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Sister tells Disability Royal Commission her brother looked 'like a zombie'

A woman has told the Disability Royal Commission she believed her brother was a “victim of neglect on many occasions” while living in a Victorian group home.

Angie Raphael

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Rose Atherton has told the Disability Royal Commission about some of the experiences her brother Glen Hardwick had while living in a group home. Picture: Supplied by Rose Atherton Source:Supplied

Glen Hardwick had been living in a Victorian group home but when he arrived at a Christmas gathering in 2017 looking “like a zombie” his sister knew something was wrong.

“There was no conversation from him and he was constantly just staring into space,” Rose Atherton said in her statement to the Disability Royal Commission.

“He was continually dribbling ... he did not interact with anyone.

“Normally, he would go and play with the dogs, but this time he didn’t even do that ... it was upsetting to see him like this.”

After that day, a family member accompanied Mr Hardwick for all of his medical appointments and once he was taken off some medication, he started to go back to his old self.

Ms Atherton detailed some of her brother’s experiences while living in group homes and said she believed he was “a victim of neglect on many occasions”.

Mr Hardwick, who was born in New Zealand and later moved to Australia, died aged 37 in December last year after suffering an allergic reaction following surgery.

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Rose Atherton has told the Disability Royal Commission she believes her brother Glen Hardwick was a "victim of neglect". Picture: Supplied by Rose Atherton Source:Supplied

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Ms Atherton said her independent brother never saw himself as having an intellectual disability and wanted to be treated like everyone else.

"Glen could be cheeky and liked joking with people," she said.

"Glen took things literally.

"He made an everlasting connection with whoever he ran into - people never forgot meeting Glen."

Ms Atherton said she thought placing her brother in supported accommodation meant he would be provided with the quality of care he needed.

"My view is that while there are some staff that do perform to the expected standards, sadly they are in the minority," she said.

"In my experience, the organisation that provided my brother supported accommodation let us down."

Rose Atherton says her brother Glen Hardwick was cheeky and liked joking with people. Picture: Supplied by Rose Atherton Source:Supplied

Ms Atherton said staff in group homes should treat clients with compassion, empathy and respect - like they would do to their own loved ones.

"They need to have the appropriate training and they need to have greater resources to assist the voices of people like Glen to be heard," she said.

"Human rights for clients need to be upheld and not forgotten about."

Ms Atherton also suggested consideration be given for New Zealand citizens living in Australia to be able to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

"Glen was able to tell us what he wanted, but he didn't really get heard," she said.

"I am doing this for him and also all the other people that can't speak up or have no voice."

Rose Atherton has spoken on behalf of her deceased brother Glen Hardwick. Picture: Supplied by Rose Atherton Source:Supplied

The Disability Royal Commission is examining the use of psychotropic medications, such as antidepressants, to influence the behaviour of people with disability.

NSW general practitioner Jane Law, who has more than 30 years of experience, said in some cases the side-effects of psychotropic medications could lead to a dramatic

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...years will be incurred where possible, and the rationale for the use of psychotropic medication can be improved.

“It is fundamental for the care of people with intellectual disability that an overarching structure with adequate funding and support for holistic management is required.

“Currently, services are compartmentalised, causing barriers to access and care. There is lack of capacity and little provision for cross sector work.”

The hearing will resume on Thursday.



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