

National Valuing Families Forum (NVFF) – press release.

The NVFF response to the Panorama investigation into abuse at Winterbourne View, a unit for people with learning disabilities owned and run by Castlebeck Care Limited.

NVFF members universally expressed their horror at the cruelty and abuse towards people with learning disabilities in the Panorama programme.” It could have been any one of our relatives”. The realisation that this is still happening sends shock waves through us all.

In 1971 the Government of the time published a white paper “Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped” which set clear targets for the closure of NHS long stay hospitals for people with a learning disability, and the development of community based provision. Here we are, 40 years later, with people with learning disabilities still living “in hospital” but this time not being run by the NHS but by a profit making private equity firm. Castlebeck has seen annualised profits rise by almost 29% and in 2010 their profits were almost £30 million.ⁱ

NVFF members feel there has been a failure to put Government policy into practice to provide appropriate services and support in the community. Commissioners need to stop buying the wrong services. NVFF members believe that people with learning disabilities requiring any assessment and treatment should be able to access this as close to home as possible. Families expect this to be provided by appropriately skilled and trained professionals and staff. We need to have confidence in the people who are supporting our family members.

We feel that the current regulatory system has clearly failed the patients in Winterbourne View and are concerned it is failing other people with learning disabilities. NVFF welcome the commitment to more unannounced inspection visits to services, however we are concerned that unless there is significant change to the process of these inspections, they will continue to fail people. The current system is too bureaucratic and focuses on paperwork. We would like to see inspectors spending more time with people who use the services and have special training in specific areas relevant to the services they are inspecting. We also believe that families should be much more involved in all levels of this process.

Our family members with a learning disability have the same rights as everyone else in this country. We want the same for our children as any other family: a good quality of life, freedom from abuse and torture and the right to respect and dignity. Government policy is based on the four core principles of rights, independence, control and inclusion – the Panorama programme demonstrated that for many there is still a long way to go.

Cally Ward & Vivien Cooper (Co-Chairs) NVFF

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Notes to Editors:

The National Valuing Families Forum (NVFF) was established in 2007 as part of the Valuing People programme. It is an inclusive and organised network of family carers across England. Each of the nine regions has a family carer network – these vary in how they are run and their membership. A recent analysis of the reach of the NVFF demonstrated that the scope of the network is great, reaching many

hundreds of families. The NVFF is hosted by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, and includes a number of key national organisations.

Further information is available from : Cath Baker: cbaker@carers.org

ⁱ NE.business.co.uk Evening Gazette Feb 8th 2011, "Health Firm Castlebeck is on the fast track" by Jez Davison