



## MEDIA STATEMENT

### Disability funding trial is at risk of killing a good idea

Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2009

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A good idea is at its most vulnerable during implementation, and this seems to be the case following today's launch by the SA government of a trial into Individualised Funding<sup>1</sup>, involving 50 persons living with disability.

Many people will know that the Julia Farr Association has taken a particular interest in the topic of Individualised Funding and has undertaken extensive research over the past three years. In response to the many calls we have received today, we make the following statement about the trial.

First, it is good that the state government has decided to engage with this important topic. There is plenty of evidence available in Australia and overseas that illustrates the potency of such an approach in people's lives. In this context, the SA initiative is welcome though overdue.

However, as with all things, a good idea is at its most vulnerable during implementation, and it is our view that the settings within the SA initiative are flawed, and work against the very principles that give context to such initiatives.

The flaws include:

- The SA initiative does not include a support needs assessment component. Participants will instead be allocated the dollar equivalent of their current support arrangements. This is missing an important opportunity for the SA government to build a better understanding of the relationship between a person's level of need and the dollars allocated;
- The SA Initiative describes how the participants will "manage their funding and support arrangements". This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of Individualised Funding, and will exclude many people who do not wish to manage their arrangements. The essential feature of Individualised Funding is that people know the amount of public funds allocated to them and are centrally involved in the decisions about how the funding can best be used to build the life they seek. We can't imagine there would be many people who would not want this;
- The SA initiative refers to the availability of a 'Self-management Facilitator'. It is not clear as to the extent of choice that people will have with this. For most people, building a plan is a highly personal journey, and where people seek help with planning it is important that

people can choose a facilitator that is right for them. A person with a disability may want their facilitator to also be a person with a disability. A family member may want their planning assistance to come from someone with similar family experience. A person with Aboriginal heritage may want their facilitator to have similar heritage. The SA initiative appears to make no provision for such choice, which seems ironic;

- The SA initiative does not give people the option to employ their own staff. While this is not an option that everyone will necessarily choose, it is a legitimate and important option that can work really well. It seems counter-intuitive and wrong to deny people and families this option;
- The SA initiative does not permit the participants to use the funding for items that “a member of the community would reasonably be expected to pay for from their income”. This is an unfortunate limitation and imposes a degree of inflexibility that will prevent people from developing truly personalised solutions in their lives. It will serve to keep people and their families in ‘recipientship’ rather than ‘citizenship’. It is simply not fair to give people control of their funding and then to tell those same people that their choices are in effect limited to the things they were getting before;
- Why stop at 50? If, despite the SA initiative’s limitations as set out in this statement, many more than 50 people register their interest, why should all but 50 have to wait. Haven’t people living with disability and their families been waiting long enough for things to change?;
- The SA initiative makes no provision for an independent evaluation;

Overall, there is no real sense of personalisation as context for this enterprise. The whole point of Individualised Funding is that it is a way to organise public funding so that people can personalise their support arrangements to live lives of choice, characterised by active citizenship. However, there is nothing in the initiative’s arrangements that says how people living with disability and their families will be supported to reclaim the right to plan for an ordinary valued life and to move intentionally towards this. Without this context of life and personalisation, the SA initiative is far less likely to assist people to produce real benefits in their lives.

Similarly there is no reference to community navigation and community development. An initiative that does not have good regard for what a community can freely offer, will result in the participants building support arrangements that mean there are only paid people in their lives.

Based on the above analysis, it is our view that the SA initiative needs to be recalibrated as a matter of urgency and we will be happy to assist in this if requested. After all, there is a lot at stake here. We believe that a well-crafted mechanism of Individualised Funding can have a very positive impact for people living with disability and their families, and the SA Government owes it to the disability community not to stuff it up.

ENDS

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<sup>i</sup> For a copy of the ‘Phase One: Self-managed Funding Initiative’ Information Package go to <http://www.sa.gov.au/subject/Community+Support/Disability/Corporate+and+business+information/Disability+information+and+publications/Disability+SA+news+and+events/Disability+SA+self-managed+funding>

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