

**HUMAN RIGHTS WEEK LAUNCH SPEECH BY
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GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
WILLOW COURT BARRACKS, NEW NORFOLK
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Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to launch Human Rights Week here at Willow Court Barracks.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

[As we have heard from Tony Nicholson...?] International Human Rights Day in 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations General Assembly having adopted the declaration on 10 December 1948. And this Sunday the 9th of December is the 43rd anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Disabled Person.

There are important reasons for commemorating these declarations. They provide opportunities each year, at this time early in December, for both reflection and action.

And Willow Court is such an appropriate place to reflect on the human rights and the rights of the disabled in particular. It is here that people with mental illness or intellectual disabilities were housed from 1827 until the closure of Willow Court and the Royal Derwent Hospital in 2000, marking the social model of care and de-institutionalisation of the mentally ill and intellectually disabled.

The 1975 UN Declaration of the Rights of the Disabled Person provides in article 3 that:

Disabled persons, whatever the origin, nature and seriousness of their handicaps and disabilities, have the same fundamental rights as their fellow-citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and full as possible.

In article 6:

Disabled persons have the right to medical, psychological and functional treatment, including ... education, vocational training and rehabilitation, aid, counselling, placement services and other services which will enable them to develop their capabilities and skills to the maximum and will hasten the processes of their social integration or reintegration.

And article 9:

Disabled persons have the right to live with their families or with foster parents and to participate in all social, creative or recreational activities.

This followed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons in 1971 which was in similar terms. And both cited the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The language itself of the 1971 declaration is telling, of changes in attitude and treatment.

In the nineteenth century included 'lunatics', 'imbeciles', 'idiots' and 'morons', and 'asylums' for their institutions and still in 1971, as the UN Declaration indicates, 'mentally retarded persons'. In a process which has been defined as the 'euphemism treadmill', intellectual disability now seems to be the generally preferred term although disability labelling too has been criticised.

I would like to focus now on what was happening at Willow Court in the mid- and late-Twentieth Century in relation to the education and treatment of children with an intellectual disability.

Lachlan Park Special School, which was run by the Education Department, opened in 1959 in one of the hospital wards. Margaret Reynolds – who as we know is participating in this week's events here – taught at the school, including teaching reading and writing, until the end of 1963. However, it seems that there was a general belief in the 1960s that children with intellectual disabilities did not benefit from education and so after her departure educational activity seems to have lapsed.

In 1966, a speech therapist, Muriel Knight, was sent to Lachlan Park to assess the children's speech. She found that owing to a complete lack of stimulation, few of the children could speak. She obtained voluntary help and funding from organisations such as Rotary to start a Child Development Unit with activities for

the children. My mother-in-law was a volunteer with 'Miss Knight', as we knew her, for many years.

Muriel Knight also had a great interest in dyslexia and learning differences and she taught many children to read. The children's school became the Royal Derwent Special School until the closure of the Royal Derwent Hospital in 2000.

I have become interested in the work of speech pathologists teaching reading and writing through the work of Rosalie Martin, 2017 Tasmanian Australian of the Year. Rosie has taught prisoners at Risdon to read and she asserts that every child and adult, almost without exception, can be taught to read. I have seen her at work with a Grade 3 class at Bridgewater where only 7 of the 28 children had reached the NAPLAN minimum standard in literacy. She worked with the class teacher and then with small groups of two or three. I saw her working with the students who were struggling the most including one little boy who had been assessed as having an IQ of 65. He was making good progress from a start of having no idea of the relationship with letters, groups of letters and sounds. With Rosie's help, he will learn to read.

It is a great advance that children with intellectual disabilities are no longer institutionalised. They can live at home with their parents or foster parents and, in many cases, attend regular schools. But at the same time we need to ensure that the schools they attend are properly resourced to teach them, not just with teaching assistants but also with speech pathologists and other trained specialists.

Every child has the right to education, no matter what their differing abilities and learning differences and no matter what the socio-economic background of their parents. I think this is one of the human rights we should be focusing on this Human Rights Week. In Tasmania, 48% of adults are functionally illiterate. We need to make sure that this does not persist into the next generation.

In conclusion, I wish you a very successful and stimulating Human Rights Week here in New Norfolk.

Thank you.