice old fella, but he was here because he was a tear away, and a runaway and a bit of a rascal in his younger days and he'd actually done some fairly significant damage to a neighbouring property and apparently that was the last straw so he ended up here. He'd been here for 50-something years. Now I would put money on it that his disability was probably environmentally manufactured as

opposed to genetically or through trauma or whatever. I mean I would question whether, if he even had a disability, but you don't know.

## Personal Spending Money

The other thing that I found, it was really noticeable, the lack of money and that the people who lived here had as well. Just as an example, I worked in a unit two doors up, two buildings up, where it was all males that lived there and I remember my first couple of days there, I think I spent the first week in tears every time I went home. But there was, in Melbourne I used to take people out, you know, a couple of people at a time and we would go out shopping for different seasons, and we'd go to Myers and buy the outfits for summer, or whatever for that year. And it was still an institution but there was a level for that sort of stuff, and so you would go and do that. People had their own towels and had their own pyjamas - and I came here and the evening change time came, so people were taken out of their clothes and into pyjamas. And the bath room doors - it was quite a big bathroom, probably you know, this width again - would, again 30 men would come in and would be in the process of stripping off as they came into the door. So, you would have shoes and socks flying, and jumpers and pants and underwear and whatever else. So there'd be clothes strewn everywhere and half-naked and naked men everywhere. And then the staff opened up a ginormous wooden box, two wooden boxes I should say, that sat out from the wall, and they just had lids, wood, lidded hinges on and in it was hundreds, dozens, I don't know, however many pairs of pyjamas, what you would call pyjamas, they were all green or orange, and they were all obviously made at the sewing place here. They were pretty unattractive. Some, supposed to have elastic in the waist, but most didn't. There was just an assortment of every single size you could get, and as people undressed they were just given a top or a bottom, or put into a top or a bottom, whether it fitted or not. So you'd have these guys running around with their pants down around, or shirts, tops too tight, and it was just kind of like, oh my god.

*Q. Even with a belt ...community still hold up their trousers, just a habit. The other thing is, the open drain so if you actually had someone with incontinence, you've got this pit where everything, the water that runs off... This later stuff came in when some of the parents and friends of Willow Court were demanding that some of this stuff go in. They were pretty proactive in getting some of the stuff to go in, like shower curtains.*

I think, I wouldn't say I'm an expert on it, but I know that coming from Kew in Melbourne, that parents and friends were an extremely strong voice, extremely strong advocates over there and they were the ones that fashioned, that bought about a lot of the changes there, whereas when I came here, certainly there was probably strong voices but I think they were not united to actually bring that sort of stuff about. It wasn't probably until the Petiffer report, would have been about 80-, there was a report done in the late '80's and I think that was -ah the labour politician what was her name, Judy Jackson, sorry had a complete mind blank - and that was and that was when stuff started to move a little bit.

## New Norfolk Group Homes

New Norfolk's not the brightest place in winter, let's just say. It generally sits under a cloud of fog til 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And if you think the trees are all stripped of their, are all leafless and if you think about a cold, grey, drizzly day. Winter was horrendous working, especially here because you couldn't get out. You know, it would be too cold to have people outside so you had 30 odd people in, just a recipe for.....but I worked, they actually opened some group homes or they bought

some of the hospitals properties, or had use of them and did move people into some of the houses, and I went up and worked up there.

*Q. They were starting to trial.....*

You know the interesting thing about that though was, I remember I was on, doing night shift and I was up in the houses, that they put people into, and I went round to this fellas house, this lovely, lovely, lovely old fella. I went round there and he was sitting up, it was about 2 o'clock in the morning, I think, and he was still sitting up, and it was back when there was no all-night television and the television is all like snowy, scratchy, and I said to this fella, 'Don't you want to go to bed, or you're not tired mate, you don't want to go to bed?' and he said 'Oh, can I go to bed?' and I said 'Yeah, you're sitting in here with the lights on buddy' and he said 'Oh, can I turn the lights off?' and it was like – oh my lord, that's so awful. So over directed. He was waiting for somebody to say you can go to bed, waiting for someone to say you can turn the television off, you can turn the lights off. That's what he was waiting for. That was a very.....

## Carpet City

*Q. That's carpet city.*

That was plush, that was wooh. That was, that was nice. This is Derwent House, and it actually had quite a bit of work done to it, I think in the early '80's. A new kitchen and carpets. So this unit had, I am not sure of the numbers but it again had men and women. And it was generally, well the time that I was here, people who probably had a moderate disability but probably people also that had mental health issues as well. They were potentially sort of, a dual diagnosis. A few older people. People that were generally a little more independent.

*Q. Why was it called carpet city?*

Because it was actually, there was money spent on it, and it was done up. And if you....that was a luxury kitchen, a new kitchen that was put in. This was all carpeted. It was actually quite, a pleasant place to work, upstairs was all carpeted. The rooms were done out, people actually had curtains and da dah de dah. The whole place was carpeted. There was only a round about 3 staff on, you only had 3 staff. So, compared to some of these places you would have 5 or 6 staff, there was only three here. And it was a much more pleasant place to be, just in terms of the environment, to be honest, if nothing else. Very different. Apparently before this fire escape was built, there was like I said, this barn-shed thing where they empty straw out and stuff. But the thing freaked me out about that was that there was, as I said, we're talking about the 1960's even.

*Q. They were still doing that?*

I think so, yeah.

*Q. So, tell me again the straw....*

The mattresses were stuffed with straw. So, straw doesn't keep clean, especially if you're incontinent. So, once a week or whatever, they would empty the straw out and restuff it with new clean straw. That was your mattress.

*Q. You would have worked with people who were part of that?*

Yeah, there would have been, because there would have been people who lived here that that was their job to go and do that, to go and restuff the mattresses.

This was a dining area here. That was the new kitchen that was put in and it was very, it was very modern and very civilised, I might say, compared to..... Showers and bathroom. There was a sunroom out here that was set up, some nice couches were put in there, plants and all of that. Bedrooms were upstairs again. So there's even carpet on the stairwell. And the heating was run from like, there was a boiler room on site. So this, massive chuffing out steam and you'd walk around and especially in winter, and there's be steam coming up through the vents in the ground. And it was a very eerie place at two o'clock in the morning when you are walking from down at Glenora and you had to go up to Carlton or where ever. And you'd wander and there'd be steam coming up out the vents and feral cats running around and the fog.

## Restraints and Conditioning

One of the other things that I found incredible, and funnily enough it was here when I first started here, the first time I'd ever seen it, they had what was called 'sleeves' and I'd never seen them before. And they were made, I think they were probably fashioned onsite again at the upholsterers, made out of that parachute sort of material, so it's pretty strong. It's not technically what you would call a strait jacket, but the purpose behind it is much the same. So instead you had this one jacket where you put the sleeves down the side and then there would be a series of straps and stuff that wrapped around, so you were basically, your arms were kept like this. The person that you were talking about that had that room, he was often wearing those. The other thing that I noticed when I worked here, that I had never seen before was a thing called a 'posy'. There was a person that lived here that slept in that area out there who was tied into the bed. So, it was this little vest sort of thing that they put on, and again quite long straps that wrapped around. So you still had, there was movement like this that was not an issue. If you think of a vest but then these long sort of straps, and then they would lie in bed and those straps would then be tied to the side of the bed. So you actually couldn't really get out. But the interesting thing about that, was that particular person who wore them became so used to them that they wouldn't actually go to bed until you had put them on. The conditioning was such that they wouldn't sleep, they wouldn't actually even go to bed, unless you put them on. I know that it got to the point where people wouldn't actually tie it, they would put the jacket on but they would not tie them in.

## Esperance Ward

*Q. So when's this building from?*

Esperance. This was all men's, I think I mentioned it before, in the '30's. These were all bedrooms and dormitories again. Horrendous, it was horrible here. I worked here for quite some time, it was, I didn't enjoy my time here really.

*Q. What were the men in here typically?*

Just a real mixed bag of, again, probably adult men, I doubt that you had anybody particularly young, late 20's right through to 70's. Varying levels of disability. There was a fellow here that was, interestingly I remember him, that he was diagnosed, he came here when he was about 7, or he might have been about 10 round about there. And he was diagnosed with childhood schizophrenia, back then. Now, he is still about today and lives in a group home. He would be now deemed as someone who was someone who was on the Autism spectrum, but you know, they had no idea back then. The resources here were ridiculous. I mean, you know, to have a psychologist on staff. I don't even recall them having a full suite of health professionals available. It was just ridiculous, and I remember this particular unit as well. This is where I was talking about the pyjama situation. Oh, I know who had that bed, funnily enough, isn't that depressing.

*Q. And there was a reason that they were bolted down, wasn't it?*

I think you'll find early on that a lot of beds were bolted down, but for that particular person, yes. It was interesting, you know, too. The other thing I remember about here is that when they bought socks, they just bought black socks because you don't have to worry about, everyone just gets, you don't have to pair them, you don't have to do anything, you just chuck them all in one, and there's just thousands of black socks so you just get what you get. So, you could say individuality was kind of non-existent.

I spent many nights climbing these stairs. This is really weird being back here. I haven't been here in years. I haven't been here for donkey's years. It smells exactly the same. It still smells that urine-y, smell it?

*Q. It's very animal.*

That's what it smelled like. Oh God, I hate it.

*Q. So, that's a TV cabinet?*

Actually, that's interesting. It's one of the few ones that's sitting, that's still around. So the television cabinet, usually they were behind a Perspex screen. So the staff would have the key and the remote. So, guess who chose what was on?

*Q. And this is interesting, because Col explains this room as being, quite often the staff would sit here and watch TV. Those that had a lot of noise issues, actually used that room there, with one staff in there, if they were lucky.*

No, there was rarely a staff in there, trust me. There were some men here with some significant behaviour issues. I do recall being chased around the yard and having to climb the fence fairly quickly at one point. Not now, we are talking about a long time ago. There used to be a swing set.

## Straw and Pillows

It's funny, in between those two buildings there, staff that had been here for many, many years used to talk about how, in between there, there was like a barn type of set of where they used to throw out the dirty straw from the mattresses and restuff them, and that actually wasn't that long ago. We're not talking 1800's either. They would empty out the incontinent, you know, whatever, and then restuff the mattresses. But it wasn't that long ago either that they were still, that the pillows were stuffed with Capock, you know. Capock, which is a tree, and that's the seeds kind of that flies around and in spring it used to fly around here. It would look like it was snowing, the whole place would look like it was snowing when the wind would blow.

## Bread with Extras

The other thing that used to, that always spun me out when I came here was that the bread was made by the local prison farm, and I think they used to put something called Bromide or something in it, which was an anti-, to quell people's sexual desires. Yep.

## Walk to the Barracks

Q: Can we see the ward where the children were?

Well you can, it's actually up here. It's privately owned. It is now a hotel. So, originally when I first arrived they were in what used to be in M-Ward, or Myrtle House. They then moved a lot of the kids,

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by that stage they were becoming teenagers, and they moved them into, behind this building Lachlan House, which was teenagers. So the kids were originally, when I was here – that was the '80's, they were in M-Ward or Myrtle House, and then they moved some of the teenagers, some of them ended up in Lachlan House, down behind the community centre here.

*Q. Was that girls?*

No, it was mixed. Myrtle was mixed.

*Q. By then Alonnah had gone?*

No, Alonnah was still operating. When I was here it was all men and no female staff worked there. And then they transferred that, shut down Alonnah and opened up Myrtle, which was the kids. Turned that into what was called Alcheringa; that was a new fitted out building. So they refitted it all out. It was like a rabbit warren, to be honest, and they moved all the guys from Alonnah house up into the old Myrtle which they then called Alcheringa. It's an aboriginal word for 'our home' or 'our place', something like that.

All this here, that's all convict brickwork, convict forged wrought iron.

This is a beautiful old building, there used to be a beautiful Blackwood staircase in there. It's called J-Ward. You haven't been able to access for many years. It's now privately owned and they are doing it up. They then opened the building up the back there, the grey building, later on - J-Ward. I think, I have a feeling it turned into a women's as well. But then they opened up the building up the back here, it was called The Clinic. It's the only place in New Norfolk that has a lift in it. It was called The Clinic because downstairs you would have people whose health needs were such that they required more, more kind of medical things. And then there is another unit, another accommodation above it on the second floor which was for people who were quite independent. It got a name, it was actually called Lyprenny, in the end before it shut. Things that were situated there were things like the physiotherapists, the occupational therapists. Prior to it closing there was an advocate onsite, and the advocate's office was over there. But yes, the only building in New Norfolk with an elevator, I always find that interesting.

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