



# The Shepherd Centre

Giving deaf children a voice



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## **Answer to question from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme public hearing held at Penrith, 17 May 2017, regarding the NSW Transition Provider planning process**

### NSW Transition Provider planning process

The Shepherd Centre is one of the organisations appointed as a Transition Provider in NSW to help children who are receiving early intervention funded by the State government to transition onto the NDIS.

The planning process that we are required to undertake uses the 'PEDI-CAT' tool to assess a child's needs. This tool focusses on identifying demonstrated lack of capabilities across a range of areas, such as whether the child has the ability to feed itself, and then develops a score from that.

Unfortunately the tool is totally inappropriate for children with hearing loss. Hearing loss as a baby leads to disability in an older child (typically in terms of impaired language and social skills development). However it is critical for a child with hearing loss to enter specialised EI within 6 months after diagnosis. At this stage the child does not yet have any language to be impaired and as a result will not score on PEDI-CAT.

Once in EI, the focus of the therapy is on supporting normal development of language. As a result, if the EI service is provided appropriately, the child will again not have language impairment and will not score on PEDI-CAT. Of course, if EI is withheld or reduced at either of these times the child will develop a language delay which may be permanent and which will cost much more to address.

These issues were raised with the NDIA at the time of the system being implemented, however we were assured that we could use our professional expert judgement in setting the child's needs. However the system that was then imposed limited the hours that could be recommended – at levels that meant children with hearing loss would never be judged eligible for the support needed for them to develop language normally.

The following two case studies demonstrate the issues, where children were only provided with half of the support they need for the development of language.

## Case studies

*All names in these case examples have been substituted with false names for privacy reasons.*

### **Case Study example 1**

John is 5 years 5 months old and has a severe to moderate rising conductive hearing loss in both ears. John currently wears bilateral air conduction hearing aids. He has a complex medical history. Sadly, John's hearing loss was not diagnosed until he was 3 years old and hence he was late to enter early intervention services. John currently presents with delayed speech and is also susceptible to recurring middle ear pathology, causing a more severe temporary hearing loss when present. John has not been hearing well out of his right ear with his air conduction hearing aids. The Shepherd Centre are looking into trialling a Baha (bone anchored hearing aid) which will require more testing and sessions to determine the benefit of this.

Based on 40 years of experience in the industry and incorporating a combination of internal and external research as well as John's individual needs, The Shepherd Centre clinical team have recommended John attend weekly half hour individual therapy sessions. Given that he is about to transition to school next year we have also recommended 2 group programs to run consecutively at the end of the year before he goes to school: Confident Kids and the Off to School program. This cost to the Shepherd Centre to provide this service is \$19,310.

The Shepherd Centre is a Transition Provider in New South Wales. A planning meeting and work up was prepared for the family, however the system of counting direct hours resulted in the reality that the most individual equivalent intervention hours that could be applied for was 85 hours. It was envisaged that this would result in a package price of \$14,993 (a shortfall of \$4,316 versus our costs).

John's plan work up was submitted to his NDIS region and he was approved for only \$9,832. This is approximately 50% of the Shepherd Centre's actual costs and still \$4,316 less than what we hoped using the stringent direct hours through the transition provider system.

With this package, the family would only be able to access monthly individual sessions and 1 group as opposed to fortnightly sessions and 2 groups.

The impact of this is absolutely detrimental to the outcomes for this child. John is at risk of starting school without age appropriate speech and language. He also risks being behind his peers in terms of school readiness and the ability to form friendships and socialise.

## Case Study example 2

Anna is 2 years 1 month old. Anna was diagnosed with bilateral profound hearing loss and uses cochlear implants in both ears. Due to early detection of her hearing loss and early intervention, Anna is responding well to intervention to date. The family have been coached in how to teach her to listen and speak through audition (through her hearing).

She currently receives fortnightly individual intervention sessions through The Shepherd Centre and also attends a weekly group in term time. If a child were not receive this intervention, their speech and language would already be delayed at this age.

It costs the Shepherd Centre \$17,886 to provide this service over the year. Anna and her family have now been through the planning process with the Shepherd Centre as a Transition Provider in NSW. The system that Transition Providers are required to use has categorised Anna as having support needs at the mild-moderate level. This equates to just 42 hours (equivalent individual intervention hours) or \$7,373, a shortfall of \$10,513. She will likely be funded for less than half the amount required to continue her service at the current level, meet her needs and result in the outcomes we know these children can achieve.

Anna is in a critical period for speech and language development. Anna's family know this all too well, as her older sister Gabby was also born with a bilateral profound hearing loss. Gabby received early intervention at The Shepherd Centre for 5 years successfully graduating to mainstream school in 2016 with age appropriate speech and language. She is now a thriving, social and outgoing little girl with the potential to learn and prosper alongside her peers. Anna's family, have seen first-hand the outcomes of early intervention for Gabby and cannot dream of anything less for their younger daughter Anna.

