



**JENNY MACKLIN MP
SHADOW MINISTER FOR FAMILIES & PAYMENTS
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DISABILITY REFORM
MEMBER FOR JAGAJAGA**

OPINION PIECE

HAPPY FIRST ANNIVERSARY, NDIS – HERE'S TO MANY MORE

Today marks one year since the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) opened its doors in Victoria, NSW, South Australia and Tasmania. It's also the day when the NDIS launches in the ACT, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. From today, thousands of people in those states and territories will start to get care, choice and control under the NDIS.

A lot has changed since that historic day last year. Most importantly, more than 5,500 people with disability, their families and carers are for the first time ever getting the care they need and deserve. By the time the NDIS is fully rolled out across Australia, more than 460,000 Australians with disability will benefit.

The NDIS was hard fought. A federal Labor government first tried to get a national insurance scheme for people with disability up and running in 1975. Legislation to establish that plan fell short, in what was a tumultuous time for our nation's parliament. This time around, despite the challenges presented by a hung parliament, the former Labor Government got it done.

Today, the NDIS is a reality. It is enshrined in law; it is fully funded into the future. In recent months, I have had the privilege of hearing firsthand from people who are already benefitting from the NDIS.

In April and May of this year, I travelled with the NDIS joint parliamentary committee to each of the four sites that launched one year ago today. I met John Coyle from Blackman's Bay, Tasmania – one of the most inspiring men I have ever encountered.

John lost his beloved wife to cancer around a decade ago and is raising his three children as a single dad. His eldest child has developmental delays caused by a chromosomal deletion called monosomy 1p36. His second eldest child has autism spectrum disorder.

Like many parents of children with disability, John is confronted everyday with the agonising question of how his children will get on when he is no longer able to care for them full time. Before the NDIS, the thought was terrifying. He's "overjoyed" now he can clearly see a future for his children. He described the NDIS as "a godsend".

The difference of being spoken to with dignity, respect and compassion. Of seeing his children's lives brought "from the fringe and into the mainstream". He marvels at the personal skills his children have already developed since the NDIS came into their lives.

The NDIS is benefitting John and his youngest child, too. Having given up work in order to care for his wife during her battle with cancer, and then to become sole full-time carer for his children, John has not had any time to himself for the better part of the past decade.

Unconditional love, and the knowledge that he is all his children have, is what has driven John through levels of exhaustion many of us will never know. Thanks to the NDIS, he now has access to some respite, so that he can spend time with his youngest child, or do the shopping or the cleaning.

He hopes, and firmly believes, that the NDIS will transform wider community attitudes to disability, at the same times as it transforms lives. It is a long road ahead to ensure the NDIS becomes a reality for all Australians with significant disability, their carers and families. Today, Labor says happy anniversary to the NDIS. We will fight tooth and nail to see that it is delivered in full, on time, as promised.

The opinion piece was first published in The Guardian on Tuesday 1 July 2014.

MEDIA CONTACT: CATHERINE CHARLESON 0419 987 947