

Submission into the Inquiry of the NDIS in the ACT

This submission in particular refers to Communication Performance and adequate provision of supports and services for clients and families within the ACT NDIS

My 43 year old son has a severe intellectual disability and commenced receiving support from the NDIS in the ACT in 2015. I am Legal Guardian and Financial Manager for my son.

As the ACT was one of the initial pilot programmes, there have been some “teething problems”. Unfortunately three years later I am finding the problems with communication even more onerous than at the commencement.

I have had cause to contact someone in the ACT NDIS office on many occasions. The only number available to contact them is through the National line on 1800 800 110. The people answering this line can apparently be based anywhere in the country. I have always found them helpful in trying to put me through to the ACT NDIS office to speak with a staff member who might actually be able to help with my son's issues; however I have never once been able to be connected to anyone in the ACT. The helpline person says they will either keep trying to put my call through for a short while or send an email on my behalf for someone to contact me. I have only ever had one call back from the ACT office resulting from one of these emails, which happened within approximately 48 hours following my call. The rest of the calls and emails have gone unanswered. This inability to contact anyone directly in the ACT causes a most frustrating disconnect, as the people on the helpline simply are not able to attend to or, resolve issues.

A recent case in point demonstrates this incredible lack of connection that had the potential to impact on my son's annual funding. I had been contacted by FEROS to make an appointment for my son's Annual Review. A date was arranged for 7 August 2017. I then received information through another source that because of the circumstances of my son living in a group home, he needed to be directly Reviewed by the NDIS and apparently not FEROS. I phoned and tried to check this information with someone at ACT NDIS. My call was not connected, but an email with my query was sent by the helpline person. That was the phone call that got returned within 48 hours. However, I was given incorrect information by the person in the Canberra office, telling me that it made no difference whether the Review was done by FEROS or ACT NDIS. A short period later I received a phone call on a Sunday night from the person booked to do the Review the next morning, telling me that FEROS was not meant to do the Review, therefore cancelling our appointment and I was told I would be contacted within the next two weeks by someone from the NDIS to arrange the Annual Review. I expressed concern at the delay, as my son's funding was due to end in September and I was also due to be hospitalised for a heart operation. I was assured it would be attended to in time.

After waiting two weeks for the call that never came, I tried getting through to the ACT Office without success on four more occasions in August and September. Funding was due to run out on 20 September. During my last call on 18 September to the helpline where I yet again

explained my story, "Emma" said she was sending an "escalating email", in the hope it might bring a response.

Having realised I was running out of time and still hadn't been contacted back, I physically drove to the Braddon NDIS Office and spoke to reception, explaining the situation and asking to speak with someone immediately. This was no mean-feat at the time, given my pre-op' heart condition and state of health and breathlessness! The receptionist returned with the message that staff had looked back through my contact history; could clearly see it and weren't sure why I hadn't been contacted before now. I was told I would be called that afternoon, as the person to attend to the matter was currently in a meeting. I was rung back within an hour and a Annual Review meeting was rushed to be scheduled for the next day; the final day to have the information approved. The whole situation was unnecessarily stressful at a difficult time and sadly doesn't appear to be an isolated incident. I have heard many stories from other families with similar concerns.

I would like to see a better means of communication between clients and the ACT NDIS. It is absolutely vital that this improves. Clients must not be seen to be kept at bay by a national helpline from receiving local assistance. Unfortunately the helpline is not actually equipped to help with personal matters!

I believe there also needs to be much more support in place to assist people to access The Portal. I had only just got my head around using the original system, when it was all changed. I haven't personally been able to access the Portal on my son's behalf for the past two years.

There are other factors that I could address in The Terms of Reference, however I believe that many other issues can largely be managed by improving and addressing the issues around communication; in person; by phone; email or through The Portal.

Thank you for the opportunity to add this Submission to The Inquiry.

Kind Regards,

Joan Swan

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