**Autism Hub - NDIS and Senior Pathways
TRANSCRIPT**

- I know that you go around to schools and that you introduce parents and teachers to the services that are available and the importance of young people engaging in those services prior to leaving school. So, I wondered if you could unpack that a little bit for us today.

- In regards to just NDIS or just general services?

- Well let's talk about NDIS first.

- Yeah. Okay, so in regards to the NDIS, we really push that all schools engage in a relationship with the NDIS. Of course, as departmental workers, we don't work for the NDIS, we're teachers. So, it's about bringing the knowledge to the schools about what's available. So that would mean that the NDIS would come to the school and run some information sessions and start educating parents on what the NDIS is about. It's about building relationships within the community. It's about having lots of conversations around what the NDIS can offer, what it can't offer. We would often have conversations with staff that would phone and say, "Oh, we've got a student that needs to engage with the NDIS but the parent's really struggling with how to do that." So, we would bring an NDIS contact to the school or introduce those services. And then once the NDIS process starts, there can be some conversations from a school point of view of what could be beneficial for the young person. Because what happens at home is often very different from what happens at school. And the needs we see at school are sometimes different from the needs that the school... Sorry, for what happens at home. And so, lots of conversations about the whole person. And of course, always student voice is so important. So, what is it that the student needs? What is it what the student wants? And then how can the NDIS plan help support those things? So as the young person continues on their journey, sometimes some of that funding from the NDIS can support those gaps that aren't offered in school.

- Thank you. And so how does that impact on planning or designing a senior pathway for young people. So in regards to the senior pathway, it's really important that the parents and the student are aware that they can access the NDIS. Are they eligible, and what funding they can access to support the goals of their senior pathway. So, it might mean a young person might want to go to TAFE whilst they're at school, and I'll talk about this later on, but going to TAFE there's not the same disability support that's available in school because the funding from school is meant to travel to TAFE. But that doesn't always happen so some people will access NDIS funding and they will use their funding to have a person do some travel training with their young person or teach them how to get to and from TAFE.

- So some more of those life skills that perhaps they need to do independently go and do some of those activities.

- Some of the gaps... So, a young person might have a goal of wanting to do something but there might be some gaps around their social skilling and their confidence. And that will really hinder their outcome if you know, if they haven't had some skilling around that. So, the NDIS is a good conversation about accessing some funding to help use some of those services whilst a young person is at school.

- We have calls to the advisory line here at the Autism Hub, asking about two acronyms. And that's the DES and the SLES. So, could you unpack those acronyms for us and talk to us about how they play into some of this you know, preparation for beyond school? So, the word DES in school comes to me sometimes with lots of anger from staff and sometimes lots of happiness, but a DES is a disability employment service. So, around school land, we hear people talking about DESes or D-E-Ss. So, what is a DES? So, a disability employment service is a employment service geared towards supporting people with disabilities. In the world outside of school, they're available for people between the ages of 14 to 65 that have a disability. In school land, they are available for students that are in Year 11 or in their final year of schooling. Now, the only way a student can access a DES in Year 11 is if they're accessing a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship. And then they can access them in Year 12, if they would like some support in finding part-time employment. So in regards to how do schools access a DES? Well, using a DES is user choice, not school choice. So, we need to provide opportunities for parents and students to be educated on what a DES is and when they can access them. So, what the disability employment service does is it in theory, it's to work with the young person to find out what their goals are, what they're interested in, what type of employment they would like. And then source employment and support them on their employment journey. And that might mean engaging with interview schools, writing resumes, supporting work experience, and going to work. To access a disability employment service in the school world, you need to be able to be employed for a minimum of eight hours a week. So that means the student needs to be able to work independently. So, someone is not going to go with them every day that they turn up to work and work by themselves.

- Okay, and what about a SLES?

- So as SLES is a School Leaver's Employment Supplement or is, it might be education supplement. It's tricky. The SLES funding is $22,000 for two years. So over two years. To support students who aren't quite ready to access further education or employment post-school. To be eligible for a SLES package, you have to be an NDIS participant. And you apply for a SLES package in your NDIS package. And then if SLES is approved, you can access SLES providers. Now the DES world are the people that mainly run SLES programs.

- Who is this information most important for, Karen?

- So, the SLES is only available to school leavers but that can look very differently for many students. So, the SLES could be, it's predominantly for students in Year 12, who aren't quite ready for school to end and they've still got room to learn but they don't need to be in the school land.

- So, the school could be involved in this conversation, definitely the student.

- NDIS, yes. But there's sometimes students that... Like, I haven't had a student in Year 11 who school didn't work for them, but they weren't ready to go to a DES because the theory is that we access our SLES, they build our skills up and then we go to a DES. But there are some students in Year 11 that have that SLES approved early and they plan on leaving school. And we also have some students that are doing a QCIA or have a flexible timetable. They might be doing a VPR, so a three-year senior pathway. And they might access their SLES. And whilst they're doing their part-time education, they use their SLES funding and start learning some of those soft skills whilst they're still at school on their senior pathway.

- So, it is very much asked, which is why we talk about designing a senior pathway because you have to design it for a young person, don't you?

- And can I just say that SLES funding needs to be applied for whilst the student is at school because the money becomes available with their NDIS package. So, it's no use the SLES funding being spoken about post-school. It needs to be a conversation that starts in Year 11 or even as early as Year 9 or 10. But it's funding that needs to be approved whilst they're at school, not post-school.

- I'm glad that you interrupted because I think that is very important information for both parents and for teachers and educators in schools to know.