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TADTas submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into Disability Services in Tasmania

About TADTas

TADTas is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the independence, dignity and quality of life for people with disabilities. TADTas changes the lives of people living with a disability by providing personalised technology, equipment and services.

Our personnel are skilled volunteers who design and build custom equipment to help people achieve their goals. We work with people of any age and any disability. Our volunteers assess needs, plan innovative solutions and manufacture products or make modifications to existing products.

TADTas' service is **unique** in Tasmania. By combining the technical expertise of our volunteer workforce with specialist occupational therapists of partner agencies, we are able to efficiently develop innovative, personalised equipment solutions that take into account individual needs and abilities.

In 2010 we expanded our assistive technology service offering to include our Freedom Wheels bike program. Freedom Wheels bikes are customised with removable and adjustable supports for people with disabilities. This is part of a National program in which we partner with therapists to equip children and young people with a specifically modified, customised bike that allows them to participate better in everyday activities and exercise. We assess and deliver about 20 bikes each year through state wide clinics.

TADTas' core workforce consists of two part time roles; Executive Officer and Technical Coordinator, complemented by a pool of 10+ skilled volunteers who

donate hundreds of hours designing, building and modifying many diverse items every year.

TADTas is a registered NDIS provider (number 4050001061). See our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for further information.

Funding History

TADTas was established in 1988 by a group of committed volunteers led by Dr. Dick Geeves to provide Tasmanians of all ages and abilities and their families assistive technology solutions. In 2004 we applied to the Tasmanian Government for funding to put the organisation on a more professional and sustainable footing. As a consequence, annual funding of \$25,100 was granted for the 2005 financial year. Funding continued on an annual basis, and indexation saw the grant increasing to \$48,000 in the last year of funding, FY2020.

The annual funding allowed TADTas to provision for office space, employ coordinating staff on a part time basis to enable us to expand our reach and interface with health professionals and people with disabilities.

Over this period, we increased the number of annual projects to between 60 and 100 per year. The degree of complexity varies from project to project, but all have the common result of making a big difference to the life of a person living with a disability. Under the DHHS grant funding model, the client reimbursed us for materials used, with the grant funding covering the overheads of providing the service.

TADTas and the NDIS

We were strong supporters of the concept of the NDIS during the planning and development stages, as we had seen first-hand the issues faced by those living with disabilities. Until the scheme covered young recipients in our Freedom Wheels program though, we had very little interaction with the NDIS. Our early experiences with the NDIS were challenging on a number of levels. Our principal frustrations were over the delay in plan and bike approvals for our young participants. Over the

last 2 years as the scheme evolved, we have been heartened to see an improvement with delays and hurdles having been largely addressed. We now have most of our Freedom Wheels clients on NDIS plans.

This is not the case with referrals for other Assistive Technology (AT) solutions. Many of our clients are ineligible for NDIS funding because they are over 65. Others have temporary needs for AT solutions but do not have permanent disabilities. Many clients are recovering from injuries that are temporarily disabling. These people are equally deserving of life changing assistance through accessing our skills, but sit outside the NDIS framework.

Prior to the introduction of the NDIS this was not a problem. A client was a client and our focus was on making their life better. With the full roll-out of NDIS we were informed that our funding which had been in place since 2004 would be withdrawn from the end of June 2019. Totally withdrawn, regardless of the fact that we were still committed to serving the needs of a clientele wider than NDIS eligibility. We made representations to the DHHS, and our funding was continued for a further year, but finally withdrawn at the end of June 2020.

The reason given for the withdrawal of funding was because we had access to NDIS funding. NDIS funding in fact covers only approximately 25% of our clients. TADTas, in its charter, is committed to assisting all clients who are referred, regardless of NDIS status. While receiving grant funding, the client reimbursed us for materials used, with the grant funding covering the overheads of providing the service. In response to the loss of funding, to be sustainable, we must now recover a contribution to our administrative and technical overheads.

In our experience, non-NDIS clients are not independently wealthy, and struggle to find funding to obtain basic aids for living. It would appear that they are being neglected by government, and that we (amongst others) are assumed to meet their needs with no source of funding to enable this. Our service offering is unique and our historical modest level of block funding was an extremely cost effective method for government to respond to demand not serviced by the NDIS or elsewhere.

While we support the overall vision of the NDIS, the absence of funding to support those excluded from the scheme by age or permanency of impairment enshrines discrimination as many do not have the means to privately fund. This cohort represents a significant permanent service gap rather than a temporary transitional NDIS funding issue.

Our work facilitates increased independence, recovery from temporary disability, social inclusion, health and wellbeing and can prevent or postpone more expensive support requirements or simply improve quality of life. The block funding enabled us to seamlessly service and improve the quality of life of all Tasmanians in need of our service, responding to need rather than their wealth, age or eligibility.

Summary:

We urge the inquiry to look at the impact of the loss of block funding on organisations such as ours and the impact on Tasmanians not eligible for the NDIS now falling through the gaps.

The introduction of the NDIS has had a variety of impacts, some unintended. For State Governments, a significant reduction in outlays from State revenue sources has occurred. One of the dangers of the NDIS is the perception that all disabilities are now covered in an insurance based scheme. This is not the case – particularly for the over 65s.

There is a clear economic and moral argument for adequate funding to continue to service their needs and provide technical aids for **all** people with disabilities in Tasmania. TADTas stands ready to assist, but cannot do so without government playing its part.

We would be happy to be contacted for any clarification.

Paul Duncombe

Executive Officer

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