

Residents, MEC in stand-off over centre for the disabled

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A WAR of words has broken out between KwaZulu-Natal Social Development MEC Weziwe Thusi and the residents of an Umlazi skills centre housing disabled people.

At the heart of the dispute is the department's decision to close the Enduduzweni Skills Centre and send the residents home while the facility is renovated.

However, the 37 residents are refusing to move.

Themba Shiba, a visually impaired man in his 70s, has lived at Enduduzweni for more than 20 years.

A Department of Public Works report released in December condemned the place, saying it was not fit for living in, especially not people with disabilities.

The department later issued the residents with eviction notices.

Enduduzweni is a skills centre for people with disabilities, especially the visually impaired.

Shiba's son, Sizwe, is chairman of the residents' forum.

After residents prevented Thusi and police from accessing the centre yes-

terday, Shiba said: "The department has not negotiated in good faith with us over the status of this centre.

"The MEC has been heard on radio saying she has been talking to us.

"This is pure lies and we want the MEC to tell the truth."

Sizwe said the residents could not simply leave without knowing where they were being moved to.

He said another centre, in the Illovo area, had been closed six years ago pending renovations and had still not reopened.

The department said it had sent letters advising residents that the closure was temporary.

Enduduzweni residents locked the gate, preventing Thusi from entering.

Attempts by the police to defuse the situation failed.

The residents demanded a meeting with Thusi nearby. However, at the meeting tensions flared, with the MEC unable to placate them.

The residents had been advised before Christmas not to return, but they returned on January 6.

The impasse was eventually resolved late yesterday when the department decided to book the residents into a hotel. – TMG Digital