**PROGRAM 1**

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 1**

**NDIA representatives: Maryanne Diamond (GM Community Linkages and Engagement)**

**Topic: NDIS overview – what and why?**

Vision Australia Radio is proud to present *Spotlight on the NDIS,* a two-part series focusing on the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

In this first program we will be looking at preparing for the NDIS rollout, planning and implementing your NDIS Plan, and, most importantly, what is the NDIS and why is it so important to us all.

Your presenter is Stella Glorie.

I am speaking now with Maryanne Diamond, who is General Manager, Community Linkages and Engagement, with the National Disability Insurance Agency, otherwise known as the NDIA, and we are going to be speaking today about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, otherwise known as the NDIS.

Thanks for your time today Maryanne.

Good to talk Stella.

So can you tell us how the NDIS is different to the current system?

So the current system, that we have known for a very long time, in general, provides money, or block funding, as it is better known to organisations. Organisations such as Vision Australia, who provide services to people with disability. That’s historically how things have worked. There has been the view, by many, for many years, that people themselves should be in control of their lives, their money, their services. Choice and control, we might call it. So there has been a lot of work done over many many years to change the model. But mindful, change is difficult.

Are you able to tell us a little about the history?

So, a number of people had been working hard on thinking about how we could have sufficient funds to cover people with disabilities and their needs in this country, recognising that in many cases the system has been crisis driven. That people - there wasn’t enough money that people had to get into a crisis situation before they would get supports and services. So that was the case for many people with disabilities.

So if people remember back to 2007 when Kevin Rudd was elected Prime Minister of Australia, he had a summit called 2020 Summit. The idea was that a whole lot of people from around Australia came with big ideas and one of the big ideas that went to that summit and came out of the other end of the summit was by Bruce Bonahades, who was the inaugural Chair of the NDIA, was that we have a national disability insurance scheme. That was where the idea was born and then a whole lot of work happened around Australia through talking to people with disabilities all around the country. There was a report written called The Shutout Report. That was the stories of people with disabilities – how they felt so shutout from systems and life and communities because they were not getting the supports they needed - which led to a Productivity Commission on what the feasibility, both social and economic, of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. That was when Bill Shorten was the Parliamentary Secretary of Disabilities, so Bill Shorten was quite proactive in getting to the Productivity, and that came out of the Productivity with recommendations that we should do this, what it would cost, what the social benefits would be. And then, because of that process it was then up to the Council of Governments, so the COAG took responsibility for it. And at the same time the community mobilised. Carers, service providers and persons with disabilities came together under the umbrella of Every Australian Counts campaign. And it was really a social media driven campaign that people signed up to, got proactive. Those three major bodies worked together to really push government to introduce a National Disability Insurance Scheme. So in 2013 the legislation went through Parliament to introduce a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Do you feel that it would have happened without social media?

I think it would have been more difficult for the community to mobilise without social media. You know, there were some events, some lobbying to governments, that part of it may have still happened, but to get the hundreds of thousands of people who signed up to the Every Australian Campaign, and a lot of the communication to people from people came through social media. I think the timing was perfect and social media played a really big part in that.

It is interesting isn’t it? And, so you know if the NDIS was modelled on any other schemes?

There was a looking around the world to see what was working, what didn’t, who was doing what. I think the NDIS was kind of modelled on some components of things but it is in itself a bit of a standout worldwide.

Now, I understand there was an Every Australian Counts campaign. Is that part of the social media campaign?

The social media campaign was a big component of the Every Australian Counts campaign.

And, can you tell us a little bit about how the NDIS is going to roll out?

So the NDIS in 2013 went through for 3 years a trial period in 7 jurisdictions around Australia to see what worked and what didn’t. Some of it was in a geographical area; some of it was different age cohorts, just so we could test what worked. And in that 3 years, 30,000 people were brought onto the Scheme. From July 1 2016 through to July 1 2019 another 430,000 people will be brought onto the Scheme across Australia. So over that 3 year period we will be rolling out, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, in some States, like South Australia different age groups come on at different times. In Victoria it is a geographical, depending on what part of the State you live in. So, it has all been planned through the agreements between Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments. So it is a huge huge undertaking and, at the same time, we are doing some work called the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building, and that is for inclusive accessible communities and building the capacity of people with disabilities and organisations to work to ensure that our community is more inclusive.

This is where your role comes in. I was going to ask you what does Community Linkages and Engagement mean, but I think you have explained it to us.

So, yes, pretty well it is about the community, it is about engaging with the community, the community being people with disabilities primarily, but also with the carer community, with service providers. It is about the rolling out of the Information Linkages and Capacity Building program of the NDIS and, you know, generally working with our community to understand and implement and really feel an ownership of and feeling comfortable with the new way of delivering services in Australia.

Maryanne Diamond, General Manager Community Linkages and Engagement from the NDIA, thank you for your time today.

Thanks Stella.

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 2**

**NDIA representatives: Cassie Hammond and Pam Steele-Wareham**

**Topic: Planning and plan implementation – the planning process, goal setting, implementing your plan and finding providers**

And today we are talking about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, otherwise known as the NDIS. And to help us along with this I am speaking with Assistant Director, Transition and Implementation – Cassie Hammond, and Acting Manager for Tasmania - Pam Steele-Wareham, both from the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Now, Pam, what is an NDIS Plan?

Stella, a Plan is an individualised plan for the participant in the Scheme. So it reflects the conversations that we have had with the participant, and maybe sometimes with their family or their support person, as part of gathering information to make sure we have got a complete picture of that person’s circumstances.

And also to speak with them about what are their goals relating to their disability that can help build their capacity to be a part of the community. And so we look at a number of factors there. We look at what is the family’s role in the person’s life, what are their informal supports, because we want to make sure we don’t take over those, that we build on all of those important informal supports that we all have in our lives, and what are they providing for the person. Are there any supports that should be provided by what we call mainstream services, being education or health, because the scheme needs to make sure that to be sustainable it isn’t duplicating supports that other mainstream agencies should be providing. And then we have a look at what then is the role of the agency to help fund the supports that will be necessary for somebody to be able to continue to live at home and have some support in the home or to live independently in the community. To be able to access the community like other people can, recreation activities with their friends, and importantly to help them seek employment if that is also something that is possible and important for them. But Cassie can probably add a little bit more to that.

Sure. Thanks Pam. So essentially the individual’s first plan is also the start of the relationship with the agency. So it is part of the pathway that they take to transition into the agency, and as Pam says, the plan document is bringing together all that information so it is all captured in the one spot. And it supports that participant to engage, be included in the community and to live an ordinary life as per their goals.

And Cassie, what is the role of a planner or a local area co-ordinator?

It will depend on the channel that a participant comes into the agency as to who they will intersect with. So some of our participants will engage with a planner and they will work through the process that Pam has just described – looking at their current circumstances, what are their informal supports, what links do they already have with community and mainstream services, what links they may be able to access that they haven’t already met, and then looking at what additional supports are required on top of that. So they will work with the participant, and perhaps their family or support person, to develop their plan and work through the process of ensuring that it goes through to approval and then there will be referral out to, often a support co-ordinator, to assist with implementing that plan.

Other participants might intersect with a local area co-ordinator who will work also to gather the information required to develop the plan and it will then be reviewed by an agency staff member for the approval process.

We have children also who we are providing assistance to, so for those who are aged 0 to 6 they may engage with an Early Childhood Early Intervention partner. Their role is looking at, determining what the support needs are that that young person may require and looking at what linkages and information they may require to be able to engage in some of those mainstream services that Pam described earlier, so the likes of health or early education settings. And the other areas of support that an Early Childhood Early Intervention partner may provide – some information to support the person around what community based supports they might be able to access as well as potentially providing some intervention support on a short term basis.

Now is there a choice between self-management and agency management?

Yes there is a choice and they are two separate options. A participant has the opportunity to choose. One of the key principles of the Scheme is that the person has choice and control. So they have choice as to who may provide their services and control over how those services are managed. So part of the conversation and planning process is whether someone is interested in managing their supports themselves. They are funded supports that they receive from the agency. If they have capacity to do so, confident and it is their choice, we facilitate that for them. Not everybody wants to take on that responsibility, so people can also choose to have what we call agency-managed. What that means is that when they have chosen the provider who will provide the supports for them, that provider then has an invoicing arrangement with the agency for supports provided. We then fund the provider directly for those supports. The participant still has the control and relationship with the provider, we just act as the invoicing and the provider of the funded supports for the individual. The individual has a relationship with the provider. This is a very different part of how the scheme works compared to previous disability system where providers were funded by government and the participant had minimal choice and control really over those supports. So the scheme funding is the participant’s funding. They choose whether they want to manage themselves or whether they want to enter into an arrangement with the service provider. That service provider will then have an invoicing/payment relationship only with the scheme.

Now Cassie, part of the planning is goal setting. Can you tell us a little about what goal setting is?

So Stella, as we were talking about before, part of the planning process involves setting goals and what we like to see within the plan process that there is that clear link between the goals that someone sets, the supports they receive from family and formal community supports and then the funded supports that are provided through the NDIS plan. Goal setting is essentially looking at what it is the person would like to achieve, perhaps during the duration of their plan, which is often a 12 month period, and they may have some goals which extend beyond that period of the plan, but there may be some essential steps that they would like to take towards obtaining and achieving those goals within that timeframe. Goals can be quite varied and are very dependent on the individual. Looking at what it is that they want do within their family, within their community, it might be their career or vocational goals that they are working on. So really very dependent on the individual and through the planning process there is some assistance and support to finding what it is the person wants to achieve.

And what happens if I am not happy with my plan?

Yes, look, certainly we are very open and welcome participants to provide us with feedback at any part of that planning process. And if the plan is not a plan that they understand fully – sometimes it is just a matter of helping to walk through the plan and what the completed plan looks like, so people understand the plan itself and how it works and the responsibilities within the plan. So sometimes that is all it takes – just a conversation to clarify things for people.

On other occasions, people may not agree with the reasonable and necessary decision that the agency has needed to make around a funded support that has been requested. If that is the case, a person is able to request a review of that reasonable and necessary decision. And that will then be formally acknowledged and we will then work through that internally within the agency with the participant. Often we can resolve it at that point. If we can’t it will then have a further level of review. If, after those efforts the participant still does not agree with the decision that has made, they can certainly take that request to the independent arbiter, who is the Australian Administrative Tribunal, and they will then independently review that decision for the family and make a ruling. And so, we have had a few of those reviews, which have occurred which have been very valuable for the agency because we have learnt so much more about how we work with our legislation and the participants.

Now you mentioned funded supports. What are funded supports?

Funded supports are those supports that are required to assist a participant to achieve their goals that are set out in their NDIS plan. So when we are thinking about supports, we think about that hierarchy that we have mentioned before. So, what is it that is able to be provided from informal supports. That would be family and friends that the person doesn’t pay for that support. We want to acknowledge the contribution that informal supports provide to an individual with disabilities. But we also recognise that at times some of those supports are not sustainable on an ongoing basis and we might need to balance out those supports. We then look to the community and mainstream supports to determine what can be provided on that level to assist a person to achieve their goals. Where we cannot cover off for the participant on those three levels the assistance that they may require to support them to achieve their goals, that is when we would look to what are the funded supports they would require in their NDIS plan to assist with that progression towards achieving their goals. As we said, whether that be inclusion in their community, their vocational goals, their day to day life goals that they have. It is essentially the support on top of that which they are already receiving through other systems and other support channels. And in some instances, some of those will be targeted at capacity building so it might be a time-limited support that will provide the person with the skills, abilities, knowledge that they might require to then be able to undertake some of those tasks or activities independently into the future.

So I have got my plan, I am happy with my goals, how do I go out and find a provider?

So, that is a really important part of the whole pathway for a participant. It is all very well to have a plan, but unless you can implement that plan and put those supports into place it is not very helpful. So there are a couple of ways that people can do that. Some people, if they are self-managing, will do that completely themselves. They are quite confident in knowing who the providers are, who are able to provide those supports and they will do all of that themselves. For people who say to us that I need a bit of support, I don’t really know who the providers are, I don’t quite know how to make contact with them or to negotiate this new arrangement, we will either refer them to one of our local area co-ordinators who will assist them with that piece of work to get the plan in place and then they will withdraw and leave that up to the participant.

Sometimes if the plan is a little more complex, and there may be a number of people involved, we would fund a support co-ordinator as part of the person’s plan to help them implement that plan because it is going to take a little bit of time. They will be working with maybe two or three different providers and that maybe some assistance that the participant sees as necessary for them to be confident that they can start their plan and get their supports into place. That support from a co-ordinator is time limited until such time as supports are in place and everyone is confident that they are on the right track.

I understand also that there is a plan review. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Sure. We will be working with participants to review their plans on a regular basis and essentially it is an activity in which we will look at the current plan, how it has been working, so what has been working well, what may not have worked so well. We also look at the goals that the person has set and look at the outcomes in terms of their progress towards achieving those goals. They may some additional goals that they might like to include in that new plan. Also looking at the supports that they have had. So have there been any changes in their informal support arrangements, are they able to access some new community or mainstream supports or has there been a change in what they have been accessing historically. Also, again, looking at the funded supports that they require in addition to support them to work towards their goals set for the new plan looking ahead.

Pam and Cassie, both from the National Disability Insurance Agency, thank you so much for your time today.

It has been a pleasure Stella.

My pleasure too. Thank you.

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 3**

**NDIA representative: Maryanne Diamond (GM Community Linkages and Engagement)**

**Topic: Getting ready – how to prepare for the NDIS rollout**

I am speaking now with Maryanne Diamond, who is General Manager, Community Linkages and Engagement, for the National Disability Insurance Agency, otherwise known as the NDIA, and we will be talking about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, otherwise known as the NDIS.

Thanks for your time today Maryanne.

Good to be here Stella.

So how is the NDIS rolling out?

So the NDIS, the legislation went through Parliament in 2013 and is was followed by a 3 year trial in 7 different sites around Australia, but 1st July 2016 we are fully rolling it out over a 3 year period. So, in some States it will be rolled out region by region, other States by different cohorts, for example, in South Australia by different age groups. So by 2019/20, everyone in Australia will be in the scheme.

I understand there is talk about bi-lateral agreements between the States. Can you explain that?

So when the NDIS came through the legislation in Parliament, the Commonwealth, along with each State and Territory, on a bi-lateral, so that means government to government, had a conversation about how the scheme would be rolled in their State or Territory, and Commonwealth programs of course. That was agreement between governments and our role at the NDIA is to implement those arrangements. So that was bi-laterally talked about when, who would come onto the scheme in that 3 year transition period.

Now this is the big question. For the people listening, what should they do to get ready for the NDIS?

First of all, I suppose I would say, find out when it is coming to your area. That information is available on the NDIS website, that is NDIS.gov.au, so you can look up your State or Territory, look at what area you live in. As I say, some come in in different regions. First, for example, in Victoria was the North East Metropolitan Region, but they will be all spelled out as to when they join. I think the other thing is that on the website of NDIS there is also an Access Checklist. Look at that checklist to see if you are eligible, and that means some of the criteria is that you are an Australian citizen, t you are under the age of 65 and that they are the main two criterias. But, I think also think about your goals, what is it that works for you in your life? What are you aiming to achieve? And prepare. So there will be finding out if you are eligible, when it comes to your scheme, think about your life and what is working and what is not and what could work. Then there is an Access Request Form, so 6 months out from when the scheme rolls into your area you can complete, what we call, is an Access Registration Form.

Is there someone people can actually talk to?

In the rollout of the NDIS we are opening offices in all different parts of the country in line with the phasing of those regions into the scheme. And part of the rollout includes what we call Local Area Co-ordinators. So there are organisations in the community who, under a tender or contractual basis, are employed by the agency to deliver services in areas. They will be establishing 6 months before rollout starts in any area and they will be available to assist people prepare. That is part of the role. And you know what I have found so far is that people learn a lot from each other. People who, if you know someone who is already on the scheme, that can be an invaluable source to talk about their experience, what they did. So I think people will find all different ways to get the information they need.

I was going to say, could people go to an organisation such as Vision Australia?

Yes, they could. They could go to any of our Local Area Co-ordinators. So, for example, in North East Melbourne, the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence is one of the big organisations. And part of the idea of having organisations such as them involved in the delivery of the scheme is that they are local in the community, they know communities. And really people don’t want Government bureaucrats from Canberra administering a scheme in local communities. I think that utilise the services of organisations you know as well as looking at what are some of the local organisations being established in areas you live.

And what happens if I live in an area where the NDIS is not yet available?

So as part of the agreement between governments, the bi-laterals, until such time as the area you live in rolls into the scheme, the term we use, ‘comes on to the scheme’, services that you have received in the past will continue to be in place for you. So things shouldn’t change at all for you. You should continue to receive the services you have been receiving until such time as your area comes in.

Maryanne Diamond, thank you for time today.

Thanks Stella.

**PROGRAM 2**

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 4**

**NDIA representatives: Maryanne Diamond and Pam Steele-Wareham (Acting RM, TAS)**

**Topic: Frequently asked questions re. NDIS**

Vision Australia Radio is proud to present *Spotlight on the NDIS,* a two-part series focusing on the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

In this second program we will be looking at frequently asked NDIS questions, access and eligibility criteria, and what does it all mean for those who are blind or have low vision.

Your presenter is Stella Glorie.

I am speaking now with Maryanne Diamond, General Manager, Community Linkages and Engagement and Pam Steele-Wareham, Acting Regional Manager in Tasmania, both from the National Disability Insurance Agency, otherwise known as the NDIA, and today we will be talking about the National Disability Insurance Scheme, otherwise known as the NDIS.

Thank you for your time today Maryanne

Thank you Stella, good to talk to you

And Pam

Thank you Stella

So Maryanne, over to you to begin with. What is the difference between the NDIS and the NDIA?

So the NDIS is the Scheme, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, legislated by Government and being rolled out across Australia. The NDIA is the Agency established by government to implement the Scheme. So one is the Agency and the other is the Scheme.

So, Pam, are you able to talk about the Early Childhood Early Intervention approach?

Yes thank you Stella. The Early Childhood Early Intervention approach is a really important initiative for the Scheme and also for families and children ages 0 to 6 years old who may have or do have a developmental delay. So the Early Childhood approach is based on the best practice principles of Early Childhood Australia and it is making sure that the Agency works directly with families, in the first instance, to provide information linkages and assistance to them to understand what is going on for their young child. And also looking at what sort of short term supports might we be able to find for the family. So it is about building the capacity of family in their natural settings at home to understand what is happening for the child and to look at what is the best early intervention approach for the family and the child.

Now, what resources are available for people with a vision impairment?

So Stella, let’s talk first about people preparing for and contacting the Agency and then Pam can talk a little bit about what people can may expect could be possibilities in plans. So if you are planning to come onto the Scheme you are checking whether you are eligible, so first of all on the website of NDIS, [www.NDIS.gov.au](http://www.NDIS.gov.au) there is a checklist, an access checklist. First thing I would suggest is that you look at that checklist to see if you maybe eligible. That looks at things like whether you are an Australian citizen, under the age of 65, and so on. Also, look on our webpage for when your area will roll into the Scheme. It is being phased in over 3 years, different jurisdictions at different times, so you need to check that. And when you are completing your access registration form, which is required, once you determine you will probably be able to access the Scheme, a copy of that can be requested in Braille. It is by request because, although really these forms are often filled out on the phone or online, as a blind person myself I know how important it is to be able to have that document in front of you, even if you are putting your answers in electronically, and so on. There are a number of other resources that, on request, people can request in different formats – large print, braille, for example, like the Participant Pathway booklet and a number of other resources. And of course there is also our 1800 number that people can call if they want to speak to someone we are establishing in our jurisdictions as we set them up, and employ or engage our local area co-ordinators who are our contract partners in the community who will assist in delivering the Scheme. They will be establishing 6 months before the beginning of phase out, so that is another local community resource. And, of course, you know there is always organisations like Vision Australia that people may know and go to and Vision Australia will be able to assist you.

And I might hand to Pam to talk a little bit about what kind of things people who are blind might expect to see, you know, once they are on the Scheming Plans.

Thanks very much Maryanne. Just, I think people might be interested to hear some practical examples of participants of the Scheme who have a vision impairment. The sort of things the Scheme planners and the Scheme has been able to provide to support them, to be able to access the community, employment, and just live their ordinary life, and the supports we provide need to be directly related to their disability and to evidence that it will build their capacity. And so, one example is a young lady who lives in semi-rural Tasmania and is attending UTAS University part-time to study zoology. And her goal has been to be able to continue to attend university and also to seek part-time work. So the plan that is being built for this young lady includes some funding to assist for transport so she can travel to university and she can also travel to seek employment. She is receiving assistance from VisAbility, Guidedogs, for some experiential training and ability training to help her with those things and also occupational therapy to help her be more self-sufficient at home and also to be able to access assistive technology. And she also felt, and it was reasonable and necessary that we would fund some speech therapy to build her confidence, you know, and being able to communicate with her peers at university and also to look for work.

And another example is a young man, a 19 year old young man, who has left college and had moved into independent living and he has had a Plan with us for a little while and it was time to review his Plan. And part of that review with the young man Identified that actually the unit that he was living in wasn’t well set up for his vision impairment and that it was quite a risk. So the Plan was changed and he moved to different accommodation that was well set up for him and the supports were put in place to ensure that he could live independently and be confident about his ability to live a really good life himself without being dependent on other people.

So that is just a couple of practical examples of the sorts of supports that we can work with people to provide.

They are great examples. They are quite young people as well.

I have got two questions stemming from that. What if I am 45 years old, will I still be eligible to have some goals as well?

Absolutely. The Scheme is available for people of 65 years and under and at any time across that life span people have an ongoing Plan. And people’s lives change, their circumstances change, and the supports they may need from us, of course, will change as their life does. And that is when we look at, you know, the review process to be able to make sure that those reviews are actually doing what the person needs them to do for them at any stage of their life.

So, I can still be supported when my circumstances change? I might need less support or more support?

Absolutely. So if your circumstances change significantly in between when we would normally look at a review, you just need to complete a request for a review of your Plan because of significant changes in your circumstances and then we will be in contact and work through that with you.

Maryanne, how many goals can I have on my Plan?

There is no limit in goals that someone has, but I guess, and Pam might be better to articulate this than me, but I think people need to think of what their current situation is and set some goals, recognising that there is a review process that can happen, or if there is a change in circumstances you can contact us and have your Plan reviewed. I mean, some examples that people might think about in goals is finding work and living independently. That is kind of a couple that I have seen come up in a lot of goals.

Pam, have you got anything to add to that, being more on the ground?

So, how many goals is what we establish in the conversation at the beginning of the planning process. And that there needs to be goals that people are able to achieve because we want this to be a successful relationship with the person. And so, people certainly talk about their longer term goals. They might have a goal that might take a couple of years for them to achieve. So what we like to do is to say, OK, what are the first steps to enable us to start on that pathway. So sometimes they are short steps that are part of the longer term goal and sometimes they are just immediate goals that people have because they need some support right now to be able to live in the community, to have personal supports they need to access the community. So it really depends entirely on the person’s circumstances. But we want this to be achievable goals for people and for it to be a successful relationship, to build their confidence - that the Scheme can work for them and make a difference in their lives.

So why is the NDIS called an Insurance Scheme?

So, it is an insurance scheme because it is, as all insurance is. You invest early and everyone in Australia pays a .5% Medicare Levy towards the cost, The Scheme is there investing in you and a lifetime approach as we hear often, it is the beginning of a journey with the Scheme when you join, recognising that you will have changes in your life and the supports will adjust to your needs. But it really is also for everybody in Australia. Anyone who, at some stage in their life, has a family member, or themselves, finds themselves living with a disability, this scheme is there for you. So, it is insurance in the way that we invest in it early, it is for everyone and we provide a lifetime approach. Mind you, one of the biggest things is that we have to make sure it is sustainable, both in what we can provide and that the resources are available. So, a lot of work is just like you would do in any insurance company.

Pam and Maryanne, both from the National Disability Insurance Agency, thank you for your time today.

Thanks Stella

Thank you Stella.

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 5**

**NDIA representative: Sheena Walters (Acting Branch Manager, National Access Team) Topic: Access and eligibility – what the eligibility requirements are, documentation etc.**

I am speaking now with Sheena Walters who is Acting Branch Manager at the National Access Team, part of the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Thank you for your time today Sheena.

Thanks Stella. Look forward to talking to you.

And this morning we are going to talk about the NDIS and for the people listening Sheena, can you tell us what that is.

That’s the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Let’s talk about requirements. What are the requirements of the Scheme?

Stella, to become an NDIS participant you need to meet the age, residency and disability or early intervention requirement. And what means is that you need to have a permanent disability that significantly affects your ability to take part in everyday activities or have a developmental delay. You need to be aged less than 65 when you apply to enter the NDIS. You need to live in Australia where the NDIS is available on or after a particular date and to be an Australian citizen or hold a permanent Visa or protective special category Visa. And people can also access the NDIS for early intervention. The NDIS has developed a specific early childhood early intervention approach for children aged 0 to 6 years.

Is there particular documentation that is needed for proof?

Good question. So for some people who are already receiving support from State and Territory disability programs, evidence of disability or documentation might not be required and that is because some programs have the same disability criteria as the NDIS so people in those programs will be contacted directly by the Agency to progress their access requests. And for some disabilities information about the impact on functionality might not be required either, for those specific disability types are listed in the operational guidelines on access and they are available on the NDIS website at www.NDIS.gov.au.

But for those who are not already receiving supports to enable the Agency to determine if a person needs a disability or early intervention access requirements, they might need to provide us with evidence of their disability. That includes information on what their disability is, how long it will last, and its impact on their life. Evidence of disability and functional impact might be provided by a professional in a number of ways. But that can be via the NDIS’s supporting evidence form in the access request form itself, or through existing assessment reports that people might already have.

And what is the best way for people to access the Scheme?

Well the NDIS is being introduced progressively around Australia from the 1st of July 2016 and by 2019 the NDIS is going to support about 460,000 Australians with disability. So to participate in the NDIS right now you need to live in an area where the NDIS is currently available and in some of these areas you also need to be a certain age and you might meet the access requirements up to 6 months before the NDIS rolls out in your area.

So how people will join the NDIS has been agreed by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. But if you already receive support from a State or Territory government disability program, you will get a letter and a phone call from an NDIS representative when it is time for you to transition to the NDIS. You can complete your access request over the phone and an access request form could be sent out to you instead if you prefer that. The forms can be provided in braille if that is requested. Or alternatively, if you would like to make an enquiry about accessing the NDIS you can contact us on 1800 800 110.

And what happens if I discover that I am not eligible for funded supports?

A person does not have to be an NDIS participant to receive support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The NDIS will connect to people with disability, their family and carers, including people who are not participants and will connect them to disability and mainstream supports in their community. That can be done through our information linkages and capacity building program – we call it the ILC Program. And those activities might include information linkages and referrals, so about making sure that people with a disability, their families and carers have access to up to date and relevant and quality information. It is also about making sure that people with a disability are linked into services and supports in their community that meet their needs. It also includes community awareness and capacity building. It is about making sure that community activities and programs understand the needs of people with a disability and they have the skills and knowledge they need to be more inclusive.

And if people would like further information, who can they contact?

They can contact the NDIS on the number provided earlier – 1800 800 110 – or have a look at our website and make an enquiry there.

Sheena Walters, Acting Branch Manager for the National Access Team, part of the NDIA, thank you so much for your time today.

Thanks Stella.

**Spotlight on the NDIS – Segment 6**

**VA Representative: Laura Allison (Acting RM VA Geelong)**

**Topic: NDIS from a VA perspective**

You are listening to *Spotlight on the NDIS* – a feature presentation on the National Disability Insurance Scheme on Vision Australia Radio.

Speaking now with Laura Allison who is Acting Regional Manager for Vision Australia in the Barwon area, which is also the initial NDIS launch site.

Laura, can you take us through when the site was opened and how long the trial went for and when the NDIS was launched in that area?

The NDIS trial started in the Barwon region of Geelong in July 2013. It was a 3 year trial with a few other sites across Australia. And then once that trial finished it was being launched through the rest of Australia.

So for that trial period we had certain criteria that people had to meet to be involved in it. You had to have been in the region up to 2013 so that people who are moving into the region weren’t eligible for the scheme until the 3 year trial was up.

So what have been the main challenges for the test site from the perspective of clients, so people who are blind or have low vision?

I think that something that has been challenging is the lack of community awareness of vision loss and how it impact people. Something we have seen coming through the Plans is that services are not always required on an ongoing basis and for long periods of time, so it might be that someone actually needs to learn a new route on the bus and that might be that once that training has been completed you might not need further training for a while until something else comes up. So those episodic needs have been a challenge to get into people’s plans and probably getting the planner to have an awareness of putting funding in place that people can tap into as they need it and that they may not actually identify needing that training 12 months before it happens. That’s probably been one of the main challenges.

Something else we have seen is that a lot of the blindness and low vision community will use mainstream forms of equipment – i-phones, i-pads – any equipment like that and then have adaptions put onto that equipment that they can use like magnification lighting, GPS apps for navigating around the community. And NDIS have a ruling against funding mainstream equipment so it has been quite challenging to be able to put the point across that this mainstream equipment can actually cost a lot less than purchasing individual devices for people and it means that people are using one device that they take with them out in the community instead of having to pack the GPS tracker and magnifier and you know a lot of other different equipment as well. Getting that understanding through has been challenging, but I think that we are starting to get somewhere with it, which is really good.

What about from the staff perspective – what are the challenges there?

So previously as an organisation we receive block funding which was a sum of money depending on the amount of clients we saw each year. Staff with the client they were working with were able to work out how much support was needed and how many training hours. And as needs came up they could keep delivering these services.

With the NDIS coming on board the funding is put into the client plan based on a level of hours. So, sometimes what we find is that a person will come in with funding for 5 hours of occupational therapy work and it is trying to work out how can we best utilise those 5 hours so that the client can receive the most amount of service out of the plan, but also that staff can actually get all the work needed done in those 5 hours. So that has been quite challenging. Probably going back to people with how many hours did it take to achieve the goal that they had set out, so really being able to estimate what is going to be needed going forward.

So when you were talking about the particular examples, so some of the challenges from clients, the blindness community, what is Vision Australia doing to assist people in these specific challenges?

There are a few different things. On the ground with individual clients if they are needing support we are offering free planning sessions with staff here, so it means the clients can sit down and have an open conversation about what they are wanting to achieve within the next 12 months, what they are looking for in the NDIS plan. Because often people go in feeling like they don’t want to be asking for too much and not really sure what NDIS will find them what they want, what they won’t. So we can really have that conversation and say that is really not something that NDIS is likely to fund and these are the sort of things that it is reasonable to be asking for.

Do you think there is going to be a change though, like you were talking about the i-pad? Do you have a sense that that might be changing at some point, that the NDIS will be supporting those particular needs?

We have seen a bit of a change over the last 3 to 4 years. There seems to be a bit of a blanket ball in the beginning that straight out that wouldn’t be funded. If we can provide enough justification to them, and again, that is based on individual need as well, then we have been able to have a few instances where there has been funding. But again, it is very individual, and just because one person receives an i-pad does not mean the next person is going to be funded for that.

And what are people happy about?

People are happy about equipment – that is one thing we do we hear a lot about. Previously people would come in and have an orthoptic appointment and book these amazing magnifiers and glasses that they could get back into hobbies and reading and looking and pictures and magazines and you would have a great sense of “I can do this”. There is something out there that will support me in doing this and then finding out it costs $3,000/$4,000 and a realisation that “I can’t afford this”. That can be quite shattering for some people. To be able to have funding for that assessment, find the right piece of equipment, we are able to provide a report justification back to the NDIS on how this is going to increase that person’s independence and not have to rely on someone else to read their mail for them and then seeing that equipment finally for people is just fantastic.

What is the biggest change that you have noticed since the launch of the NDIS?

I think definitely people’s goals. Some of the things we are seeing coming through on plans, we get a really good picture of where people are wanting to head in the next 12 months. Previously the funding we had in place, we would put services in place, dependent on what we thought people wanted and needed. Now that that has changed people are coming through with their funding, but also a goal saying this is what I want to achieve and this is the funding that I have got. Can you support me in doing this? So Vision Australia has really had to change the way we deliver services to people, when we deliver them, where we deliver them, to make sure we can support that person to achieve the goals in their plan. The goals have really changed from people coming in saying “I want to be able to read my mail and read a magazine and be able to access my computer” to “I want to be able to go and travel to Europe next year. How am I going to be able to do that?” And breaking that down to – how are you going to get to the airport, and how are you going to get through the airport? What are you going to do when you get over there? And really being able to put these things in place so that people can get out and do whatever it is they want to do.

And what is our engagement with NDIS like?

We have a few different levels of engagement with them. Our team in the central Vision Australia area will engage with the national office of the NDIS. We have our Advocacy and Engagement Team who are quite often in with them talking about what we are seeing as a whole organisation and representing client that, on a whole. We also have levels of engagement with the local officers and that will be directly with the planners and the people who are putting that funding together for our clients so that we can come in and support people on an individual basis. There really is quite a connect between Vision Australia and NDIS.

Also, an area that was identified earlier, that a lot of staff in the NDIS had very limited knowledge of working with people with vision loss. We have been able to get in there and support what our clients are actually needing in their plan.

And this support that we have lent, what has this resulted in?

We have seen people coming back with plans that have adequate funding in them to receive services. We have seen an increase in equipment being funded for people so they can be independent in their life. We have seen larger goals people are achieving, which is fantastic, and we have got teams in there looking at the changes that have been made for mobility allowances – how that would impact our clients if it is to either move solely into the NDIS or be separate to that.

Thank you very much Laura Allison who is Acting Regional Manager for the Barwon Region in Victoria and the Geelong NDIS site. Thank you for your time today.

Thank you.

This has been part 2 on *Spotlight on the NDIS* Special on Vision Australia Radio. Thanks to the National Disability Insurance Agency, their representatives, and Stella Glorie for their assistance and support with this program.

For more details call 1800 800 110 or visit NDIS.gov.au to find out how to get NDIS-ready.