

Queenslanders with Disability Network LTD (QDN) statement to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on NDIS

- QDN is an organisation of, by and for people with disability with over 700 voting members and 500 supporters.
- QDN is currently funded to undertake NDIS participant readiness work across the state, with a focus on people with intellectual disability.
- QDN is also funded to operate as a Disability Support Organisation in Qld, establishing up to 20 Local Support Groups across the state – 1 of which is in Townsville.
- Today we want to discuss the importance of NDIS pre-readiness work and capacity building and leadership development with people with disability in the north Queensland NDIS roll-out.
- We also want to discuss the importance of peer co-designed and led initiatives as part of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building component of the NDIS.
- In 2015 QDN undertook 141 Participant Readiness and Pre-planning workshops across the state, including Townsville and Charters Towers. They attracted 2,100 participants with disability and included a further 1,000 people attending as family or staff supporters.
- A key learning from this work is that people with disability need investment in their own capacity building to ensure their viable place as empowered customers in the NDIS market, just as equally as the work that is being done to invest in the market viability of specialist disability services and mainstream services.
- Another learning from this work is that people with disability, especially intellectual disability, need time to prepare for the NDIS and preparation needs to focus upon:
 - Enabling access to information, support and development opportunities in a ‘user-friendly format and process’ in the lead up to the scheme coming into their area.
 - Giving people opportunity to come together, share information around their dreams and goals and plan. Given high unmet need to get a disability service people have had to tell about their negative experiences so getting people to even think about dreams and goals in a positive way is a big thing.
 - Having the information and support above provided in an accessible way – eg people with intellectual disability benefit from pictures or symbols, not written words, as they generally have low literacy skills.
- Through the Ready to go project and Local Group work QDN has seen that people with disability also learn best when the activity is peer co-designed and delivered by people with disability, for people with disability.
- A peer learning and mentoring approach enables people to share their ‘lived experiences’ and to learn and be supported by each other.
- For example, Townsville Local Support Group members are very keen to share stories about their current life and their hopes and dreams into the future.

- Group members have been excited to hear about the NDIS – how it will work, the eligibility criteria, what is a goal and whether the NDIS can support them ‘living a good life’.
- QDN reinforces it is vital that people with disability who are marginalised and/or ‘hard to reach’, are included in pre-readiness activities – people living in supported accommodation facilities, (formerly called hostels), people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people with dual disabilities.
- Pre planning and readiness work needs to have a strong focus on people currently not in the disability support or community care systems. We need to continue to bring in those who are currently disengaged so they don’t miss out again.
- Queensland is in a unique position given that approximately 50% or 45,000 of people estimated to enter the scheme are not current users of specialist disability services. This means that a significant amount of people will be starting from a different place with no experience of planning, service systems.
- Can I make particular reference to people living in rural and remote areas of the state and stress their need for participant readiness information via a range of mediums, not just digitally, as this cohort often reports they have poor internet and IT connectivity.
- We also need to continue to provide information and support to people currently receiving support; balancing the quantity of participants reached with quality, in-depth work that achieves capacity building in participants.
- Having “consumer trusted” independent organisations undertaking further PRI work will support the state disability system and the NDIA to function more smoothly, as Queensland moves progressively through the NDIS transition pathway.
- QDN has been engaged in work by and with people with disability, to build upon existing strengths and build the capacity, of a core group of approx. 25 people as leaders in this work across a number of initiatives.
- QDN’s NDIS participant readiness work and Townsville’s Local Support Group are only funded until the end of 2016.
- We believe it is vital for the NDIA and Communities to continue to invest in such initiatives and Queenslanders with disability will thrive during transition if solid investment occurs in these ILC components.
- We also stress the importance of peer designed, led and delivered activities. These place people with disability “in the driver’s seat” in planning their futures and working with their peers to inform and support NDIS plans that truly deliver economic and social participation for people with disability as citizens within their community.

Peter Gurr, QDN Director; Convenor, Townsville Local Support Group and Ready to Go Peer Facilitator & Paige Armstrong, QDN CEO

Wednesday 7 April, 2016