

I am the Director of Gloucester Pre-School a community not for profit pre-school that caters for 45 children per day and up to 90 families per week. It has always been a challenge to find professional early intervention support for children 3 to 5 years of age in our region. Previous to the NDIS from organisations based in Taree would travel to Gloucester once a fortnight to work with children who had been assessed and identified with additional needs.

This system was not ideal as therapists often did not come and the time between support was often weeks or months. Families has little or no choice of who would work and support their children.

Since the introduction of the NDIS the situation has only got worse. Northcott, the pre-schools current funding organisation had their portal open in November for funding applications. As no families had identified their children with additional needs we could not make a submissions for funding. At the start of 2017 when the preschool children started we identified 4 children with high needs and 15 children with speech needs. We have two children approved for NDIS funding one is the high needs child. It has taken two months to have some assessments done by the Dept of Education councillor on two of the children and we have received no reports to date.

I have one family that has moved to the area with NDIS funding approved and they have not managed to organise any support for their child since they started here 2 months ago.

The family contacted Early Connections- Manning & Gat Lakes for support. They then sent the preschool a referral form for us to complete. We returned this on the 10th Feb. 2017. We have had not connect or support since. When I last followed this up they say they are working through their waiting list. A letter was sent to all services from them saying *"At this point we have only been planning for existing clients (those previously deemed eligible through their enrolment with an ADHC funded service). We are only able to plan for children who come through on an "access approved" list from NDIA and are waiting for further lists to come."*

The child has server speech delays and is due to start school in 2018. He can't use the speech therapist from Hunter New England Health that is located in Gloucester as he has NDIS funding. There are no other speech therapist in Gloucester that have NDIS approval. We are now at the end of term 1 and the preschool has no funding to employ additional support workers to work with him as Northcott has it's funding portal closed until Term 2. We also have no referral documents for him so as yet couldn't even apply for funding. This child has significant delay in all area but the speech delay is impacting on everything else.

We have a second child that has NDIS funding. She has an OT and Speech therapist that travel up from Maitland. It takes them 1hr 40 to travel one way. They stay for ½ at the service together. Some of this time is spent talking to the child's teacher. So she is getting about 15 to minutes for support. It is been charges out for 3 ½ hours of time. Plus anytime they take to write a report. I have not received a report so can not apply for finding for this child at this stage.

So what happened with families who need support and funding in Gloucester. This is a typical case for us.

1. A child starts at Gloucester Pre-School aged 3 or 4 years of age.
2. Parent is unaware that the child has developmental delays in any area.
3. Pre-School builds a report with the family and slow starts to have conversations with them.

4. Parent agree to have child see by a pediatrician but first they need a referral from the local GP.
5. They see the local GP with a report written from the pre-school.
6. The GP doesn't believe that there is a problem and will not give the family a referral.
7. Local speech pathologist from Hunter New England Health does seem to like working with low income families as they don't consistently do the suggest work at home. (I have many disgruntled parents over the past 5 years and they will not use her).
8. Parents don't get support until their child is enrolling in school and then the school counsellor is required to do a report.
9. School fund is cut back so hard that even then they get little support.
10. If we have for 2 years support before the child when to school many of the problem could be resolved or minimised to say the least.

NDIS was meant to off an affordable and workable solution to all of us. As I have stated above nothing has improved but only got worse. The system is in crises and the only support these families are getting is from over worker and stretched Early Childhood educators.