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7 March 2017.

Review of NDIS Costs
Productivity Commission
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Submission to Review of NDIS (costs) by the Productivity Commission

We have been plagued for many years, as parents and VCAT Plenary Guardians of a family member with an intellectual disability and as coordinators of family support and lobby group LISA Inc., with the ‘power over people’ of block funded/captive market service providers – especially the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS/the department) in Victoria.

Most state government block funded service providers, very much including DHHS direct care support services, have always sent the message to consumers (persons with disabilities and their stakeholders) that they should consider themselves lucky to get anything and never complain, as they are receiving charity from the government who are paying the support service cost for their family member. Consumers are rarely seen or were rarely seen as valued, and without which service provider staff would not have a job.

Many service providers, DHHS especially, and such state government bodies such as the DHHS Complaints Unit, the Office of the Public Advocate, the Disability Services Commissioner, the State Ombudsman and the Health Services Commissioner all have no directive powers within a siege mentality of barriers to consumers better than the green zone in Baghdad. All for which we have very extensive and well documented evidence/findings.

This siege mentality defends in the extreme against any complaints from consumers. With ignore, avoid and deny any matter raised by consumers. This attitude totally negates their policy of, “complaints are tools to service improvement” and “98% of solving a problem is admitting there is one”

National Disability Service (NDS), of which we are a member, have been for some considerable time making extensive effort to change the block funding/captive market mindset of its service provider members to a marketplace mindset in readiness for the NDIS full roll-out. Especially addressing the NDIS criteria of the consumer (participant) having “choice and control, service entitlement and being valued.

We, therefore, waited with baited breath for the NDIS to come to our area, so we could both have direct experience and relay our experiences through LISA Inc. Fortunately, our areas, NEMA, was the first main roll-out area in Victoria.

With the PC Report saying such as:

- No disability support arrangements in any jurisdiction is working well in all of the areas where change is required,
- A national approach and a shift in decision making to people with a disability and their carers, is required,
- People with a disability have too little control over what happens to them and limited choice of service providers.
- Under the NDIS, the pace of adoption of self-directed funding can be expected to grow as people gain confidence in the new system.
- People with disabilities must/should live as close as possible to that of the general community.

We saw these factors and more, as moving services from a traditional captive market to the marketplace, with consumers effectively having the money in their pocket for their support services. Like most businesses in the marketplace, service providers must attract, retain and value their customers. As, “who controls the money, calls the tune”.

Whereas, there appears to be movement at the captive market station to reduce this initial move towards consumer control, choice, control, entitlement and being valued, back to traditional bureaucratic control over people, as public service organisations such as the Office of the Public Advocate and the Office of the Disability Service Commissioner openly stated that they do not see NDIS plan funding as effectively in the consumer’s pocket.

As this funding is not paid into the consumer’s bank account, like pension money, the said organisations see this as little more than a charity hand-out, saying the NDIS plan funding is held in a portal, to be used for the participant, not by the consumer - certainly not giving the consumer of disability services rights under consumer law within ACCC and Consumer Affairs. As the general community has for services it uses.

In respect to the difference between SIL (Supported Independent Living) and SDA (Specialist Disability Accommodation), the NDIA is promoting the NDIS on almost exclusively SIL.

We attended three very large seminars promoting the NDIS concept in Geelong, Darebin and Whittlesea, and the NDIS NEMA launch at Bell City, Preston. At not one of these was SDA mentioned in any way at all!

And the following statement, no one within the NDIA will answer this:

"We call on you, the NDIA, to give us practical examples of quality of care benefits residents of NGO group homes (SDAs) gain from before NDIS to after NDIS. And, do the same for residents of DHHS group homes, with the DHHS continuing to block fund the support service costs of its group homes in the NDIS areas of Victoria".

Whereas this should be a really important factor for the NDIA in determining the value and quality of support and care SDA participants are receiving both for the NDIA provided funding, and in comparison with SIL participants.

Tony & Heather Tregale
Coordinators, LISA Inc