COVID-19 and Disabled People and their Families

The Growing Space and Sam Paior

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Edited to remove technical support stuff.

SAM: Hello, everyone. Welcome to The Growing Space's webinar.

We have a lot to talk about today.

Welcome, everybody. I'm Sam from The Growing Space. I run a small business called The Growing Space and I have two NDIS participants in my life who are hiding in the corner because they're not allowed to come out here right now.

The slides, the video, the transcript and the Auslan will all be available on The Growing Space website later. So don't feel too distressed if your sound doesn't work well or you can't get something working. You will be able to have access to this and we should be able to get that up for you, hopefully today, but certainly within 24 hours.

This webinar is not providing you with medical advice. If you're worried about the health of someone you support, contact the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080. You can call them at any time if you need. Do save it for when there is a need. I'm sure they're very busy.

We will talk about getting ready to be fully self-isolated, which is redundant because we're here now, but this will give you tips on how to make that happen. We will be talking about support workers, your needs, reducing the risk of catching the virus, but not from a medical perspective, how to self-isolate, working with providers, because that is a changing environment right now, what to do when everything goes pear shaped, connection and medical help, what to buy and what to do about getting help when you have lost your income.

How can you teach someone that you love about the coronavirus? We know it is a difficult time for people, people don't understand. There are a lot of people with intellectual disabilities and cognitive impairments and autism who might be thinking, "What is going on?", their routine is in a spin, why do they have to wash their hands and why can't they go out? We have an easy English explanation of a lot of this stuff and I will be updating that in the next 24 hours as well. All of this will be available on The Growing Space website and that will be free. You will not have to pay to join, although if you want to access the other resources on there, you do have to pay to join that and you can claim that on your plan.

How can you learn more yourself? There is great free training that the government have put out. Don't be put off by that web address at the bottom, the https://covid-19training.com.au/login.php. It is a government-sanctioned training. It will take you between 10 and 20 minutes to do and it gives you great information. It is how to protect people that work with you, what should you do if you get symptoms, what about if the person you're supporting is getting symptoms and how to tell the difference between the myths and facts. I encourage you to do it and send that link to your support workers if you have them so that they can do this training as well and be well aware of what to do.

First of all, NDIS stuff. What are the NDIS doing to help all of us? You can request phone planning meetings. Most planning meetings will need to be done by phone now, but if you do need to do it in person, you can request that. That may change. In fact, all of the information we're giving to you is changing on a day-to-day basis. That's why we're doing it live and why I'm nervous. NDIS offices are still open to the public. They did put out communications early yesterday saying that they are closing, but they are still open at this point. Maybe that will change tomorrow.

This is a big one. If you're happy with your current plan and you're coming up for your plan to be renewed, you can have it renewed for 24 months. You have to ask though. Talk to the call centre or speak to your LAC, ask for it to be rolled over. The only thing that won't roll over is capital, so equipment, et cetera. You need to speak to your LAC if you haven't got your equipment provided yet. You can speak about extras or changing the buckets. If you're going to do this plan roll over, don't forget to say if you think you're going to need less core or more capacity or the other way around, ask that when you ask to roll it over.

They're more talking about the funding amount to be rolled over. How it is made up in there, you might have the option to be flexible on that. So many things in the NDIS, there is not a lot of consistency in that right now and that is understandable given the changing nature of everything. The NDIS is prioritising changes of circumstances reviews for those that really need it, particularly if you've run out of funding due to the COVID-19 crisis.

"Are my services are going to cost more now?" They may well cost more now. Your plan will not be automatically topped up with this, but many services in your plan are able to be charged at 10% more for up to the next six months. That includes assistance with daily life, which is basically your core supports, but it doesn't include SILC. If your customer is living with SILC provided support, they're not having theirs raised. Also improved daily living support is going up. Support coordination is not going up and SLES is not going up.

Cancellations can be charged at 100% rather than 90%. The notice times are going to change. We don't actually know how the notice times are going to change, but if you cancel, your provider will be able to charge you. If they cancel, they cannot. Once again, your plan at this stage won't be topped up.

"Help! We don't have enough money on our plan and why aren't they automatically increasing?" This is kind of conflicted, but most NDIS plans are not utilised fully. The vast majority are not utilised fully. So they've decided not to do that at this stage, but if you're getting close and you're worried and you're using more funding because you have switched from an ADE or a day options program to in-home supports, please put in for a change of circumstance and outline those urgent circumstances. Call that 1800 number, send an email. I suggest you do both and cover all bases.

"Will my next plan be smaller because I couldn't use it because of COVID-19?" They say no. This is a screen shot from the NDIS website. They're updating daily. This was an update from yesterday saying if you don't spend your services because of various reasons, they will take that into account at the next planning meeting.

There's lots of questionings going to be coming in on can you use your therapy funds or core funds to buy equipment because your therapist can't come any more. We will cover that more later. The short answer is there are going to be cases where that is a yes, but not all. So we will talk about that in a bit.

Can I change my NDIS plan to be more flexible? Yes, you can. You will have a review of the plan. I wouldn't worry about your funding level changing. If you just need the buckets changed around and need more money in one bucket than the other, then go ahead and do that. There are some people from the NDIS watching today, so cover your ears for a minute because I'm going to say something evil. If you are self-managed and you need to shovel money from one bucket to the other - this is not advice - personally I would just claim from whatever bucket I could at this time and I would not be hassling the NDIS to make chose changes. You can take your hands out of your ears now NDIS people.

Next, getting ready. It seems too late doesn't it? It is not. There are still plenty of things you can do and things you've probably already done. Make sure you have got enough food in the house or get some arrangements with local providers to be delivering, make sure your medicine and non-prescription medicines, over-the-counter stuff, don't forget your laxatives and antihistamines. Don't go stupid, but get what you need for a month. Make sure you have the cleaning and personal hygiene products. Hand sanitiser is coming back in stock in certain places, so keep your eyes open for that as well.

NDIS participants. Things you can spend your money on. Presumably you know this already, but make sure you've got your incontinence items, thickeners, catheters. If you are agency managed, you may need to call the NDIS and have some money shifted around in your plan. PPE is a really tough one. It is just not available. That is personal protective equipment. That's the gloves, your sanitiser, mask, gowns, disinfectant. This is starting to come back into stock. I got an email yesterday or the day before from Mable saying that they have a stock available for their clients and I think we will see more of this as time goes on. Do try and get those supplies up if you can. Don't oversupply because we have such a big demand right now.

Support workers. "My support workers are cancelling on me. What can I do?" Find out why they're cancelling. Maybe they can work for you remotely. I will give you ideas about that in a minute. Contact your support coordinator, if you have one, to get some help. Contact other service providers. Just start making calls. Make sure you have an emergency plan, which I will also cover, and know who can do emergency back-ups if your needs are critical, and we will also cover that in a minute.

Do you know what your essential or critical needs are? "How can I find and use new workers?" A lot of us are going to have to find people because people will stop working because they will have their own caring obligations or may have been exposed to the virus or may get it themselves. So broaden your search when you're looking for support workers. Think about people that used to work in hospitality. They're all out of work and they're all people people. Think about the people that work at your local cafe. Give them a call, give your local cafe a call and say, "Have you had to sack any of your workers? Maybe they might be able to help me". They obviously won't have the skills around the personal care, manual handling, but if you're willing to provide training in that, that is great; if not, assign them to do the other stuff, the laundry for instance. Hireup, for those that are their clients, Hireup has started a new assistance service. If you click on their link which is at the top of their home page, they can help you quickly get on board and assess and find new workers for you, particularly those that do have those extra skills around the manual handling, medication, behaviour, et cetera.

Ways to use new workers. It might be a good idea if you can reduce your risk and have fewer workers doing more work. So maybe you need to move on a couple of your workers or have them do external chores and just have a couple of workers in the house if you really do require workers in your home.

This is a big question. So many people are asking this and I can tell you there are a lot of lobbyists working very hard to make this happen, but you are still not allowed to pay family members from your plans. Some family members might be able to claim for carer payment and put in an application for that, and I've lobbied for the government to fast-track those carer payment applications, but, no, you are still not allowed to a pay family members. Some are going to ask, "How do you define a family member? Is my cousin's girlfriend a family member?" I think you have to use common sense here. You certainly would not be hiring anybody in your immediate family. Further than that, you're going to have to make your own decisions. The NDIA have not defined exactly what "family" means. I will leave that to you.

Let's talk about essential needs. Essential needs, or critical needs is what I call them, is anything that actually keeps you alive and something that you cannot live without. So for most people that will include eating and drinking, it will include toileting support, personal hygiene and that work that prevents bed sores and physical injury for those with physical disability. Don't forget this too, mental health and preventing self-harm are essential support needs. If you need a support worker to help you with that work, please keep those workers coming and keep them doing what they need to do. We have a lot of people in our lives, a lot of us have people where behaviour support is going to become really super tricky over these next few months of lock-in, so make sure that you put that on your essential support needs list.

Have you got an emergency plan, a back-up plan? This is hard for people to do. It is very confronting, but we are here now and this needs to happen. You need to put yourself together an emergency contact number list. This list on the edge of the screen, I will share that on The Growing Space page as well so you can print that up and write it in. We want you to include your current support workers' names, numbers and contacts and any agencies that are managing them if they are. Even a back-up one. Support coordinators are hearing from providers that they are basically dumping community support and focusing all their workers on their in-home support for those in group homes, et cetera. It's very distressing for us, but also understandable given the circumstances.

Think about any family members that might be able to help, immediate family members that might be able to help, and then think about extended family. Are there cousins or friends that could drop in and help you get out of bed or make sure that you've got water, whatever it is that are your essential critical needs that we've identified as per the last one?

Then going a little bit further, and this is getting a bit uncomfortable, what about your neighbours? Can a support worker do a letter drop in your neighbours' letterboxes to say, "Hey, I might need help here". Some won't like their neighbours and don't want to, but others have friendly neighbours. Don't hesitate to put something in those letterboxes because it may come down to needing their support.

There is also the Red Cross and other agencies of that nature. They may be able to help you at a real pinch. We're getting desperate now, but times may end up in that way. We have heard awful stories about people overseas and we don't want that happening to you guys.

Then there is police. Police can do welfare checks. They can break in the front door if you need them to, to help get you off the floor or whatever it is you might need in an urgent situation.

The last resort, and we don't want to go there if we don't have to, is calling up an ambulance and going to hospital. We don't want to clog the hospitals or be exposed by going to hospital. So if you can avoid that, please do.

It's heavy stuff, isn't it?

How do you reduce your risk? This is some stuff that you can do right now. Stay at home. That seems redundant after the messages yesterday from the Prime Minister. Stay at home. Don't go out if you don't have to. Send someone else to do the shopping. Don't socialise with others in your home or out and about. Avoid other people. Become a hermit. Find new hobbies. Limit shop visits or stop shopping in person. Have external people do that shopping and drop off for you. People that come into your home, try and keep that separate. Reduce the risk of any of that stuff coming in your home.

Keep stuff clean, including deliveries. I've heard that deliveries don't pose a big risk, but I will tell you the stuff I'm doing. We have our Woollies people. They and Coles have priority for people with disabilities now and they can just drop it off. They don't need you to sign or open the door. After the shopping is dropped off, I put gloves on and spread out the items on the table. The items that can be left outside for 24 hours, it stays there; if it can't be left, I'm spraying them with disinfectant. I'm washing the fruit and vegetables with soap. I'm in a space where I'm being extra vigilant and that's what I'm trying to do. I'm not perfect. I don't do it all the time, but I'm working on it.

Those of you that are wheelchair users, I will post this as well. This has been very thankfully shared by Yellow Submarine. I thank everyone who has contributed with material to share here. Here is one that is good for people with wheelchairs. Here is a list that you can tape to the back of your wheelchair if you want to remind people that they're going to have to wipe you down every single time you go out or every single time a person pushes you around in your wheelchair. This is going to be really important. Here are some ideas on ways to keep your wheelchair clean. We will make sure that this is posted as well separately so you can print it off.

"How is my family doing this?" This is actually a photo from a client of mine, fantastic people. Hello if you're watching. You know who you are. They set up an outdoor washing station. Their workers have to wash their hands and use a hand towel out the back.

You can see the colours here for VMAX, who is Clarrie, Dylan and Brendan. They have their own towel. At the end of the day they are washed in 60 degree water. They have their own plastic cups because they're only working outside. We're not allowing them in the house. The cups are out there so they can help themselves to a drink of water. Our workers are blokes so they can go out the back of the yard and do their pee. Obviously not everybody will do that and you need to allow workers inside, even if they're outside for the majority of the time.

I am trying to stick to a routine of wiping down the surfaces in my home. This is not easy to do. I am working on this. I'm working on getting better at it. If you've got hospital grade disinfectant, you want to wipe down your door knobs, taps, toilet, phone, remote controls are a big one, computer keyboards and the mice joysticks and controllers, handles, a fridge handle is a big one. You want to do them, the outside gate latches if people are coming in and out, tables and benches, the steering wheel of your car and the door handles. There are lots of different things there to think about. Do what you can. We've talked about the workers going through the side gate and the colour-coded cups that we've got as well. I'm sure plenty of you have other ideas as well. If you want to put those in the Q & A, I would appreciate it because I can add it into the materials that I share with people later.

"What are some other ways that I can reduce risk?" We have probably covered a few of these. Have your groceries and medicines delivered by workers who do not work in your house. Put a "Do not enter" sign on the door. It is a visual reminder. Also some handwashing signs. Here is the stop sign. We have got that on our Facebook page and our website and we will make sure I put this all together in one page within the next couple of days so everybody can download it. We have also downloaded this one, hard to see. That's better. This is a handwashing, how to use hand wash and how to hand rub using sanitiser and that has come from the World Health Organisation. I have this laminated and put up in our bathrooms to remind ourselves to wash properly. You can even draw or tape "Do not cross lines". You might want to keep part of your house free of workers or outside. You might want to put a line across the table that the worker sits there, so just a visual reminder.

If you have a cleaner and you need to keep a cleaner, and many will need to during this time, and you might want to bump up your cleaner, make sure they don't bring their own equipment. Have them use your own mop and cloths and duster, use your vacuum cleaner. Now is the time to buy one of those robo remote ones that whizz around on the floor if you can't use a normal one. Have one that your cleaner can use. You don't want anyone being a Typhoid Mary and bringing germs house to house.

We have gone through a lot of rules about workers and how they can do it. It is a good idea if you can write them down or get help to write them down so that you don't have to reiterate it over and over. It is uncomfortable bossing people around. Many will be very comfortable with it, as am I, but some won't be. So write it down, have a support worker or coordinator help you to write it down and have it on a page saying, "These are the rules of our house now". Things like, "You must go through the side gate; wash your hands outside before you come in; you must only use your hand towel or paper towel", however it is that you work it. Also ask your therapists, OTs and physios how they can help you institute these rules and keep you busy and learning new skills, or the person that you love. There are different ways of working, but a lot of these therapists are smart people and coming up with really clever ways.

Self-isolating. Do think about food delivery options. There might be a favourite cafe or restaurant near you that obviously is not open to the public at this point, but many of them will be open for takeaway. Do give them a call, have a chat, see what the menu is and see if you can't have some food delivered. If you're having your food delivered because of your disability, then you can most likely claim 80% of that cost from your NDIS plan. That will cover the preparation and the delivery costs and that 20% or so will cover the raw food costs, the costs that anybody have that are not services-related. If your plan is plan managed, you may need to have money, buckets of money shuffled around and call the NDIS to do that. The NDIS have said in the past that meal preparation and delivery is a stated support. If you are a self-managed participant, I would not worry about that, that does not apply to you. If you are plan managed, talk to your plan manager of a way to get around that and fix that.

Maybe you can have a worker do your laundry. For those that are family carers, the weight of your caring responsibilities have probably just increased manifestly because I know for me because we don't have workers in the house now, the things that the workers were helping with in the home are now back to me and I'm working full time as well. Or a lot more than full time. So if there are things you can do like leave the washing basket outside and have a separate worker pick it up and wash it at home and deliver it back folded, that could really help. Obviously, many of you with disabilities can use that as well. It doesn't have to be a proper delivery service. Let's keep our support workers in work. These guys need money too. Develop a bit of a routine. We will talk more about that in a minute too.

Here is the routine. The routine on the right is a bit of a joke routine. I will read it out for those that have a vision impairment. "Home schooling schedule, 9am home economics, learn how to make me a decent coffee". Wouldn't that be great! "10am, engineering, how to operate the washing machine and vacuum. 11am PE, carrying out rubbish and recycling to the bins". They have joke examples there. While this one is a joke, I don't think having a schedule is a bad idea. I think it is a brilliant idea. If you can make it into a visual schedule for those people with disabilities who like routine and who need to know what's coming up, and to be frank that's probably most of us, I think that's a great idea. If you include pictures, make it visual, that is great. Maybe the therapist can help you do that. They can do that remotely. You might be able to take photos of certain things in your home and send them to your therapist. Ensure it includes downtime and exercise and outside time if possible.

I'm not supposed to be advising you, but don't expect kids to do a full school load, particularly if they're in primary school. They're going to learn a lot of other things through that time. They will learn how to use X-Box better, YouTube. They probably know those, but don't expect them to have a full school load. Do what they can, but don't put the massive pressure on yourself if you're a parent.

About behaviour support. This is the stuff that gets tricky and hard. Ask your PBS practitioner for advice, your psychologist for advice, and how to work with those isolation rules, particularly around the restrictive practices. Ask other therapists about one-to-one programs that can be done remotely. Can you stream a yoga session from the big TV that you've got? Or can some stuff be done outside with the therapist? Can a therapist come and work in your driveway?

The new rules as of today, March 25, is up to ten people can do an outdoor fitness session together as long as they maintain that 4 metre square distance ruling. If you're stuck using registered providers because of the PBS requirement and you can't find those registered providers, call the NDIS Commission and ask them for advice on how or if you can use unregistered providers at this time. That may be imperative for some of you.

Working with providers. "What should I expect from my providers?" Clear communications about their availability. You want them to give you as much warning as possible. We had one provider the day before yesterday at 4pm give notice to clients saying that all services would stop immediately except for their in-home supports. I find that appalling, and it is a large provider that's done that. But why don't you get on the front foot, call your provider, ask for their plan and what are they going to do. They should be letting you know what they will need to prioritise too. Make sure your providers are telling you, have them communicate. We will make it clear to our clients that if your needs are not urgent, if you're chasing us down about horse riding lessons, we are going to prioritise the needs of someone who urgently needs them to turn them in bed. Ask about their fees and cancellation changes and how that might have changed. If they are treating you poorly, or if they cancel all services, please contact the NDIS Commission. The phone number for that is 1800 035 544. So please contact the NDIS Commission if you're getting in trouble with your providers. The Commission needs to know.

Here is a big list and this document will be available to you. Many would have seen this on The Growing Space website. It is a list of ideas of ways to use social workers while maintaining that social distance or working outside or working remotely. We've got, I think, all of our workers now are able to do some of that work remotely. You can all have a Zoom account now that you've used Zoom. You can all log in and get a basic account which allows you to have three people on video at once in a meeting and you will be able to see them all at once. Can you still pay them while they're working remotely? Absolutely you can. In fact, as a self-manager, I have made a decision that we will just continue to pay our workers regardless of whether they're working in person or off-site or maybe even if they're not working and I've cancelled them. We're just going to keep that going. The money is there, the funding is there and that is our option to do because we want to retain them so that they're still available to us at the end of this.

All right. Now comes some of the dark stuff. What happens when it really goes pear shaped? How can you stay connected? How can you keep your mental health? This is a photograph from a Zoom chat that I did with our family a couple of nights ago. We're going to schedule those in. They're supposedly scheduled in every night, but we've only done the first one so far. We will do more. Schedule in regular FaceTime or Skype time for you and the person you love. Help the person with disability to do that themselves so they initiate it themselves, so they're not a passive recipient of this contact. Try to help them set it up. Put it in the visual schedule, "10am, Skype with mum", and make sure that that actually happens. Help the person you love put that into the visual schedule so they know to expect it. It is very alarming for people. Don't forget people with AAC requirements should still be able to use these formats. You may have to translate for them if you're supporting them, but at least they will be able to have that visually for those that don't have visual impairments.

Facebook groups. There's some fantastic groups popping up. There's a kindness pandemic where people are sharing supports. In Adelaide we have Self-Isolating in Adelaide, a great source of morale and ideas and other people to talk to that are facing similar issues to you. There's also a group called Disability and Chronic Illness COVID-19 Information Clearinghouse. It is a big long name. That's the last one in the list of links there. Once again, you will have access to all of this later. That group is fabulous because they are all people with disabilities or family members with disabilities and they're all sharing fabulous resources and information on how to do this safely and how to do this well, and keeping up morale and also a few funny memes to keep you happy, and a fair amount of bitching about people that don't understand the serious nature of what's happening.

If it goes really bad, planning for the worst, can a family member move in with you or can you move in with your family member with disability? Or can a worker move in? Several of our clients have picked a very trusted worker, someone that doesn't have caring requirements of their own or potential caring requirements of their own, to just move in for the period and negotiate a wage. I think you will find that many agencies would be very happy to negotiate with you on this and to just pick a weekly figure that works for everybody to fund your worker to live in with you. If you're self-managed, you have full flexibility on that. If you're plan managed, talk to your plan manager about it and see if they will agree. Go to them with a proposal. I think most are being flexible now as you would expect as they need to be.

Also that says "client". It shouldn't say that, sorry. Do you or the person you love have a "How to meet my critical needs" list that a new or untrained worker could follow? If a random person walked in, a policeman, is there a one-pager that describes what you need in an emergency situation? Please try to develop that. If you can do it in easy English or pictures to demonstrate or illustrate this, please do that because you might find that you have workers that don't have English as a first language, so having those visual images of how to support you will be very helpful.

Once again, think about how support workers can help you even if they're sick or you are sick as well. What can they do remotely? I haven't tried this out, but I want to get one of our workers to FaceTime with my son and to have him clean up his room by FaceTime. I suspect that he will make the FaceTime call drop out, but we will see how it goes. We will give it a go.

Creating connection and mental health. It is fine to be scared and worried right now. Everybody is scared and worried right now and we have all got a million brain tabs open. I think of my mind as a bit of a browser. Sometimes you have so many browsers open that your computer crashes. That's all of us now. What the brain does in people is a little bit different than our computers. Our computers are not good at this, but our brains are. What our brain does is it prioritises the things that are most important to do and it dumps the non-essential services. So Evie, my colleague from DSC, she said that she poured the boiling water from the kettle into her cereal instead of her coffee cup the other morning. That's okay because it's not an essential service. We can make those mistakes and not worry about it. We're all making those mistakes. Anxiety right now for everybody is massive. This is normal and, in fact, it is healthy. We are biologically wired to be stressed at this time. It is really important to allow ourselves to feel that sense of overwhelm, to not be little Miss Powerful all the time, and this is coming from someone who is really terrible at this, but make sure you talk to people about this stuff, vent, share. Those Facebook groups, put up a post in there. Be vulnerable, allow yourself 20 minutes of crying in the shower if you need to. It's okay, because if you don't, it is going to build up and you're going to be an absolute basket case after this is over. Probably.

Use some strategies. All the usual stuff. Get exercise in. There's a whole heap of yoga and exercise stuff available on YouTube and other formats that you can follow. Even on Facebook I think there's daily things that you can do. Try and keep up a decent diet and eating good food. Engage in some humour. If you need downtime, put up some stand-up comedy on Netflix if you have an account. Continue to talk to people. It's important. Think about professional help, remote counselling or psychology. If you're a parent or informal carer, unpaid family member, you may be able to use funds to pay for those services through the plan of the person you love if your stress is related to your caring needs. Do consider that you can use your psychology funding for that.

Also, keep busy. Find a new hobby. People are pulling out old photos and starting to sort them or sorting them online. It's one of those jobs we never get to. Establish a routine for yourself and include in it cleaning door knobs, yes, but also the self-care work. Don't expect yourself to automatically do that self-care in a way that you might normally. Normally you might be going to the yoga class or whatever else. If you're not scheduling it in and having it in your face on a schedule, chances are you will drop it because you might not consider it is essential, but it is. Make sure you do it.

This was the fabulous analogy given to me by Sarah Reece who does some disability support work and has lived experience of psychosocial disability. She was talking last night about this. When you think about a birch tree and a gum tree, in a time of drought, a birch tree actually survives well. It looks good. The leaves stay on, it stays green, it's all very pretty. That's the tree on the left. On the right is the gum tree. The gum tree drops its leaves and half of its branches. It looks dead. It gives itself some space to die. It shuts down anything but its essential services. But then after the drought is over, the birch tree is dead forever, but the gum tree starts sprouting again. We need to be that gum tree. We need to vent and have that self-care so that we don't be the birch tree; we need to be that gum tree.

All right. "What can I buy?" All of you are asking all sorts of questions about how can you spend your money. The rules are the same. It's on page 8 of the NDIS Guide to Self-Management, which you can download, or page 9 of booklet 3, which is about how to use your funds, which is about using your NDIS plan, the booklet 3 from the NDIS. So the questions all remain the same. You still can't replace supports that would usually be provided by your family, friends and within your community, but a lot of that has changed now, hasn't it. So let's talk a little bit about a few things. This is one of our clients who has agreed for us to use that photo. She is a fabulous young woman with multiple disabilities.

See that table she has got there? Usually there is no outdoor table or chairs at her house. What she has done is I have supported them to purchase a table from Bunnings, a fold-up light weight cheap thing to put outside to create a visual barrier and distance between the person with disability and the worker. The worker sits at the other end. They're able to do crafting together and chat and whatever else while still maintaining that social isolation distance. These are things that you would never normally use your NDIS funds for, or neither would it be appropriate, but now these things are definitely a possibility.

The questions that I'm hearing being asked all over Facebook include things like webcams - good luck if you can find one. If you need a webcam to engage in your therapy or with support workers, I would suspect that that would be fundable through your NDIS plan. Of course, go through the list, make up your own decision. I cannot provide direct advice on this because everyone's situation is different.

You might need a longer cable for something so that a worker can work further away from you. We had already purchased, not through NDIS funds, a second computer screen with a direct cable so that my son can work at one end of the table and his computer plugs into another computer screen that's at the other end of the table so the support worker can sit at the other end of the table and can direct Ben, or Ben can direct the worker. They're right now building a website for his small business, his micro enterprise that he is building, and that is working well.

You might need increased internet requirements, both on your phone and home, or one or the other. That could well be considered an NDIS fundable expense, but do be aware that if you do that, you would only be claiming the difference between the current plan and the bigger one and you will need to stop that after the crisis is over.

You might need things like extra hand towels. I just bought ten for our workers. That is a PPE expense for our workers. Noise-cancelling headphones, a lot have considered that. They may be really important to be able to engage in online therapy, et cetera. Your personal protective equipment, it goes without saying, really.

Now, the computer, that is a really big one. I would suggest that the purchase of a computer during this stage is probably not claimable, although it will be for some, I'm not going to give a blanket answer, but what you might want to consider is renting one because that would clearly be a disability-related short-term expense that would be appropriate. So you may be able to rent a computer and that would be the same for exercise equipment as well. Rent a treadmill, rent a bike. I'm going to guess a lot of that stuff is close to not available, but if you can jump on now and rent some of that stuff, I reckon you could claim that on your plan, and there might be capacity for buying some of it. Once again, it will be related to you and your disability support needs and going through those lists on page 8 and page 9 of those guides.

Just the last slide and we will make it quick because you can look at this later. Many will have lost income, and I can’t imagine that trauma right now. Centrelink has supports available, but it is very hard to get in contact with them. I encourage you not to go to the office. You do not want to be exposed there. If you can hold off, I would encourage you to do that. The minister mentioned yesterday on the 24th that they are hiring an extra 5,000 staff members to handle this load. Give them some time. If you were working in hospitality, for example, or you’ve lost your job, you may be eligible for carer payment if you’re looking after someone with a disability in your home, or if you’re a disabled person, you may be eligible for DSP. Consider doing support work. Consider doing the support work. You have lived experience. A disabled person, who better to help somebody else with disability or as an informal carer, family member, who better to do support work? Think about reducing your own exposures though as well.

If you run a small business, you will be eligible for payments. Look at business.gov.au. Banks are starting to hold mortgage payments. I think there is support for renters coming soon, so hold out for that. Maybe you can just offer support for others who are able to work. For example, any healthcare workers. Maybe you can help look after the kids, do some home schooling and do some shopping for them. They might be things to do. Just consider general volunteering. I know there’s a lot of volunteering agencies in dire straits right now. If you can do work remotely and help without pay, if you’ve got that ability to do that, then go for that as well.

Second to last slide. For those with vision impairment, it is a picture of a train tunnel with someone walking at the end with a light at the end. I have just written that, “The light at the moment seems a long way away”, and this is so hard for everyone, but you will need to know you are not alone. I want you all to be the gum tree and not the birch. Look after yourselves.

So thank you very much for your time.

A huge thanks to Evie. Don’t leave us yet, we will do some Q & As. A big call out to Disability Services Consulting. They are a disability service focused business, but if you get onto the website, they have fabulous resources for participants. It is www.disabilityservicesconsulting.com.au. We will add that in.

A big thanks to our Auslan interpreter Chelsea who has jumped in at very short notice and huge thanks also to Leelee who has done that live captioning.

We will be making the transcript, the Auslan, the slides and the video all available for free for everyone, and I’m hoping you will share the shit out of it because we really want people to know to be supported and know what they can do around this whole crisis.

So, let's go to questions.

Sorry, everyone. Bear with us. This is the first time we've done anything like this.

I will just answer a question in the meantime, "Did I miss the part about purchasing equipment?" I think I covered that, but I can go into that a little bit more. Yes, purchase or rent equipment with your NDIS funds. Speak to your plan manager before you do it, if you've got a plan manager, to make sure that they're happy to reimburse that or pay that for you, but if you're a self-manager, you should be able to use your core funds to do that.

EVIE: "Will existing review requests be delayed for people who have lodged an internal review before COVID-19?"

SAM: I think if it doesn't include a review for critical support needs, I imagine that they will not be prioritised. If your existing review is about critical support, and we're not talking horse riding or physio to build core strength, those kinds of things are really important, but they're not critical, and I think the NDIA need to and will be focusing on those with critical support needs at this point.

EVIE: The next question, "Someone has been told that their support worker is not allowed to do anything that's not face-to-face with the participant. Can you give some information about when you can do Skype?"

SAM: That is 100% incorrect. The NDIA have even put out in their Q & A that workers can work remotely. There is nothing to stop that. If your agency is saying that, please report them to the NDIS Commission so the Commission can get in contact with them and tell them that that is incorrect.

EVIE: Someone wants to know, a support worker living a hermit life wants to know how to help.

SAM: If they are an independent support worker with their own ABN and insurance, then you would do whatever it is they normally do. Get into Facebook and get into groups and let them know. If you're on Hireup, let them know the skill set that you have because they're looking and prioritising workers that have the skills and experience that are needed. That would probably be the same for Mable. I'm not sure what they're doing. They're those online platforms.

EVIE: "Do you have any tips for giving someone IT support without physical contact?"

SAM: When you use Skype or Zoom to do that work, there is an option to share your screen and there is often an option to control somebody else's screen. So I would be doing that. You might also just want to call commercial IT providers to see if they can help you as well. There are lots of little businesses around where people can help set up IT and do that work. Obviously, they're all run off their feet right now, and yes, in answer to the next question that's coming, I would expect that you could claim that out of your NDIS plan if you are self-managed. Not agency managed. If you're agency managed and you want to switch to self or plan-managed, the agency are prioritising those requests. So do make sure you call in and ask for that urgently.

EVIE: "Can you talk about the flexibility between core and capacity building budgets?"

SAM: You cannot claim from the wrong bucket. However, the NDIS is prioritising requests to shift money from one bucket to the other. From capacity building to core, or core to capacity, whatever you need, if you need to do that, if you're plan or agency managed do that. If you are self-managed, I would claim from wherever you claim from. Keep a record, but I can't imagine anyone is going to gaol for that later.

EVIE: Now a hard question. "Do you have any suggestions on how to explain the social distance factor to children who seek deep pressure and activities to do with that for a support worker and participants at home who don't understand that?"

SAM: That is a really great question. Thank you. Explaining that to participants or family members is going to be really difficult. I think you as a family member are going to have to meet those needs personally and do that for the person and not expect support workers to do that unless it is absolutely required. I think there are mechanical ways of doing these things. Buy a roller if you need to. There are gym rollers that will put a distance between you. What are they called, those roller things that you buy to work out muscles?

EVIE: A roller.

SAM: Kmart have them, cheap, $15/20. Anything that can put a distance between the worker and the participant is a good thing. Find alternative ways to get that pressure. Now is a great time to train your dog to do therapy work if you've got a dog. Get a dog trainer to work remotely with you to train your dog to do the deep pressure and lie on top of a person when you need it. You can claim that too because you're training the dog to do a disability service for you.

EVIE: We have time for three more questions. I have the three ready here. "For somebody who was waiting on assistive technology, do you think equipment suppliers are likely to stay open?"

SAM: They would all be considered essential services and that should not be a problem. I think the biggest problem is going to be they don't have the equipment in stock. It's going to be hard getting that equipment because a lot of manufacture is done in China and that would have slowed down as it may not be considered a priority over there. There may be some difficulties around that, but it shouldn't be at Australia's end, if that makes sense.

EVIE: How would somebody access Coles priority delivery?

SAM: I may have misspoken about Coles because I think that they are the ones that are not doing the priority delivery, but Woollies definitely are. You need a Companion Card number, health care card number, you need some evidence of disability. You go to their website and enter your details. You will get a text back once filling in online. While you're waiting for that approval, you can actually build up your shopping cart in the meantime, so when the approval comes through, you can just hit "checkout" and it can all go. Don't forget, you should be able to claim that delivery fee from your NDIS plan if you're self or plan managed.

EVIE: The final question, "Somebody who is self-managing for a daughter with autism, they're trying to wrap their head around ideas or support to use for funding. Who can they speak to for ideas?"

SAM: I have 31 ideas on our Facebook page and website. I will try and get the web developer to put that on one page so everybody can see it at once or go to the Disability Services Consulting, they have a participant information page, and I might shoot you those documents, Evie, and you can upload them to your site as well. Other ideas, talk to therapists. OTs are pretty creative people and get online on those groups. There are some brilliant ideas being shared online in the Facebook groups if you have access to those.

EVIE: There are some suggestions. Someone suggested the emergency card that you mentioned with the contacts, it would be a great idea to print that out, laminate it, have it in large print around the house and on someone's wheelchair if they're going out.

SAM: Also with that is to email that to all of your providers and to your extended family and network so everybody has access to who to call when it all falls to poop, if it does. Hopefully it doesn't.

EVIE: A suggestion to look up on Facebook a model called "Just Listening", which gives an idea of how you can connect with somebody without physical contact. It sounds interesting. We will link to that. We will link to a COVID-19 group for people with Dushan.

Finally, apparently it is common practice in Europe to wash vegetables and fruit in the sink with a couple of teaspoons of bicarb soda.

SAM: I do not know bicarb soda is a disinfectant and kills bugs, but maybe it does.

EVIE: That is the time. We will send everybody the slides, we will send you the transcript of this and we will send you, if I can manage to put it together, the video of the presentation as well as the Auslan recording.

SAM: I just want to thank everybody for this. I have a suspicion that Evie and I might do more of these because I think we're going to need to. I've just sucked you in on that, Evie. Don't tear the hair out. Chelsea, I might have to suck you in too, and you too, Lee.

Thank you very much, Evie. Evie has done this on a fully volunteer basis.

If there's anything else you can do to support us, let us know. Feedback would be really helpful for us, ways that we could have done this better. We would really like to know so when we do this in the future, we can improve it and make it more helpful for people.

You can send an email to covid19@thegrowingspace.com.au and we will collate all of your suggestions, not questions, this is suggestions, on how to improve the webinars in general, and our presentation style or the way that this has been run today. We appreciate your feedback on that so we can improve it.

Thanks to everyone. We will end the meeting now. Have an awesome week. That sounds stupid. Be the gum tree, not the birch. Look after yourselves and look after those that you love. Take care everybody. Stay safe.

END OF WEBINAR