

Transport Forum, November 2015

Catherine Mahony, CDAH Coordinator

“At the heart of the NDIS is a life included in the community: with friends, family, belonging and contributing. None of this can happen if we don't have the transport we need. That's why we're here. That's why this forum matters.

Flexibility is the key to living an ordinary life. Transport funding with the NDIS should reflect this. There are plenty of examples here in the Hunter, where even with vastly increased NDIS funding, people continue to be isolated and excluded. This is because people don't have enough transport funding to participate socially and economically as they desire and as the NDIS espouses. Make our transport funding flexible, so that we can interchange it with other supports in our plans as we require. We want to find more creative and innovative solutions. Whilst transport remains fixed, we can't try or experiment with new innovative options, let alone drive creativity. Let us control how we use our funding; let us manage our own budget so we can live our lives to our full potential.

Our next suggestion is to get rid of the levels. Our transport needs are as individual as we are. We can't be reduced to a 3, 2 or 1 classification. The three levels don't cut it and are not responsive enough. This is not just about asking for more and more money, it's about our genuine desire to develop cost-effective and creative solutions that bring about citizenship. We don't want to rely on our NDIS transport funding allocation to live a good life. We should be asking ourselves how transport can support natural, freely given relationships and assist us to build new ones.

For planners to understand us as individuals, they need to be supported to make funding decisions that are driven by values. Values that embrace inclusion, individualisation and citizenship. We need people with disability at the centre of the Scheme, genuinely co-designing each and every part of it, including the values training that planners require. We need values based leadership in this scheme to ensure that the decisions made are as individual as we are. You can only do that in genuine partnership with people with disability and their families. It's about having the flexibility to invest in people in different ways depending on their circumstances. We call it a human rights insurance approach.

We know that transport with the NDIS needs to be sorted out. How it works, who's in, who's out, who's responsible and how to make it the best it can be? For too long, we've relied on government and industry to develop the solutions to our issues. It's time for us here in the Hunter to take control. Across this country, there are some fantastic examples where communities have joined together to solve their own transport issues. For example Northern Rivers Car Pooling where residents share their journeys with each other and build community relationships at the same time. The Peninsula Transport Assist Incorporated, an innovative vehicle and volunteer sharing network that pools community resources together on the Mornington Peninsula. Perth rates highly in the public transport accessibility stakes.

This is because the community banded together with a transport vision and worked hard over many years to reach the targets it set for itself.

As great as the launch of the NDIS is for this country, the job's not done yet. We have to all work together to make sure it will be the best scheme it could possibly be. I passionately believe this to be true.

And with the greatest of respect to my fellow panel members (and Cath was referring to David Bowen and Steve Warham from Transport for NSW), they can't do it by themselves. They need the lived experience of people with disability and their families to make sure the scheme is not only the best scheme that it can be, but it meets the needs of those people that it is for.

The job's also not done, because there's still work to be done out in the community raising public awareness and continuing to build support for the transformation in our community that the NDIS represents. Because, as giant a leap forward as the NDIS is, it's not the whole box and dice. Transport outcomes for people with disability in this country range from poor to abysmal. Still taxi's pull away from people with guide dogs , even with their hand on the car door. Multiple buses drive past before people who use wheelchairs can get on. As for a train trip to Sydney, Mark Bagshaw from The Able Movement tells it like it is, "To enter the train, Citizen Average steps from the platform into a small, grotty, non-air-conditioned "vestibule" which either contains a toilet or room to store bikes and luggage, then immediately through a narrow door into the main cabin.

Alas, not me. My wheelchair doesn't fit through the door, so I spend the entire trip with the other baggage breathing in the noxious smell from the brakes on the wheels, freezing cold in winter and expiring from the heat in summer, unable to make a phone call because of the noise, constantly being climbed over by passengers wanting to get to the toilet."

If we don't make progress in these areas, it's going to have a significant impact on the operation of the NDIS and also impede the progress of people with disability to be able to participate fully in the community.

So if we don't make progress on these areas, whatever support is available through the NDIS, people with disability are going to remain poor and isolated, and not part of the community, and that's not what we want. So join us in our movement for change. Thanks.

Catherine Mahony

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