

**Provider Innovation**

**Information Pack**

Adapting and delivering services in a challenging environment

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**Contents**

[**Introduction** 3](#_Toc43717574)

[**Staying connected through social isolation** 4](#_Toc43717575)

[**Provider innovation case studies** 5](#_Toc43717576)

[**Positive change through yoga** 5](#_Toc43717577)

[**Keeping active in isolation** 5](#_Toc43717577)

[**Foot in the Door keeps up the training, whatever it takes** 6](#_Toc43717578)

[**Wheels keep rolling with disability-friendly sanitiser** 7](#_Toc43717579)

[**Youngsters flying thanks to ‘Quaranstream’** 8](#_Toc43717580)

[**Dancers with disability still moving together during COVID-19 crisis** 9](#_Toc43717581)

[**Choir supporting Australians to find their voice** 10](#_Toc43717582)

##

## **Introduction**

This pack is designed to help providers continue to adapt by sharing case studies that highlight innovative approaches to delivering services to NDIS participants in a challenging environment.

Examples range from implementing physical distancing and hygiene measures to embracing video technology to deliver supports to participants during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

During the early stages of the pandemic, the NDIA made changes intended to support and encourage innovation in the way services were delivered so participants continued to receive their essential supports.

Changes made by the NDIA included:

* a more flexible approach to purchasing low cost assistive technology
* creating temporary arrangements for Supported Independent Living (SIL)
* increased flexibility for participants to use funds across all Core support categories
* ability for providers and participants to edit NDIA-created service bookings
* automatically extending plans by 365 days when we have been unable to undertake a plan review before a participant’s current plan ends, and
* advance payments to providers and temporary changes until 1 July 2020 to a number of price limits and the cancellation rules to support providers adjust to the COVID-19 environment.

When alternative services are required because a participant’s usual services are not available, participants are able to use their Core supports budget flexibly to help access any additional supports needed.

The NDIS can make changes to participant budgets through the unscheduled plan review process, so that expenses incurred in the delivery of disability supports can be claimed on the basis of changed circumstances.

Visit the NDIS website for the [latest advice on the COVID-19 measures](https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/latest-advice-ndis).

Please let us know which topics you would like more information on in the future as well as any other feedback you have to communications@ndis.gov.au.

## **Staying connected through social isolation**

In response to the new environment created by COVID-19 restrictions, NDIS providers adapted their operations in innovative ways, including the adoption of video technology, and new products and approaches for implementing physical distancing and hygienic practice.

Technology including telehealth and video communication apps emerged as vital tools for NDIS participants to stay connected with their providers and the wider community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A number of providers used telehealth to deliver supports such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and Early Childhood Early Intervention.

Allied health and other professional associations also consulted with their members and provided additional advice on standards to be applied when using telehealth.

To help participants purchase smart devices to access digital supports and interpreting services delivered online, a new support item for low cost assistive technology (AT) was added to the NDIS Price Guide and Support Catalogue on 30 April 2020.

For more information on buying AT items with NDIS funds refer to [the](https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/participants-coronavirus-covid-19/using-your-budget) [Assistive technology explained](https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-equipment-and-supports/assistive-technology-explained) page of the NDIS website.

The ongoing use of video technology and telehealth to deliver disability supports under the NDIS continues to be explored and will be the subject of formal consultation processes and policy development with all stakeholders at a later date.

## **Provider innovation case studies**

**Positive change through yoga**

When Julie Clark set out to start her own yoga business on the NSW Central Coast to support people with a disability, she came with firsthand experience, after suffering an acquired brain injury at age 32.

Julie had a brain haemorrhage that required brain surgery, and she is now impacted by cognitive and physical fatigue.

“It started as a way of self-expressing and advocating why I’m a bit different, and my body doesn’t move the way it used to, but I can still do yoga,” said Julie.

Julie receives funding from the NDIS for support workers who assist her with running the business and other daily tasks.

All Ability Yoga is also a registered NDIS provider, and Julie says navigating both sides of the NDIS spectrum gives her great insight to support her clients.

“The NDIS has given me the capacity to go into economic participation and have employment, which was always my goal.”

In response to the changing landscape the COVID-19 virus created, Julie adapted her practices: using protective equipment, regularly sanitising, taking her temperature before each session and staying two metres away from clients during their one-on-one sessions.

“My social responsibility is not only my health but the health of my clients, but now more than ever my clients need some peace and calm in their lives.

“Clients look forward to their yoga sessions, one of my clients was waiting for me out the front and had tears of joy when I arrived.

“I considered doing video conferencing but it’s not the same as being in the room, walking around and making sure people feel comfortable with their own ability.”

In her work, Julie supports people with a range of disabilities including Down syndrome, dementia, autism and psychosocial disabilities, and her message around inclusion is loud and clear.

“I’ve got a great amount of respect for people who have lived through adversity”.

### **Keeping active in isolation**

A Brisbane-based allied health business is ensuring Queenslanders stay active during Australia’s shutdown period, with a focus on those most vulnerable.

BodySmart Therapy works with clients with wide-ranging disabilities including autism, multiple sclerosis, acquired brain injuries, Parkinson’s disease and psychosocial disabilities.

Their exercise physiologists create programs for clients to ensure they stay active and maintain physical health, but due to shutdown and isolation, staying active has become an increasing challenge.

“A lot of our clients with autism are used to a routine, and it’s quite a shock to them when something big changes,” BodySmart Therapy’s therapy coordinator Majella Nolan said.

“We are now doing virtual sessions, bringing programs into people’s homes.

“We are also doing one-on-one home visits but staying out in the garden, or going to the park to maintain social distancing.”

While most Australians are aiming to stay active in isolation, Majella says for their clients, it’s a much more serious consideration.

“For a lot of our clients if they don’t stay active, other health issues can arise and it can cause further complications.

“So many of them have come so far thanks to regular sessions and to just stop would see them back at square one again.”

BodySmart Health is also running an active kids programs online, so clients and their siblings can be active at home together, and maintain a form of physical activity while away from school.

“Being online means we can also assist families in rural areas who might not have access to allied health or therapies, and it’s a really positive thing for those families.”

### **Foot in the Door keeps up the training, whatever it takes**

“Astounded” is the word Joe Devine uses to describe the uptake of online learning by NDIS participants undertaking courses with his registered training organisation (RTO), Foot in the Door Training.

“We’ve been providing accredited training for the best part of a decade and became a registered NDIS provider in 2019 to deliver life skills training to participants,” says Joe, CEO of Foot in the Door which is based in Caboolture, north of Brisbane.

“We let our students lead the way—if someone has a laptop and reasonable IT skills, then online is definitely a good way to go. Others might prefer to have assignments delivered to their letterbox, which we can collect when the work is complete. Or we can do a mix of both online and hard copy learning.

“Our gardening students get seeds and seedlings delivered to their homes, backed up with assignment instructions which can also be delivered or emailed.

“Another example is cooking, our biggest life skills program, and for this we send out recipes and instructions for those supervising the students. We also hold online sessions to guide students through the cooking assignments.”

NDIS participant Stuart Devlin, aged 20, has been doing both effective communications and budgeting training at Foot in the Door. He finished the budgeting course before the lockdown hit and is determined to complete his effective communications course.

“I do online training sessions using WhatsApp, and I get both a hard copy and emailed version of my assignments delivered each week. For me the virtual experience has been pretty good, though the downside has been the lack of social interaction that you get in physical classes.”

Another participant who has adjusted well to the virtual learning environment is Jodie Landsdown, 50, who has a mild form of Down syndrome.

“How it works is they send assignment parcels out to me and once I’m finished an assignment, I take it in on a Wednesday and get it assessed,” she says. “Then my trainer gives me more stuff to take home and work on.

“My goal is to complete my Year 10 Certificate in September next year, and a bit further down the track I want to complete Year 12. I’m also writing a book about my life, and Foot in the Door is helping me with that too.”

### **Wheels keep rolling with disability-friendly sanitiser**

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An innovative disability-focused manufacturing company based in Melbourne has released a new line of water-based hand sanitisers to address one of the hidden challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic—maintaining hand hygiene for manual wheelchair users.

Push Mobility CEO Shane Hryhorec, himself a wheelchair user, says on any given day people in manual wheelchairs touch their wheel rims several thousand times a day, “and that brings with it enormous challenges as the rims are obviously in touch with potentially contaminated surfaces”.

Shane, aged 34, has used a wheelchair since breaking his neck in a swimming accident in 2007 and is now an NDIS participant.

Since his accident Shane has become a strong advocate for people with disabilities and most of his staff have a disability or have family members with disabilities.

“Keeping our hands clean is a lifelong challenge and during a pandemic the challenge is critical,” he says.

“When the pandemic hit, pretty much the only hand sanitiser products available on the domestic market were alcohol-based.

“After much searching I finally tracked down a manufacturer close at hand in New Zealand, Zoono, which makes a range of water-based antimicrobial sanitisers just as effective as the alcohol-based products.

“They are much kinder to skin surfaces and have the extra benefit of being non-flammable.”

“We’ve just launched a new Australian-made product called the Wheely Hand Stand, which is a wheelchair-accessible sanitiser station designed for spaces such as shopping centres and hospitals,” he said.

“As we roll this out our sanitiser products will be much more widely available.”

Shane says Push Mobility was founded on the back of his own experience getting his first wheelchair, where the only choice and control available was choosing the colour.

Shane says his own experience of the NDIS has been “fantastic, beyond phenomenal”.

He uses his plan to fund a range of AT and other personal supports, including occupational therapy provided by Solve Disability Solutions.

“To witness the evolution of the NDIS and the way it’s improved over time has been amazing,” he said.

“For companies like ours, the amount of funding available for participants to spend in the marketplace allows us to invest in research and development in a way we never could previously.”

### **Youngsters flying thanks to ‘Quaranstream’**

While life for most Australians quieted down during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants in programs run by Victorian-based organisation Flying Fox are busier than ever.

Flying Fox run regular camps year-round for people with disability, including small group camps of six to seven people, or larger groups of 25‒30 people.

The camps are a chance for participants or ‘campers’ to interact with others their own age and create meaningful social interactions.

Founder and CEO of Flying Fox Dean Cohen said the importance of engaging with other young people has been an integral part of the organisation’s development.

“We are very much a youth-run organisation, the average age of our staff and volunteers is probably 21, which we love because it’s young people providing opportunities for other young people.”

As a registered provider, Flying Fox campers can use their NDIS funding for community participation to join in camps, or now, for the online Quaranstream program.

“Obviously a lot has been put on hold and we’re still planning to run camps when we can.

“During the pandemic we’ve moved online and we’re working really hard to make sure social connections can continue.”

Campers and buddies can now check in online each day at 11.00am for one hour, and are taking part in a range of activities including ‘sing-a-long Sundays’, ‘workout Wednesdays’ and ‘mindfulness Mondays’.

Some campers are running their own sessions, they’re celebrating birthdays and engagement is growing rapidly, with almost 600 campers logging in over a three weeks period.

“It’s an opportunity for campers to enjoy each other’s company and also for the families to have an hour to themselves to do some other things, which is really important too.”

Dean said the regular interactions they are have with campers allows them to communicate in new ways, which is opening their eyes to greater opportunities in the future.

“What we’ve actually found is a lot of our participants are far more vocal in these sessions than we’ve ever seen them.

“The environment we created for certain campers might not have worked and now we know different ways to deliver programs and we’re actually going to be able to do our jobs far better in the long term because of going through this.”

### **Dancers with disability still moving together during COVID-19 pandemic**

Young people living with disability danced from the safety of their own bedrooms and kitchens as they continued their weekly dance classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A leading contemporary dance theatre company ensured its dancers—many of whom are vulnerable to the coronavirus because of their disability—continued to have the support of their routines, creative exercise, and social connections while in isolation.

Adelaide’s award-winning Restless Dance Theatre took their training online using video communication so dancers could keep working together and stay healthy, physically and mentally.

Artistic director Michelle Ryan, who won the prestigious Australia Council Dance Award for 2020, said the online classes have been a hit.

“It’s not just about being a nice dance class, it’s about learning and developing and still creating work,” she said.

“It has become evident how important that is and that dancers provide support for one another, when there is so much tragedy and trauma in the world.”

Restless Dance Theatre embraces people of diverse abilities and works with young people with and without disability, creating inclusive dance theatre informed by disability.

Ms Ryan, who lives with Multiple Sclerosis and is also supported by the NDIS, said it’s equally important for her to continue working during the current health crisis.

“I’m not sure what I would do if I wasn’t working,” she said. “It’s very important for me.”

Ms Ryan said NDIS support with daily activities and physical exercise has given her the energy to continue working full-time with Restless Dance.

Like some of the dancers she teaches, Ms Ryan is also immune-compromised and has been self-isolating.

“The great thing is I can get groceries delivered to me, my support worker leaves them at the door, and someone will help with food preparation offsite and then drop it off,” she said.

Ms Ryan’s life is the subject of an award-winning documentary by Australian choreographer and dancer Meryl Tankard, called Michelle’s Story.

This is her 8th year as Artistic Director of Restless Dance Theatre. The company performed in South Korea in 2019, has twice performed at the Adelaide Festival, and has twice been nominated for the national Helpmann Awards.

### **Choir supporting Australians to find their voice**

Every week, hundreds of Australians usually descend on their local community hall, church or school to take part in national choir group With One Voice.

For most, the choir is much more than a place to sing, it’s a place where they feel at home.

With One Voice is the brainchild of entrepreneur Tania de Jong AM. Her vision was to use the neuro-scientific benefits of community singing, to bridge the gap between people experiencing disadvantage and those more fortunate.

In 1998 With One Voice was born, welcoming people from all walks of life, including those with a disability, to encourage community and build a supportive network for those who might need it.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, With One Voice has been hosting free live sessions every weeknight on their Facebook page, run by different conductors each night.

 “We don’t want to risk our members losing that connection with the entire community,” Tania said

“We want to support our community to maintain their mental health during these challenging times.”

With One Voice is an NDIS registered provider, which allows participants to use their NDIS funding to increase their social and community participation.

 “We know people with disability are particularly vulnerable and that has really driven us to act fast and offer an online solution to keep people connected to their broader communities,” said choir marketing coordinator, Lydia Griffiths.