

**Meeting the needs of an intellectually impaired
child in a residential respite care home
(10HDC00356, 25 June 2012)**

Disability services provider ~ Respite care ~ Safety ~ Security ~ Supervision ~ Right 4(1)

This case relates to an 11-year-old child with autism and an intellectual impairment who, sadly, was found drowned in a nearby pond after absconding from a respite facility.

There was not just one issue leading to a problem with the child's safety but a series of inadequate or incomplete strategies.

The factors that point to a pattern of service provision that resulted in the respite care provider failing to provide reasonable care to this child were:

- The child had a propensity for absconding. In the year prior to his death he attempted to escape three times and escaped twice from the respite facility.
- The respite care facility focussed on the front door of the facility when taking steps to prevent the child absconding again; however it is likely that on the day he drowned he absconded through one of the backyard gates.
- The gates to the backyard only had locks on the inside and could be opened from the outside.
- There was a failure to reliably record that the gates had been checked and were securely shut.
- The level of supervision was reduced because handover took place at a time when the children were present. The policy was that the children would be collected by 3pm and handover would take place before further children arrived at 4pm. On the day the child escaped, two children were permitted to be picked up after 3pm and handover took place at 2.45pm when all five children were present.
- There was also a failure to ensure the child's crisis plan was updated.

The respite care provider was found to have failed to provide services to the child with reasonable care and so it breached Right 4(1) of the Code.

The respite care provider was pro-active in reporting the incident to a number of agencies and has made attempts to support the child's family through this difficult time. It has made many improvements since the incident and has undergone two external quality audits.