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Opinion

Peter Scutt | Contractors are giving NDIS clients more choice

By Peter Scutt
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Watch: Dylan Alcott tells NDIS scammers to 'get stuffed'

In his recent piece in *The Canberra Times*, Lloyd Williams, national secretary of the Health Services Union, argued that care and support workers are better off working on one of our competitors' platforms, HireUp, which uses a casualised employment model. I would usually avoid making such comparisons in the public domain, but if Mr Williams insists, [here are the facts](#).

On the Mable platform, the average cost for NDIS participants when engaging social support services, Monday to Friday, inclusive of platform fees, is \$52.80 per hour, while the support worker receives, on average, \$44 per hour. These rates are determined not by Mable but by independent contractors and their clients. According to its website, HireUp charges NDIS participants \$55.82 while paying its casual workers \$37.35 (including superannuation). As such, independent contractors on Mable are earning, on average, \$6.65 per hour more than HireUp's casual employees (when superannuation is included) while still saving the taxpayer money.

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📷 I founded Mable to enable older people like my parents, people with disabilities and their family members. Picture Shutterstock

Not everyone is looking for full-time employment. In fact, support workers on Mable tell us the flexibility to choose their own hours around their personal commitments is the number-one reason why they choose to provide support via Mable, not to mention feeling more valued by determining the rates they charge.

More than 50 per cent of support workers on Mable are new to the sector, and only one-third said that if Mable didn't exist, they were certain they would remain in the care economy.

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No one is forcing people to offer support services via Mable or, conversely, to access support services via Mable. People willingly do so as their preferred option because of the model's premise of enabling choice and control to remain in the hands of the two parties engaged in the care relationship.

If support workers on Mable wanted the protections of employment, then they can readily choose this option as there is a chronic workforce shortage in the care economy.

The HSU argues that Mable should be forced to look more like an employment model. They want independent contractors to be paid less and lose the right to choose when, how, and the length of their shifts and which clients they work with.

And they want the taxpayer to pay more. The productivity gain enabled by Mable is clearly not due to support workers being worse

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EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT LOCAL COMMUNITY CARE CONNECTIONS.

Despite Mr Williams' claims, the evidence suggests that contractors on Mable are aware that they are operating small businesses. Like the 2.5 million small businesses in Australia, support workers on Mable are making their own decisions about superannuation, planning for taxation and putting aside funds for their own leave.

Running a small business isn't for everyone, but at a time when most care providers are struggling to find sufficient workforce, Mable receives thousands of applications per week from aspiring small businesses around the country.

In response to Mr William's comment about my past, yes, I previously worked in finance and provided capital to aspiring technology entrepreneurs. I grew up in Wagga Wagga but, like many country kids, headed to Sydney and then overseas to work.

As my parents grew older, my mother developed dementia, and my father became physically frail. Ten years ago, they were receiving support from a traditional home care provider, but that provider could not send the same support worker each day.

This led to my father begging me to end their home care altogether, given the anxiety it caused my mother. Many people with dementia need familiarity and routine, and the unfortunate truth is traditional providers are often forced to roster workers based on the needs of the business above their clients' needs.

My friend Tony and I founded Mable to enable older people like my parents, people with disabilities and their family members to engage support workers from their community that they choose and who choose to work with them.

Our business is only nine years old, and yet already 48 per cent of all relationships between clients and support workers on our platform are six months or older, with many multi-year relationships. Mable now employs over 300 people.

In our most recent staff survey, 13 per cent of respondents identified as having a disability and 29 per cent as having a close family member with a disability. They are attracted to work at Mable because of our social impact.

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INTERVENTION, why is the HSU so keen for the government to redefine genuine independent contractors choosing to use a digital platform like Mable as being employee-like?

Recently, senior officials from the Albanese government asked me if Mable had met with relevant unions, including the HSU, about the employee-like reforms. I explained that Mable would welcome the opportunity to sit down with the HSU and had privately invited multiple people from relevant unions to meetings over the years.

Unfortunately, the HSU and other unions have been more comfortable criticising us publicly than talking to us privately.

We want better outcomes for people working in the care economy, and we respect the complementary roles employment and independent contracting can play in the care economy.

So here is an open invitation, Mr Williams - if you or your colleagues would ever like to learn more about what Mable is already doing to ensure minimum standards for independent contractors on our platform, I would welcome the opportunity.

- Peter Scutt is the executive director and co-founder of Mable.

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