

PROJECT  
**reach**  **BLE**

Supporting people and services  
to engage with the NDIS

***Supporting 'Hard to Reach' People with  
Psychosocial Disability to Engage with the NDIS***

Chris Sierzant

National NDIS & Mental Health 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference 2018  
Wednesday, 31 October 2018 | 10:40 am – 11:10 am

# Background

- Helping people with disabilities apply for the NDIS
- Funded for 12 months through Commonwealth Sector Development Funds to work with people considered “hard to reach” or “hard to engage.”
- Statewide partnership of four organisations – including social workers, counsellors, youth workers
- Develop an Engagement Framework to document our journey

# What was our strategy?

- How do you find someone who might not want to be found? (Hint: Don't use social media!)
- We networked with “touch point” services, community groups, and health professionals (over 100 stakeholders)
- Assertive outreach and meeting people where they are at
- Assumptions:
  - Recognising what clients need, not what *we think* they need
  - Client-centered practice that emphasises choice and control

# What was our scope?

- Put in place supports to help people engage with the NDIS
- Helped people to complete and submit an Access Request Form (ARF)
  - Telling a story and demonstrating functional impairment
  - Gathering evidence
  - Offering support through the planning process
- People needed practical support and guidance to put these supports in place (including once someone is on a plan)

# Consumer Outcomes

We actively supported 62 people who were previously chronically disengaged. Of these:

- 25 people now have plans
- 16 people disengaged with the project before their application or appeal was submitted for reasons such as:
  - Multiple and severe barriers resurfaced
  - Lost motivation or fell out of contact
  - Discouraged from applying (hearing negative stories)
  - Told it would be a redundant exercise (by health professionals)
  - Difficulties obtaining the required evidence for the application
  - Decided not to proceed as it was too overwhelming

# Consumer Outcomes *Continued...*

- 8 applications are still pending with the NDIA
- 6 applications did not meet access requirements
- 4 of these applications are being appealed or resubmitted
- Some applications were lengthy – dozens of pages
- *Over 300 vulnerable Tasmanians with disabilities not engaged with any services identifying as needing support to access the NDIS*
- *Big need from some specific services (e.g. prison)*

# Insights: Client experience

Primary barriers our clients experienced were:

- Lack of knowledge of the NDIS and processes
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Application rejected, lost hope
- Needed a plan to keep their life stable
- Health providers discouraging an application
- Application process lends itself to poor mental health

# Insights: Worker experience

Primary barriers our team experienced were:

- Hard to demonstrate “permanency” even with diagnosis stating life long condition
- Requirement to demonstrate every treatment option “exhausted” before accessing scheme
- Frustrated by cost of accessing psychiatric testing to evidence disability



# Insights: Service experience

Primary barriers that services experienced were:

- Lack of understanding of NDIS application process amongst primary health providers
- Requirement to educate health providers and “coach” them through the process
- Fear of competition between providers in competitive NDIS market

## **Participant Identification**

Raising profile  
Building key relationships

## **Connections**

Links to ongoing support  
Continuity of commitment and after care



## **Practice**

Assertive outreach  
Principles  
Eligibility testing readiness  
Eligibility testing  
Tools  
Open and flexible access  
Commitment

# Summary

- People often have multiple barriers at once – honesty counts!
- People have negative experiences – tread lightly!
- “Touch point” services are important
- Most people found the process overwhelming
- Don’t assume that services understand the process – they need encouragement too
- Exciting times ahead – not impossible for our generation!

# Thank You!

Any questions?



## Contact Me ...

**Chris Sierzant** BA(Hons)(Psych), Grad.Dip.Couns.

**Richmond Fellowship Tasmania**

**Phone: +61 409 282 014**

**Email: [chris.sierzant85@gmail.com](mailto:chris.sierzant85@gmail.com)**

**LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chrissierzant85/>**