

JULY 2010

Submission for the NDIS Productivity Commission

My name is Miwa Stynes. I am a former employed professional and taxpayer, active participant in society and socially-engaged woman. I am now an unemployed recipient of government benefits, full-time carer and socially isolated leper who believes now, that it is never too early to have a drink (to hell with 5 o'clock).

I am also President of St Patrick's Special School PnF Committee; former Chairperson of The Briars Special Early Learning Centre Governing Council; and author of the picture book, "The Angel Who Was Accidentally Born on Earth."

I have two young children who both have autism and an associated intellectual disability. Both my children are mute. We currently live in Adelaide.

Public Meeting – Adelaide Wed 30 June 2010

I attended the Public Meeting held at the Adelaide Town Hall on Wednesday 30th June, 2010. The guest speakers comprised The Hon Kelly Vincent MLC; The Hon Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services; Bruce Bonyhady, Chairman of Yooralla; and The Hon Mitch Fifield, Shadow Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector. The meeting was chaired by David Holst, chairperson of Disability Speaks.

One of the key points that emerged from the discussion was the absence of the general public's commitment to a national disability scheme. One of the overarching goals of the Productivity Commission's inquiry is to create a scheme that better "increases the economic and social participation of people with disabilities and their families" (p9 Productivity Commission Issues Paper May 2010). But how do you engage people with disabilities with the community if the community doesn't understand disability? It is not safe to assume that a national disability scheme will automatically be met with public acceptance. A successful, sustained mass media marketing campaign is essential to creating understanding of disability and subsequent acceptance of a new national disability scheme.

A NEW Disability Scheme – Who Pays For It?

"...any new financing approach must principally involve **new** revenue from the community as a whole..." (p34 Disability Care and Support, Productivity Commission, Issues Paper May 2010). Public acceptance of the method of finance of a *new* scheme – no matter what that scheme is – is crucial to its success.

Irrespective of its form, either directly (via an hypothecated levy) or indirectly (from general revenue or a future fund approach), any future NDIS will be funded by the Australian taxpayer. As such, the Australian taxpayer deserves to understand why the NDIS is a worthwhile impost which should receive their full support (Especially when many Australians, as I do, privately fund their own disability insurance). The NDIS must therefore be *preceded* then *accompanied* by a dedicated and sustained multi-media marketing campaign.

Selling the NDIS

Let's face it. Disability is not sexy or glamorous. As a parent, I was dragged prostrate and sobbing into a full-time carer's role. That both my babies could be afflicted with a *lifelong* disability made me gag. It had, quite simply, never been a consideration. However, I developed an affliction myself which I have labelled – ACS – Acquired Compassion Syndrome. I suspect that most of the attendees at the Public Meeting also have it (Some people are born with it.). What it gives us is an in-depth insight and understanding into the needs of people with a disability. Parents, carers, people who work in the disability sector – We are the converted and the devout. We have our arms raised ready to accept the sacrament that is the NDIS. But...What about everyone else? Public acceptance of a new national disability scheme – *for which the public will pay* – must be courted and wooed until it is well-established. This can be achieved through a sustained and effective marketing strategy.

The Typically-Developing, Mainstream General Public (for want of a better title)

It is not realistic to assume the mainstream general public will necessarily support an NDIS. That a national disability scheme is the right and ethical thing to do is not enough in itself to garner the support of the mainstream taxpayer. Feedback received by David Holst on talkback radio demanded, "Why should I pay for someone else's wheelchair?" The NDIS, directly or indirectly, is another impost on the taxpayer.

To presuppose a social scheme with such an enormous economic impact will automatically slide into acceptance by the wider mainstream public is careless. My friend recounted an incident where resentment was strongly expressed to her because her family and disabled child had better seating at a public event than the complaining mother and her healthy family (I really shouldn't call her a stupid cow...). Megod. What we would give to be on the other side of the barrier...

An ongoing, dedicated marketing campaign has the power to not only change social attitudes but to transform social behaviour.

Changing Social Attitudes and Behaviour to Ensure Public Acceptance of an NDIS

Can we fix it? YES WE CAN! (Thanks to Bob the Builder for that positive message of hope and possibility). The Government has a demonstrated preparedness to sell (and sell and sell some more...) social messages until they enter and become an ingrained part of the Australian psyche. These social changes become such a part of who we are, we forget there was ever an alternative. Remember "Keep Australia Beautiful" and "Slip Slop Slap" (now I'm showing my age...)? In 2010, it is unthinkable that we would throw our rubbish out the car window while driving at 150kph without our seatbelt on, drunk as a skunk, smoking a ciggie with one hand and slapping the wife with the other (Speed Kills, If you drink and drive..., Smoking causes..., Domestic violence...etc). It **is** possible for the Government of the day to not just influence our social behaviours and attitudes but to dramatically change them through dedicated and sustained multi-media marketing. To ensure public acceptance of a new disability scheme, this must happen for the NDIS.

First Step Initiative for Implementation of a National Disability Scheme

Social commitment to a national disability scheme should not be taken for granted. Nor should we be affronted or insulted if such commitment to a scheme is not automatic. Even

after five years, my own family still struggles to understand what is involved and how truly gruelling caring for two disabled children is.

Effective mainstream buy-in and public acceptance of an NDIS beyond the immediate stakeholder group needs to be created and nurtured. The government must make a determined commitment to selling the NDIS to the public to bring about pre-emptive, effective and lasting social acceptance of a new disability scheme.

A successful and sustained marketing strategy must be a priority for immediate development and should precede (and follow-up) implementation of any new national disability scheme.

Miwa Stynes

July 2010