

7 November 2013

Dear Christos,

The concept of Freedom Housing is innovative and exciting, and unlike anything else that I have ever heard of. It tackles a large gap in terms of care for persons with disabilities: a gap that is a lot bigger and far more serious than most people realise.

Supported accommodation is usually offered, but as I understand, it does not cater for the person with high care needs. There are many short-term solutions such as respite care, but these are expensive and difficult to obtain, and most importantly, they are only short-term.

Currently, the acute medical needs of elderly patients - or patients with a disability - are dealt with effectively whilst they are in hospital, and then follow short periods of rehabilitation, but nothing extends beyond this. There is only one long-term option for the high care needs patient, and that 'option' is a nursing home. This is entirely inappropriate for persons with a disability: many of who are quite young. Families are forced to place loved ones like Pamela, and some of the younger patients who I have treated as a physiotherapist, in nursing homes. These are young men and women, who are now living in a facility primarily designed for the elderly. It is not an appropriate environment for a 25-year-old car accident victim or for a 45-year-old MS sufferer.

The most promising aspect of Freedom Housing is its capacity to cater for the person with high care needs for the long term, while giving her the opportunity to create a lifestyle with as much independence as possible. This will in turn strengthen the relationship between her and her family.

I have witnessed families that are struggling to cope with the care demands of their loved ones. This creates significant stress and ultimately affects the health of the carer. In many cases the carer - whether it be a husband, wife, the parent, or sibling - will focus all of her energy on caring for her disabled loved one. Sometimes without even realising it, she begins to lose her relationship with her loved one. It is no longer a wife talking her husband, a mother to her child, a sister to her brother; it is a carer talking to her patient.

There is a focus on short-term solutions and fixing the immediate health related problems. These are very important, but we have collectively failed to find the long-term solution, and the impact that its absence has on the family that is providing care for their loved one.

Freedom Housing provides 24-hour care and allows the family members to go about life as "normal". They can go to work without feeling guilty, or duck out to a movie knowing that their loved one is well cared for. The person with the disability does not have to feel she is a burden on her family, and yet she will receive the best possible care. She can attend her therapy sessions in the physiotherapy gymnasium within the 'Freedom Key' and she can carry out general household tasks with the assistance of her carer. It means that her family can come home and have a meal together in its own home, which is something very special.

Freedom Housing provides the elderly - and those with a disability - a means through which to maintain their independence. It provides them with the opportunity to be supported within their own home and not be shipped off to a nursing home far away from their loved ones and friends. It removes the stress and strain of caring for a high care needs family member, and it provides a suitable environment in which a family may all live happily together.

I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping a family together, while providing it with the means of catering appropriately for every single member of that family unit. I believe that Freedom Housing has the ability to do this on a level that is very practical.

I whole-heartedly support Freedom Housing. I wish you all the best in your endeavour to make this a realistic option for our community.

Best wishes,

Kate Seaton