

31st July 2017

In response to the items that I have read from Frank Ross' correspondence regarding the failings of the NDIS. I am supporting him by sharing my experiences within this letter. My biggest concern is for those in the NDIS that are not able to advocate for themselves or have someone like Frank Ross to advocate on their behalf. I hope that my letter helps reform or make changes to the NDIS.

My name is Debbie Diggins and I was employed by Uniting Care in the Southern NSW Area to work in the position of a LAC (Local Area Coordinator) with the rollout of the NDIS in SNSW area. I was employed by Uniting in June 2016. I resigned from Uniting in June 2017. Working for Uniting I describe this as working from the inside out. Whilst in this position I found myself advocating for many NDIS participants, with repercussions from my management and from the NDIS. Many days I found the experiences that participants and their families or carers were facing was too overwhelming for me and so I decided to resign from Uniting/NDIS. I could not compromise my personal integrity or my standards any further. I now work from the Outside in with a provider, helping participants to access and use their plans.

During my time at Uniting/NDIS below are examples of issues that concern me:

1. Participant with Multiple Sclerosis needing a new wheel chair as her old chair was being held together by gaffer tape. After over 60 emails to and from the Participant and NDIS and after 4 months, NDIS still couldn't tell me how or who I could talk to, to get the quote approved for the chair. This started in December 2016 and to date I still do not believe the wheel chair has been approved by the NDIS.
2. XXXXXX is a 56 year old participant severely intellectually disabled. Her 81 year old carer, mother XXXXXX, is also hearing impaired. XXXXXX received a terrific plan and her mother was overwhelmed with the funding, but the plan did not include support coordination. I worked with the XXXXXX and a local provider to put care in place for XXXXXX. and I also helped with advice to put in for a review for Support Coordination and home modifications that were required for XXXXXX's safety. The review was carried out by the NDIS after 3 months and the result was that the same plan was put back in place, without support coordination or home modifications. XXXXXX (mother of XXXXXX) was at breaking point. I was unable to advocate for these ladies nor did she think she had any one that could help them. During my visit, I discussed with XXXXXX about asking her son XXXXXX to help, he lived in Canberra. I called XXXXXX and discussed the situation and he was more than willing to help. In about January 2017 he put a second review in for his sister for support coordination and home modifications however nothing had happened by June 2017. XXXXXX told me she received phone calls from various people within the NDIS and got different stories and was never given a number to call back. After months of not hearing about the review XXXXXX called the NDIS and he found that he encountered all the issues that Frank Ross has faced and identified in dealings with the NDIS. XXXXXX has now given up and reportedly said to his mother " this total NDIS thing is Impossible I give up".

The day before I left Uniting/NDIS I received a call from XXXXXX. She cried and told me about XXXXXX's frustrations and in all the years of living with XXXXXX's disability she has never felt depressed but now NDIS is sending her over the edge and she is finding everything impossible and overwhelming. That day I gave XXXXXX information to call the Ombudsman and our Local member to get some help.

3. 46 year old aboriginal man, with mental illness and brain injury – given a \$6,000 plan. All relevant and current information and supports were collected and recorded by the LAC at the preplanning meeting but the Planner at Batemans Bay NDIS office created the plan and didn't take little of the information into account. The inconsistencies with plans are impalpable and the outcomes depend on the individual planner and their subjective views. There was no transport allowance which would help him to access the community. Received no funding to cover his current supports which now have been cut by 5 hours per week. These supports were helping him to function within the community. The NDIS plan was put in place and because of lack of funding, in the plan for his current supports, they were reduced and to date his behaviour in the community has been worrying and is currently missing and tomorrow, a mental health worker, a support worker and myself and police will be looking for him as he is now missing. If NDIS had funded the plan correctly and put a Support Coordination in place, this man would be participating well within the community. How is he able to put in a review for more supports or find the supports he requires?
4. The NDIS help desk which is in some Centrelink offices are not able to help with many issues that participants are enquiring about. They are usually referred back to the LAC who is so busy with Pre-planning meetings, Plan Implementation and reviews. Participants and Carers in the NDIS system are mostly unsupported and unable to understand or access their plans.
5. In my experience of writing \$10m worth of plans, not one of my participants had been able to understand their plan from the NDIS.
6. Implementation of the plans with participants would typically not happen until months after they received the plan in the mail. The LAC's were not notified the plan was completed or sometimes the plan was never received by the participant because of mailing or address issues with the CRM. Most participants and/or carers did nothing with their plans after the implementation meeting with the LAC as they would find it too hard or too confusing. At times participants would require or want supports. The LAC or participant would put these supports in place to find out from the provider that their plans were not funded for that support. They would then need to go back to the NDIS by ringing the 1800 number so to have the funding moved into the correct line item. I question how does someone, often intellectually disabled or elderly or with no advocate find their way through the NDIS? They don't, they give up.

Working from the Outside of the NDIS as a provider:

1. Phoning the NDIS can take from two minutes or two hours to be answered, no consistency.
2. Many email addresses have been given to me to send various enquiries too. To date none of my emails have been responded too.
3. When an NDIS representative calls to speak to me about a participant, they do not leave a number or email to return the call and speak with them. You just need to wait for the NDIS to contact you and invariably they don't. Twice now I have contacted my local member and that is the only time the NDIS have responded.
4. Issues that I have called NDIS about:
 - a. Review forms missing from the NDIS website
 - i. I phoned the NDIS to find out why I could not find the review form on the website. It took me and the NDIS representative about 10mins to locate it through the forms section, the Representative giggled and said "put this into your favourites". I felt this showed the frustration of the operator.

- b. Phoned NDIS because funding on a plan could not be accessed for the participant by the Plan Manager, for the amount in that section of the plan. It was \$2,200 short.
NB: The Plan was Plan Managed. My call to the NDIS representative ascertained that the \$2,200 was allocated within that budget for Consumables. I asked how does the participant use this funding, if it can't be allocated by the Plan Manager? The representative said, "Oh this funding is Self-Managed, I haven't seen that before!" My response was "How does a participant find out this information, if it is not written on the Plan?" response from NDIS representative "I don't know"
5. Trying to claim payments through the portal. I am finding this extremely confusing and I am fully trained by the NDIS. The headings on the plans that are funded, do not match the line items or Subheadings of the price guide. Then you go into the portal to make the claim for payment and the heading on the portal is different again in the drop-down boxes. There is no consistency. Providers are spending too much time trying to find the correct line items that the funding has been allocated against by the planners.

I have given only a few examples of issues I have faced while working on the inside Uniting/NDIS and now on the outside of NDIS as a provider.

I will support Frank Ross and any other participant and their families that are having problems with the NDIS. I believe that NDIS is a great opportunity for many.

NDIS need to put procedures in place which make it simpler for participants and less time consuming for providers and professionals.

Emails should be monitored and replied to in a timely fashion. Details should be left with providers or participants so they are able to return calls to the NDIS.

NDIS representatives on the front line at Centrelink offices should be able help participants at the time or pass on their information to a representative that will call them.

NDIS representative need to be more empathic and understanding of a person's disability.

The Quote process is still being internally worked on and quotes are still not being approved.

Provider Finder on the NDIS website is not working.

The system for most participants is overwhelming and impossible to use.

Support Coordination should be given at the time of the pre-plan with the LAC, if it was requested by the participant or family representative. Currently Support Coordination can only be given if a participant has been labelled by the NDIS as Super Intensive or Intensive. If Support Coordination was initially given to most plans as requested, providers and participants and carers would have been able to utilise their plans and massively reduce the need for reviews.

The week that I resigned in June 2017, four LAC's from Southern NSW also resigned. We were all very experienced and in discussions I had with them, their reasons for leaving were like mine. Eg: Frustration with NDIS, lack of support for the participant and providers and procedure failures.

I am hoping that this information will help in the quest of making NDIS more efficient and less frustrating for the people that need this support.

Kind Regards Deb Diggins