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A C McARTHUR SERVICES

Inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative
Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern,
Re: Feedback on the Proposed *Thriving Kids* Program

My name is Ange McArthur. I am a late-diagnosed autistic woman, a mother to two autistic sons, and an Independent Support Coordinator and Psychosocial Recovery Coach who works exclusively with autistic children and adults across the country. I write this letter to strongly oppose the proposed *Thriving Kids* initiative and the disturbing direction it signals for the future of autistic Australians.

From the outset, I must emphasise: **autism has always been included in the NDIS legislation.** To now contemplate the removal or segregation of autistic people from a scheme explicitly designed for people with disability is not just short-sighted—it is ableist and discriminatory.

Instead of scapegoating our community due to the increasing number of diagnoses and the growing demand for support, the Government should be asking: why is the system failing so many of us? Why are so many autistic people and families needing support in the first place? The answer is simple—we live in a society that was not built for us. The solution is not to exclude us from support, but to change the environments, structures, and attitudes that force us into crisis. I can’t help but feel like this is an attempt at a tiptoe back to the Medical Model of disability.

The *Thriving Kids* proposal, as it has been described and speculated, appears to offer a “solution” that removes choice and control, is not individual- or family-focused, and seems dangerously centred around outdated behavioural interventions like ABA. If this goes ahead, you **will** repeat the same mistakes that led to the current generation of burnt-out, disabled autistic adults—adults like many of the clients I support and like myself.

Let me be clear: the idea of separating “mild” and “moderate” autistic children is not only bizarre—it reflects a deep misunderstanding of autism**.** Autistic capacity is not static; it fluctuates depending on environment, stress, sensory input, and life circumstances. Children who are denied early support because they “don’t look disabled enough” are the same young people who later find themselves in crisis—masking, burning out, and ultimately requiring far more complex and costly support as adults.

Furthermore, I cannot comprehend the logic or ethics behind “capping” numbers on a disability support scheme designed for both congenital and acquired disability. How do you intend to predict the future of disability in this country? What happens to the children and adults who will fall through the cracks because a number on a spreadsheet was more important than a person’s life? The assumption that disability must look a certain way to be relevant to matter to the Government is so out-dated and small-minded. Our world is changing, we’re learning more, and it’s time that the Government caught up – not all disabilities appear the same, they are not equal. Focus on the person, not the diagnosis, and stop assuming that they are not the experts around the condition/s they live with every single day.

The demonisation of autistic people in this narrative is deeply harmful. Autism is not an illness to be cured, and the implication that we are somehow a “burden” to the scheme or the public is disgraceful. We were once told early intervention would support us—and now, that promise is being withdrawn.

An announcement was made without any detail, zero forethought and no information to alleviate the panic that has been instilled in so many individuals and families in Australia. This Government continues to cause more damage and despite these opportunities to our community to provide feedback, it only seems to fall on deaf ears and seems to be an offering just to tick a box and maintain an image. I have it on good authority that the internal staff in NDIS learnt about the same program announcement the same way the rest of Australia did – and I'm sorry, but that says more about the internal systems than it does our community. There are so many systemtic flaws within the NDIS, I truly believe that the focus should be on reform within the NDIS, the morale of NDIS staff, the culture and the ableism that proudly exists within some of the employees of the NDIS. Because

And let's talk about the broader impact. I support over 100 NDIS participants, both adults and children. Around 90% of the children I support are homeschooled, not by choice, but because the education system continues to fail them. Before you blame the NDIS, perhaps look closely at the education department. Look at the crisis points schools themselves are creating by refusing to accommodate autistic students with dignity.

Finally, I support a number of late-diagnosed autistic adults who are burnt out, housebound, unemployed, and chronically unwell—not because they are broken, but because they **never received the support they needed as children**. What is being proposed under *Thriving Kids* ensures we repeat that exact same cycle. These adults, including myself, have a similar history and timeline – stories of trauma and abuse, bullying and suicide ideation. Just when it felt like it was starting to be safer for us to unmask and co-exist in this world, it's almost like we're about to take a huge leap backwards. And what for? To make the Government comfortable? Cap numbers?

Autistic people are not the reason the NDIS continues to exhaust so much money – I deal daily with providers attempting to make claims for works that were not completed, misusing funds, taking advantage of our society's most vulnerable people, and when I issue a complaint to the NDIS, I'm told "thank you, we will note this but we aren't going to action anything". So, please tell me why this is our problem? You can remove autistic people from the scheme, but you're still going to have fraud and misuse of funding.

We deserve better. Our children deserve better. This program is not "thriving"—it's surviving, barely. And autistic people were never meant to just survive.

If you take the time to understand, hear our stories, do the research, understand autism from a neuro-affirming perspective, you might just learn just how amazing our community is.

I feel blessed every single day that I work with the cohort that I do, because when I got my diagnosis, I felt seen, and heard, for the first time in my 30 years of life. I look at the participants that I support and their strengths and weaknesses and how diverse we are, and I will never understand how this became a bad thing to the rest of society.

I can rest assured, at least, that I can change that narrative for my own children and the people that I work with, reassuring them that it's not us that needs to change.

Sincerely,
Ange McArthur
Support Coordinator | Psychosocial Recovery Coach
Late-diagnosed Autistic Adult & Parent