



Wednesday 30 August 2023

**ORAL SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL DISABILITY  
INSURANCE SCHEME:  
INQUIRY INTO THE CAPABILITY AND CULTURE OF THE NDIA**

Witness: Donna Bain, General Manager of Self Help Workshop Inc – trading as Self Help Workplace (position held since April 2009)

Self Help Workplace is a not for profit social enterprise specializing in providing supported employment for people with disability.

Self Help Workplace has operated continuously since 1962 and has been involved in the NDIS since its trial launch in Tasmania in 2013

We currently have 48 supported employees. One is funded by the Department of Social Services through its continuity of support program, 46 have a plan that includes supported employment and 1 is employed although we are still waiting patiently for her plan to be reviewed to include employment (amongst other supports).

I would like to start by acknowledging that NDIS has generally improved the lives of our employees who receive supports under the scheme in addition to supported employment. In particular, this includes: access to supported accommodation, access to services to support them to live independently, community participation and some transport services.

Our concerns about the NDIA's culture and capability centre around the following themes:

1. Participants are not included in processes which affect them and when they are, they are not treated with respect
2. The planning process is clunky and decision making is tardy
3. The system assumes a level of access to and ability to use technology. This is not reflective of the experience of most of our employees.
4. NDIS' systems are not tailored to or respectful of the needs of people with intellectual disability
5. NDIS' systems assumes that participants are supported by carers who are able to step into the planning process easily. This is not always the case. We have many carers including siblings and parents who are in their 70s and 80s. Their capacity to take on the day to day responsibility of a person with a disability who is also aging, while navigating the NDIS bureaucracy layered with technology is unrealistic and inconsistent with the need for the scheme to be fully accessible
6. Information about participants is not updated when plan reviews are completed.
7. Employment is not given enough focus and support

The following case study illustrates the ongoing challenges of supporting people with disability in employment within the NDIS and reflects poorly on the capability and culture of the NDIA.



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I have changed the name of the supported employee to preserve their dignity and privacy.

Joey is a female employee who has worked at Self Help Workplace since 1983. In February 2022, Joey's NDIS plan was rolled over into the new funding model. At the time, the LAC alerted SHW to a deficit in the plans funding for supported employment. Because Joey works five days a week, including an area that requires 1:1 funding, it was likely that the 2 year plan would be exhausted early. They recommended an early plan review.

In June, a request for a plan review was lodged with the agency. The agency then made 3 phone calls to Joey. One on one day and two on the second day. Joey did not answer these calls because: She doesn't bring her phone to work and there was no caller ID displayed on the phone. As Joey did not respond, the agency closed the request.

In July, Self Help Workplace's Employment Champion (the role of the Employment Champion was created three years ago to provide a dedicated staff resource at Self Help Workplace whose job is to walk alongside our employees to support them achieve their work and life goals) sat with Joey to contact the agency to restart the review.

The NDIA staffer required Joey to verify her identity. She was asked for her phone number. Joey couldn't remember her phone number so she asked SHW's employment champion to read it out for her. The NDIA staff member rejected this and stated that Joey needed to answer for herself. The call persisted and eventually Joey was able to satisfy the identity verification requirements by providing details of her date of birth, full name and address.

At the end of the telephone call, Joey turned to our employment champion and said, "I hate this situation. It makes me feel stupid. I'm not stupid. It is just part of my condition." At the end of the phone call Joey felt deflated and embarrassed. Joey has an intellectual disability and is 59 years of age.

Joey is not stupid. Joey is one of Self Help Workplace's longest serving employees and will shortly celebrate her 40<sup>th</sup> year with us. Joey's talents include:

- Using initiative and fills in for other employees who are away
- Being considerate of others
- Team player
- Safe worker
- Pleasant with customers and her work colleagues
- Gets on well with the team
- Works diligently and does quality work
- Does the most amazing craft work of which she is very proud (hand made cards are her specialty).
- Joey is also working with a tutor at the local library so she can get her drivers licence.

A further meeting has been held with the agency about Joey's plan. This meeting involved Joey and Self Help Workplace's Employment Champion. As a result of the collaborative and construction three way conversation, steps are underway to update Joey's plan to accurately reflect her employment goals.

Joey's interaction with NDIA can be improved.



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1. Participants should receive notification of plan reviews in writing. This communication should be written clearly and simply
2. Participants should be invited to meet with the planning team and bring a support person of their choice to that meeting. That meeting should be held so that people can see each other's faces (video conference or in person)
3. Planning conversations need to specifically include employment. Too often, plans results in employment not being included or dropped from plans. The rationale behind putting employment in core funding under the category of social, economic and community participation. However, employment rarely gets the attention it deserves.
4. Participants need to be supported to make informed choices about the appointment of a plan management provider. When the scheme started, most of our employees were self managed or agency managed. Now 10 are agency managed and the remaining 36 are planned managed. Conversations with employee and families indicates:
  - (a) they did not know a plan manager had been appointed
  - (b) They did not choose their plan manager.
5. Plan information about participant needs to be update to date.
6. Employment needs to be given more focus and support during the planning process and once the plan is underway.

I would like to finish with another example which is currently unfolding at Self Help Workplace. It involves Carol.

Carol started volunteering with Self Help Workplace in March 2023. She came to us as an NDIS Participant without employment in her plan. We were advised that a plan review was underway to make a number of improvements including adding employment. Carol has proven to be a terrific member of the team and is really enjoying working and making new friends. We have worked with her support team over the months to expedite the plan review. However, we made the decision on 11 July 2023 to put Carol on the payroll as an employee. We made this decision because (a) supported employment is what Carol wants to do (b) Self Help Workplace is where she wants to work and (c) we are enjoying working with Carol and it was no longer appropriate to have her work as a volunteer alongside her peers who are being paid for the same work. Carol is now a fully fledged paid employee. We will continue to support Carol and hope that her NDIS plan comes through with employment. We have requested \$10,500 for her supported employment.

Economic participation was always a key element of the establishment of the NDIS. The Productivity Commission recognised that employment improves the economic and social participation and inclusion. The health and wellbeing benefits of work are also well known.

NDIA has a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting people with disability to pursue their economic and social independence through paid supported employment. The culture and capacity of the agency needs to be refocused with this purpose in mind.



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## About Self Help Workplace

In 1962, a group of parents were concerned that their children with a disability who were about to leave school would not be able to get a job.

Their inspired solution was to create Self Help Workplace, a locally owned and operated enterprise that would employ people with disability. The enterprise started with 6 employees.

From its humble beginnings in a weatherboard cottage on the grounds of St Giles, at Newstead, Self Help Workplace has grown into a strong social enterprise, employing 49 adults with disability, working across five commercial business units, on a large industrial site in Youngtown that occupies over 2.5 hectares. The team is supported by 11 staff, 3 volunteers and voluntary board of 8 directors

Although much has changed over the years, the defining vision and mission of Self Help Workplace has not.

Our Vision is to sustain and grow our business so people with disability in Tasmania have equal access to work and training.

Our Mission is a supportive and inclusive social enterprise for people with disability in Tasmania which provides skills development, value for customers and friendship

The five business now operating at Self Hep Workplace are:

Prime Timber Production:	Manufacture of pine and hardwood product such as boxes, bins, customized packaging, garden/tree stakes, survey pegs, docking, and assembly
Merit Commercial Solutions:	mailouts, product assembly, document shredding, rag production
Encore:	preparation and sale of second hand clothing
Plenty Catering and Hire:	corporate catering, canteen services, bus and room hire
Spruce Grounds Maintenance:	Commercial and residential grounds maintenance including moving, weeding and site tidying up.

However, Self Help Workplace is much more than just a place of work. However, Self Help Workplace is much more than just a place of work. Self Help Workplace is committed to supporting employees to learn independent living skills. The current life skills programs incorporates the following activities:

- Cooking
- Food handling and hygiene
- Personal and work hygiene
- Maintaining a kitchen garden

In addition, accredited training is provided on topics such as horticulture, warehousing, manual handling, retail and literacy and numeracy.



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