

Date: 20 March 2002

MEMO

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To: Margaret Mackechnie	Our Ref.
From: Joanne Walker	Your Ref.
Re: Woodborough Raod	

As you are aware I have recently been seconded to Woodborough Road, the history and problems surrounding this home are well documented. At present Woodborough Road accommodates 10 young people. Two bedrooms at the home are shared. I write to you on this matter.

The staff group are committed compassionate individuals who have been worn down by a constant barrage of extremely difficult young people. One of the major difficulties presenting the team is the management of shared bedrooms.

This issue has been raised by the inspection unit (Oct 01) and continues to be an area of grave concern for them as it is myself.

The messages given to young people by this practice is abhorrent. The staff group despite their best efforts, find themselves having to compromise all principles of good child care practice on a daily basis. This raises anxiety levels and results in high levels of tension, staff sickness, problems in recruitment and retention and an overall feeling of helplessness. Needless to say the 'knock on' effect in face-to-face relationships with the young people is damaging - as evidence by the huge amount of vandalism to the very fabric of the building itself. We are already dealing with a staff group who feel let down by the department (rightly or wrongly) and who are being asked to manage what is, an untenable situation.

Young people are inevitably traumatised by admission to residential care and to be then faced with having no personal space increases their sense of abandonment and worthlessness. It is common practice, in order to minimise risk, to move bedrooms whenever a new admission is presented therefore creating upheaval and disruption for the entire client group. Thus issues of bullying and intimidation are rife, the unit remains in constant turmoil and so the abusive cycle continues.

Fundamental issues of choice, dignity, respect and privacy are ignored by this practice. Complaints from the children are common place and we are unable to provide any solution. At the very lest we are unable to guarantee safety.

I am aware of a previous incident of rape being perpetrated in another home with just such a situation, indeed, within the last week a young man who was placed in a shared room was urinated on whilst in bed! The horror of this happening is unspeakable. How can we give care to anyone who has been so abused by a system which allowed this to happen? We cannot even begin to work with him, nor indeed any young person if the underlying theme is one of not being valued enough to warrant a single room. In discussing the issue with both the staff group and young people countless events have been relayed to myself which resulted in crisis of one form or another - to the individual and / or as a consequence the entire home. Sharing bedrooms is a source of constant friction between the young people resulting in unnecessary dangers. It is a disaster in the making and only a matter of time before a tragedy happens.

I would go so far as to say this practise constitutes institutional abuse.

I believe (following my own assessment of the situation) that many of the historic and current problems with both staff and client groups are borne out of the reality of sharing bedrooms and would respectfully ask that the department gives consideration to either

- i) A reduction in numbers at Woodborough road to facilitate single occupancy
- ii) Alternative use of the building / space to facilitate single occupancy.

I fully realise the financial implications in this request but ask it be balanced against the cost. Financial, physical and emotional to all concerned. I feel that headway could rapidly be made should the department see fit to respond to this problem as a matter of priority.

Yours

DPA

Jo Walker

CC Paul Darbshire
Ted Townsend

DPA

An excellent letter
I will file JP with
MM/77 & @ OMC 28/3/02

DPA