

National Disability Insurance Scheme
Public Hearing
Canberra, 27 March 2015

Witness Statement: Marguerite Walshaw

INTRODUCTION

My mother and I are the guardians for my sibling (hereinafter referred to as Sibling/him/he), an intellectually disabled person. Sibling lives with another person in a house rented through Canberra Community Housing. Focus ACT provides personal, domestic and other support. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays Sibling works for Koomarri.

Every Friday I drive Sibling to our mother's for the weekend (sometimes we shop on the way). The three of us have an outing on Sunday afternoons chosen by Sibling – this may be a concert, a visit to Questacon, the Bus Depot Markets – and always coffee. I then take him home.

NDIS – THE LEAD UP

For the last two years my mother and I have attended numerous meetings, talks, discussion, information sessions, and displays associated with the NDIS. We received information about these from Focus ACT and Koomarri. At these events, and whenever we asked, we were advised that we would be notified by the NDIA regarding Sibling's assessment.

On Monday, 16 March I received a phone call from Focus asking if my mother and I would be at Sibling's assessment on Wednesday, 18 March. I said we knew nothing about it, but I would contact my mother and we would be there. On Wednesday morning Focus again checked that we would be there and said that a Focus Representative (Focus Rep) would attend.

The address I wrote down for the assessment was Belconnen Arts Centre, 118 Emu Bank, Belconnen.

We arrived at the Belconnen Arts Centre on time for the assessment. No one knew anything about it, but, luckily, a staff member said that there was an NDIA office in the building opposite.

We arrived at the NDIA office 15 minutes late. After a few minutes we were able to get someone's attention, he knew nothing about any assessment and referred us to another staff member; we were directed to his workstation, so he could check his computer. As we sat down the phone rang. He excused himself and had a phone conversation for about 5 minutes. He then checked his computer and directed us to a room on the side. By this time we were about half an hour late and quite distressed.

THE ASSESSMENT

When we entered the room, we apologised for being late and stated we were not happy that we had not received any notice of the assessment from the NDIA. Two chairs were found for us and the assessor introduced herself.

We were perched around three sides of a small desk. A gentleman we were not introduced to and the assessor were on one side, my mother and I on the end, and the Focus Rep and Sibling on the other side.

The assessor proceeded to explain why we were there using the Agency's formal jargon. I requested the she repeat what she was trying to say in plain English. She said that we were here to assess Sibling's support requirements, but any report she produced would have to be in this type of language.

At this point the Focus Rep produced a personal support plan that had been drawn up for Sibling. It was handed to my mother and I to read through for a few minutes. We said that there were a number of errors of fact in the plan and we had some issues with it and needed to look at it properly.

The paper was returned to the Focus Rep. The assessor asked the Focus Rep a few questions, and the Focus Rep referred one to Sibling and a couple to my mother. Other than the question from the Focus Rep, Sibling was not spoken to the whole time we were there. Also, Sibling cannot read, so does not know what was in the paper produced by Focus.

The Focus Rep said that an amended version of the support plan would be emailed to the assessor and me.

We were thanked for our attendance and ushered out.

THE FOLLOW-UP

The Focus Rep emailed the assessor and me a copy of the amended support plan, and the assessor's emailed reply was:

Thank you,
This information will provide the foundation of Sibling's plan, I look forward to working with you all into the future to assist Sibling in reaching his goals and aspirations.
Kind regards

My mother and I are horrified – Sibling's assessment is to be based on a plan that still contains major errors; a plan that has not been discussed with him and his guardians; and will be written by an assessor who never spoke to Sibling.

An example of the errors in the plan:

The Plan: On Sibling's health – Cancer scare.

Fact: Sibling has a number of serious medical conditions and has had major surgery twice.

Also, Sibling works for Koomarri three days a week and there was no input from them for the assessment – probably, like my mother and I, they did not receive any notice of the assessment.

From the beginning my mother and I have been anxious about the impact the NDIS will have on Sibling. Unfortunately, rather than being a positive experience, the lack of communication from the NDIA and the assessment process have only increased our fears and concerns.