

### **Why does this group speak up against Ghost, Paranormal and night tours?**

First of all, not everyone is against these types of tours, in fact many people have participated in this type of tour in locations around the world and some within this group have a keen interest in the paranormal as a hobby or science.

**This statement is not meant as an attack on those people who enjoy and are passionate about exploring this past time.** It is an attempt to help people understand the prevailing philosophies of the disability industry and the respect that people here have toward the previous residents and staff and how tours can reduce that.

People that lived at Willow Court Training Centre were sent there because raising a child or sibling in the community wasn't the done thing at the time. It is what we called best practice in a "time context". With hindsight we as a community may look at this differently today. Community supports for families simply didn't exist outside of the large institutions making it very hard for families to manage and understand the needs of the family member with an intellectual disability. It was also a community expectation that any child, person with a disability be sent away and isolated where the "best supports" are.

People with chronic mental health issues, dementia, Huntington's disease, alcohol and drug burnout, nervous conditions, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder etc. all were treated at the hospital. This was the norm up until the late 1960's when there were new thoughts and models of treating people and so a regionalisation model appeared and community support was put in different regions in Tasmania under the guidance of Dr Eric Cunningham Dax. People who needed chronic care still remained in the hospital system, but the social-psychological model was the way forward.

While patients received treatment at the hospital either before or after the introduction of anti-psychotic medication there was a lot of human anguish and emotion until treatments could help in the healing process. It is this strong emotional anguish that is believed to remain within the complex and be absorbed into the solid structures of the buildings. This theory is called the "stone tape theory" and isn't a science theory, more a paranormal theory. We don't dispute people believing in this idea.

In any investigation of this theory there needs to exist a strong emotional "recording", someone must have had to have suffered immense personal psychological strain or torment. Asylums where people were placed because of mental health and/or intellectual disabilities are considered to be rich places of interest to enthusiasts.

It is here that we have our first issue. Asking people to pay money to enjoy investigating someone's suffering or the "residual haunting" because of the strong emotions that were stored within the structure of the buildings at the time of their personal struggles with mental health or intellectual disability fails to respect a group of people that are now included within our community.

This entertainment comes under the well-studied phenomena called "Dark Tourism" (*attractions associated with death*). Dr. Philip Stone, Senior Lecturer in Tourism, Editor: The Dark Tourism Forum and Leading expert on Dark Tourism states below.

*"However, to date, the academic literature remains eclectic and theoretically fragile. Our understanding of both production and consumption of dark tourism remains limited – especially considering the relationships between dark tourism and the cultural condition and social institutions of contemporary societies".*

We believe there are two ways of looking at this issue and they are

- 1) A place of positive human struggles or
- 2) A place of death, disaster or the seemingly macabre.

### **How does this fit with Willow Court?**

The human struggle to be freed from incarceration, community isolation (physical and attitudinal) and from being demonized by people, for difference is to be remembered, and celebrated. To be remembered in dark tourism for "difference" simply perpetuated negative perceptions and stereotypes, even in death. This diminishes the "struggle" that people living with a disability and their advocates (Staff and Families) fought hard to overcome.

We choose to remember the human struggle of families, advocates and people who live with disabilities to integrate and be including within our society without being demonised or portrayed as something other than human.

We must start to respect difference and not point towards difference or sell it as entertainment for the pleasure of others.

### **What about Port Arthur?**

Many people have tried to compare Port Arthur with Willow Court because there are paranormal tours and night tours at the site. There are **no living convicts and immediate family** that could be offended by people exploring at the site as it was closed decades ago.

The tours do not include the Port Arthur massacre site because there are people living in our community who remember relatives and family that were affected by the tragedy on that day.

It is this respect that people at Willow Court deserve but may not be able to express because of an intellectual disability and we believe it is exploitive to assume that the place that was a forced home is to be used in this manner and not celebrated as a place of human struggle, a struggle to have those basic rights recognised and respected.

### **Protecting a person's image and being valued:**

When you work within the disability community support system or you are a parent or family member of a person with an intellectual disability you may study or come to an understanding how people become devalued through a theory called "social role valorisation".

We all like to be valued and respected within our communities and we all look after our persona or image. This is that we like people to see us as. People living with disability often struggle to

understand these concepts and their consequences if your personhood or reputation is a negative one. The results are often that the person will be devalued. Devalued people are often pushed to the bottom and the edge of our society.

As people, who are related to, are friends with or who just understand this concept, the important part of protecting a person or group of person's reputation as valued people within our community is important. Selling their historic experiences of being "tormented", "different and cast out" does not support this idea.

We also believe in Article 3 on the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities"

*"D) Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity"*

Exploiting and devaluing the lived experiences of people with disabilities because of difference is not supporting this agreement that Australia is a signatory to. Often those that receive money for such tours have a history of creating more macabre history than that which is recorded in historical documentation.

Therefore we do not support paranormal activities within the site.

Cheers

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