



For better or for worse?

Buzz words don't fix chronic underfunding

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Individualised funding continues to be the buzz word of this disability decade.

It is truly a sign of how low things are in the disability community that new era solutions includes hyping new case management models that for many the benefits are problematic.

For 80-90 % of disability service clients will not be better off under individualised funding and Disability Speaks would caution consumers to proceed carefully and not be consumed by hype alone.

Can you imagine the furore that would erupt if the government announced that instead of improving Education systems to modern and acceptable levels they would simply move to package funding and shift management responsibility onto the parents of children to source and control their own education services.

Such an analogy is appropriate to today's disability service world.

Service management is complex and complicated and comes with inherent risks and costs

Individualised funding is a service management approach and should be recognised only as such

It is not a solution to the chronic underfunding woes that dog the disability sector

Consumers need to be very careful about the future choices they are now being asked to make.

There is no doubt for some individualised funding and by extension self-managed funding will be a major windfall.

For people with the acumen or the expertise to negotiate better service options may come out well in front

For others complexity, confusion and additional costs are guaranteed.

Many will also have heightened expectations assuming desperately needed additional services are forthcoming, but that is not the case.

The biggest genuine benefit of individualised funding we can see is that it may give consumers the ability to swap service providers more simple and easily

That is genuinely a very good thing and should be applauded.

Last week the South Australian Government wrote to 2300 clients of Disability SA to ask them how they wished to manage their "personal service budget".

More information can be found at

www.sa.gov.au/disability/individualisedfunding

While some will congratulate the government for what is seen as a new era in disability services for others this communication will be confusing, misleading and almost certainly a non event.

For those on waiting lists there is no change e.g. still no funding available.

The Individualised funding "Return Sheet" gave "5 making your choice options"

1. Directly manage funding
2. Someone help you directly manage
3. An agency to help manage the budget
4. An agency to arrange the services and manage the budget
5. Leave everything as it is, Government to continue to arrange and pay for your services

With no hesitation our family ticked box 5

While that option may not be everyone's choice the reality for many is that if the government delivers on what we pay our taxes for (and governments are elected and expected to do) and provides

- Timely services when needed
- In sufficient quantity

- Of highly professional quality
- With flexible choices and
- With a person centred focus

Then option 5 is the best choice for us!

The chance of NDIS fixing the problems shrinks by the day as it becomes more and more a grubby political football game. From today's Age Newspaper
<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/hockey-cautious-on-disability-plan-20121204-2at94.html>

In our family we can see no justification for us to continue to take on administrative and managerial responsibility for our 28 year old with high support intellectual disability needs.

It is not our aim to keep management responsibility because in the short and long term this option is unpalatable for a vast plethora of reasons. Her parents will not live forever being the most critical one.

In many cases people electing options 1-4 will need to

- Pay agency planning fees which comes out of their available funds reducing funding available for services
- Develop and have approved a personal Budget Support Plan
- Hope the funding detailed buys them additional services or
- Buys them better quality services or
- More flexible services and
- Accept responsibility for arranging their own services including finding staff and handling crisis situations

It is easily arguable that the wish of some for individualised funding only arises because services have not been available on a timely basis, personally tailored in sufficient quality, flexibility or quantity.

It is also a fact that many major service providers find that up to 20% of services involving labour need emergency intervention due to short term staff unavailability. The biggest problems in the sector are usually staff related. Shifting the responsibility of finding, providing and training staff away from government and NGO's onto consumers is a potential black hole that people need to be fully aware of.

As consumers considering individualised funding options Disability Speaks suggests you move carefully and seek a wide range of independent advice from different advisors.

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