**Episode 1, Part 2**

***Supporting a person whose housing isn’t working for them***

**Contributors**

Lauren Lovegrove, Support Coordinator - MNDNSW

Marnie Roelink, Support Coordinator - MNDNSW

Vasemaca Loki, NDIS Participant

Joanna Findlay, NDIS Participant

Andrea Lockwood, Summer Foundation

Linda Hughes, UpSkill Lead, Summer Foundation

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**Andrea:** Hi, I’m Andrea Lockwood and welcome to Part 2 of Episode 1, focusing on best practice for support coordinators who are supporting people whose housing isn’t working for them. In Part 2 we’ll talk about Marnie and Lauren’s person-centred approach, as SCs, to supporting a person’s transition to their new home, including seeing the property or meeting people involved before they move, supporting the person to live their life in their new home and what to do if they change their mind, and establishing if the new home is working for the person

# Sharing information about properties

Firstly, Lauren and Marnie shared how they support a person to visualise or trial a new home.

I was going to ask you actually about the visualising aspect of the environment and the place that a person might be moving to and talking about taking videos or doing Facetime or whatever it might be, but the way that you’re giving a person a real sense of what that environment is like. Have you had any experience where a person might see the property or see the local environment and think actually that’s not quite what I had in mind, that that might not work for me?

**Lauren:** Yeah, absolutely, I have had people look at numerous properties and for whatever reason they’ve not been suitable. One person, there was a property that was across the road from a cemetery and for them religiously that was not something that they would do or would want. So no matter what that property was offering it was just not suitable and so we looked at others and eventually found something that was better suited. Or I had someone else, there are 2 sides to the building and one side has this beautiful pool view and the other side’s the train station and they’re like "well I don’t want the train station”. So giving them those views and that was the one that I was taking videos for and video calling for her to be able to know that and to know that she doesn’t want that noise and she’d like the option to have the glass door open and get fresh air without trains and buses going past. I think that that was a really important thing for her to be able to see and get a feel of so that worked well.

**Andrea:** Yeah, it makes a difference to actually then picturing yourself or planning to move into a property.

**Andrea:** One other question I had was you talked about the people that you’d worked with, meeting landlords or real estate agents and people like that for the property they’re moving into. I wondered if you’ve had experience with a person meeting their support team in that new environment before going in there or even meeting housemates that might live if they’re going into some sort of shared living arrangement?

**Lauren:** We’ve not had anyone move into a shared living arrangement so we haven’t done that process but with supports, if they’re on-site supports, we definitely do try and have a meeting with them beforehand and discuss what the expectations are. Who do they have working for them? Because for some people that’s really important, how much choice do they have in who’s coming and providing that often very intimate support with showering or toileting so we do try and make sure that that can happen. There are times where that support team isn’t in place and we are relying solely on the core supports in the plan so they already know who they’re bringing along with them which is handy. But that process may happen down the track once a provider’s been appointed.

# Working in a person-centred way

**Andrea:** Marnie, I wonder if I can ask you these questions as well in terms of your approach to making this process as person-centred as possible?

**Marnie:** Sure, it is about having that conversation with that person from the get-go and asking them what their preferences are, whether it is in a high-rise, whether they feel like they can access something that’s on a different floor, whether they want something on the ground floor. It’s being very specific because a lot of the time with this move for that participant, they’re wanting this to be a lifelong change or somewhere where they want to stay so it’s about actually looking at what kind of environment, whether it is something that’s closer to shops, something that is in a quieter street or vicinity. Whether it’s a quieter area that they’re after.

I had a participant... now looking for SDA and she’s actually come from a rural place and she’s lived there all her life and she’s in inner-city in Sydney at the moment and she’s looking for that particular I guess SDA environment. For her it is not being close to a train station or a busy road, it’s a really important factor in her quality of life that we’re looking at those things. So it’s going down to the specifics of that.

Also being able to access that SDA unit or space prior to moving in, even if the choice has been made, to actually have a look at the final end result of where they’re moving into. A lot of the SDA properties are being built as they’re advertising and participants are going for these properties and getting places before they’re completed. So making sure that everything once it’s complete is exactly right for that person, the spec for the bathroom, where the sink is, where the oven is, making sure that there’s accessibility from outside, a balcony to inside. All those things are really important to make sure they’re in place prior to that person moving in.

So it is about communicating not just with that person but the provider, housing provider, the person that’s giving that care support and working closely with the occupational therapist who will actually be able to a lot of the time give feedback or even I’ve had a participant’s OT go with them to look at the apartment to make sure that everything is in line and right for how they would need to move around that space. So there's quite a lot of people that you can include to make sure that it is person-centred and that person is getting what they need.

# Supporting someone who is moving into a home that isn’t built yet

**Andrea:** I think for many people buying something effectively off a plan where you're looking at a picture of it can be really difficult to do and so I wondered, you mentioned, Marnie, then about people that are buying something before, they’re making a decision about a property before it’s actually built. Are there particular things that you do with people in that situation to support them through that decision-making process?

**Marnie:** Yes, I think it's really important to make sure that the housing provider is consulting with them all the way through that build and whether it’s sending them virtual pictures which they can do as to where it’s up to so they can see that and then making sure that they have an opportunity to physically go and visit that site. It can be with their care worker. They may wish for their coordination of support to go along with them to support them with that. It is actually liaising with the people that are involved in that process to make sure that they’re able to look at everything and do everything before they move into that space and to actually also let participants know, even though it’s a really long journey and they feel like they’ve finally got the place that they’ve been looking for, if they step into that and there’s something that is just not right, it’s really important that we’re open to different options.

People are allowed to change their mind and it’s really important to be flexible around that and make sure that we get that feedback from the person that’s actually going to be living there and their family, their family could be included in that. It’s just not the participant, having that family unit now that they can move into that SDA space as well so it’s actually just networking and making sure that you’re liaising with the people that are providing that particular SDA.

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# Maintaining ‘choice and control’ when someone changes their mind

**Andrea:** As we know choice and control are key principles of the scheme and I wondered for both of you the experience that - you’ve just mentioned, Marnie, someone who might change their mind and so they’ve been accepted or offered an opportunity for a property and they might change their mind. Just wondering how both of you navigate that process with a participant.

**Marnie:** It really is around working out what in particular is not suitable about what they’ve chosen because then you can nut it out, it could actually be something with that particular housing that can be changed, that can be modified to suit their needs. So it’s working out, can we meet that need in this particular environment that you’ve chosen? If they really can’t it’s about going back and looking at what is needed and what’s suited to them. So if you’re getting that decision prior to getting SDA quotes agreed upon and prior to them signing a tenancy it means that they’re actually not locked into that SDA if they have signed a tenancy agreement and that amount has been claimed for that SDA. It is a longer pathway, it’s really about going back to NDIS and going back and looking at what’s accessible and a change of circumstance so that they know that this wasn’t appropriate for whatever reason and going through that pathway.

So it’s also about letting that participant know that if it’s not something that is suitable to them and they want to change their mind these are the pathways. If you're seeking that SDA under NDIS it’s really important to be across what happens next and as a coordinator you take them through those steps and act on that if that’s what they wish to do

**Andrea:** We talked to Va about how Lauren ensured she was informed and had choice and control about her providers. Va begins by saying that Lauren was key in bringing everything together and making a blueprint to move forward. Va describes how Lauren always provided options to change providers, for example her physio, or to move into a different SDA.

**Va:** It takes Lauren’s role to combine it together, and make it into a plan or a blueprint to go forward. Yes, so it was – getting a physio, when I’m not happy with the physio, Lauren would advise me, “we can change to another one”. So she gave me options as well, and the kind of care that I wanted, and who I’m happy with, who I’m not happy with. Then Lauren would say, “yes, we can always get another new one”. So they were critical things that I needed to do. Yes, that I could change physios on that occasion. Yes. So that was Lauren’s role, yes, to have a new – yes.

**Andrea:** Really important to know that you can make those choices, Va, in who you want to work with.

**Va:** Yes, and Lauren, when she knows I’m not happy with a service, she will make the changes straightaway. And I think with her, she wanted me to be happy; to make my journey more – a better one. Yes, so I know her aim was to always keep me happy and informed as well, with the various services and various professional services I was getting in my current team.

I’m so happy here, Andrea. But I had 2 choices. If I didn’t like it here, I could move to another SDA in Rockdale. And I came here, after 1 week, I said, “no, I'm happy here. I’m not moving. This is it.” Because it had everything that I needed.

**Andrea:** Jo also shared similar experiences about the emotional support she had from her support coordinator. Jo said that her support coordinator never gave up on her. That if anyone had questions to ask her, or needed approvals for something, Marnie always worked in her favour, which meant Jo felt like she wasn’t alone.

# Home automation

**Andrea:** Home automation systems can be a critical element of a new home meeting a person’s needs. Marnie and Lauren share their experience of addressing this area.

 **Andrea:** It sounds like home automation can be one of the sticking points in getting it right and setting it up at the time the person moves in but also getting it working the way that works for that person. Are there particular things you do around that issue?

**Marnie:** Yeah, absolutely so depending on what type of SDA that person’s moving into automation may be included and that setup often does happen prior to that person moving in. Sometimes it’s not and it's more personalised to make sure that it fits that person and they can utilise that and use that and it works for them. So it is also making sure that once they do move into that, that that setup happens really, really soon and that that works for that person. So it’s really about looking at that particular environment and what that SDA has got set up prior I think is really necessary for that person moving in.

**Andrea:** Are there particular providers that are key to ensuring the automation systems are working for both, Lauren, with the example that you shared of this, the system that wasn’t in place at the time a person moved in? Was there particular people or providers that you pulled in to make sure it was working in the end?

**Lauren:** Yeah so the OT was extremely involved in putting together the request and making sure everything was included and they continue to be involved until that has all happened and it's implemented and working well. Sometimes we’re just waiting on an answer from the NDIS and that’s just a time thing. It takes time for them to go through all those applications and make decisions. So we look at trying to add in extra in-person supports to allow for that person to still be able to do all the things they were hoping to do with that automation. I guess people just feel a little bit like they’re a bit less independent when they’re relying on someone else rather than the automation to do it.

# Clarifying provider roles

**Andrea:** There can be a lot of providers involved in supporting a person with disability to live in their new home, and it can be difficult for people to know exactly who is doing what. Lauren and Marnie share how they address that need.

I also wondered for both of you, once a person moves in there are different providers so it might be an SDA provider or a landlord, you might have a tenancy person as well, there’s also the support provider, how people understand who to go to for what. Laruen, I wondered if you can comment on how you support a participant to know how each role works together.

**Lauren:** I think because that’s also different between each property so it’s like you're almost learning every single time someone moves in. But what I try and do is have a contact list for all my participants so they can keep that somewhere handy. I have the contact name, the number and then also what their role is. So in these situations you might contact this person so if you need repairs contact this person, if you need extra support because it’s not working you contact this person. But at the end of the day you can come to me, if you’re not sure just ask me and I’ll call everyone and work out who it’s meant to be. Well we learn.

# Establishing if a new home is working

**Andrea:** Beyond the person finally making the move, we talked to Lauren and Marnie about how they establish whether the new home meets the person’s needs.

**Lauren:** Yeah. I think the first thing is chatting with them, “how’s it going? Is it working? What are you finding? What are the challenges? How can we work through them?” A lot of the time it’s generally really good feedback. I’ve had feedback of like “this has revolutionised how I live because I can do all these things now”, so they’re meeting goals. They’ve got the equipment that they needed, the supports can be provided without any concerns or WHS issues, things like that have been really, really good. So ensuring all that’s in place and working well and then as I said working through the challenges. Perhaps the supports aren’t working and we need to look at why that is and changing them or in a few cases the assistive technology hasn’t been approved yet but they’ve moved in so how do we work without that home automation?

So sometimes things are a bit outside of our control and I try to set expectations a bit lower in the process, “it’s not going to be 100% exactly what you want but if we can get to 70% maybe that’s what we need to aim for. It’s not going to be perfect but we can definitely try and make it as good as possible so how do we do that?” So there are lots of challenges but I think generally chatting with someone, chatting with supports, you can work through what they are and find ways around them.

**Andrea:** Yeah, regular conversations, you can keep track of things, just talking regularly with people.

**Lauren:** Yeah, absolutely becaus~~e~~ maybe it’s working in that first week and then 3 weeks down the track the wheels have come off and nothing’s working anymore. But if you’re not in contact with them you’re not going to know that.

**Andrea:** We spoke to Va about what impact her new home has had on her life. Va told us that she's been living in her new home for about 5 months and enjoying every minute of it. She shares how the environment plays a big role in how she’s feeling and how SDA has been a big game-changer and made things easier to cope with.

**Va:** About 5 months. And I’m enjoying every minute of it. It’s made a lot of difference, absolutely. Yes. [inaudible] environment does play a lot of – a role in how you're feeling. Yes. Clean. Safe. Beautiful views to outside. Yes, so very important, the environment of living. Yes. I’ve been much, much happier. And [inaudible] makes it more easier to cope with, and knowing that I have help here all the time, with various carers to look after me.

So it was really game-changer – big game-changer, moving into the SDA. It’s a beautiful [inaudible] setting. A free-flow apartment. So grateful. And it’s all because of Lauren Lovegrove. The woman has put a lot together.

**Andrea:** Yes. What type of things in the home – we’ll talk about outside the home in a moment – but inside your home, what type of things inside your home make a difference for you in how you do things at home?

**Va:** The bathroom. Big, huge bathroom. To be able to fit in the commode, whereas I couldn’t [inaudible]. Also the automation available when I need it. So it was already built that way. So all they had to do was just come and plug in, and it’s ready to go. And balcony – easy access to the balcony. Wide enough to fit my big wheelchair, to go in and out. Make 360-degree turnarounds. The space of the apartment to accommodate my big electrified wheelchair. The bedroom; big, spacious bedroom, again, allowing me to get my wheelchair in, proceeding to be turned. Yes, and the automation option, which we have applied for. Because I don’t have the strength to pull the blinds down by myself, because my right hand has been affected.

**Andrea:** Yes, and doing things in a way that works for you, Va, that you feel safe and you can be independent as much as you can.

**Va:** Yes, that’s probably it. Yes.

**Andrea:** Jo also shared what she likes about her new home and the ongoing support she has from her support coordinator. Jo’s new home has a swimming pool which she was really excited about. It also has space for her family to stay, which is really important to her. Jo shared that her support coordinator has organised for meals to be delivered - Jo can go on to a website and order what meals she likes, which is then delivered to her doorstep and all she has to do is heat them up. Jo reflected that her support coordinator knows what NDIS has to offer and knows how to find options and put these in place for Jo. Jo had less support hours initially, and her support coordinator organised for those hours to increase, which made a big difference to her. Jo felt that her support coordinator had compassion and empathy for what is really important to her.

Marnie, I wondered if you can share your experiences of looking at how that new home is meeting the person’s needs.

**Marnie:** Yeah, like Lauren said definitely it’s about just having that contact with the person that’s moved in and seeing how they feel, letting them settle in. I think there’s a really big settle in period when they’re moving into SDA, especially if there’s a new environment and in particular if they’re living on their own. So allowing them to settle and that general feedback. I had a participant that moved in and she was closer to her family and she’d been distance-wise separated from her extended family for quite some time so she had sent me photos in of her new apartment with her children and grandchildren present. That was awesome to see because it really did capture how she felt in that moment and also being close to her family. So I think just getting that feedback validated that she is happy and that she’s happy that she made that decision.

There are issues though that do come up when you move into any new place so it’s actually working on what those issues are, who to go to, for example for automation and things specifically in that environment or in that building that you might need to troubleshoot that aren’t working. The lift, anything that’s automated takes time to set up for that person so it’s going back to that provider and liaising with them and making sure that you’re following up and making sure those things are attended to as soon as possible so that person feels safe and secure in that particular environment. So it’s working with that provider as well.

# Working out if a new home is what the participant imagined

**Andrea:** Ensuring a new home is going to meet a person’s needs is essential. We also talked to Lauren and Marnie about whether the new home is what the person may have imagined. Marnie, I wondered if you can share a bit about your reflections on someone’s vision for what a new property might be like and then if in some ways it might not be what they imagined how you navigate that with the person?

 **Marnie:** Yeah, I think it does vary from person to person and depending where they’re moving and what their experience is. The hope from a participant and family but definitely the coordinator is that it is really positive and it can add to their life and it can actually lead to the goals that they’ve got and give that quality because everyone deserves that quality of life. So I think one particular situation that was very positive for the gentleman that I talked about previously and his one main goal was to have a baked chicken dinner with his new housemates and watch Manly play. He did not have that opportunity to have that beautiful environment and that setting in the aged care facility that he was in and on the second night that he was in there the care manager sent me pictures of him sitting up to the table in his wheelchair with - I think there were 5 other people living in that house – with his baked chicken dinner watching Manly on TV and he just looked so happy. Something like that seems like a very small thing to ask but his journey to actually get there and to have something so simple that made him really happy to me was something that was extremely positive and I felt that yes, he is actually in the right place.

Then you look at the other challenging situations, I actually had a participant that moved in and the place itself was really lovely but the care support model that they’d had chosen for that particular SDA that was set in was not the right care model for this person and that was really, really challenging and hard for that person that had that vision and felt like it would be life changing and was ready to start their life with a progressive neurological condition that time is not really on their side. That was really complex to navigate through that. It was actually really complex to go back to NDIS in that particular situation and ask for them to guide us and to guide her on what do we do with this because she’s already in SDA, it’s already been approved, it’s the actual care model that’s not working for her and it really was not working for her.

In the end that participant ended up moving out and not getting an answer and they’re the things that as a coordinator are very challenging and you’re constantly trying to navigate while supporting that person. Luckily she is actually back into another SDA that she loves and is working for her because that model has grown and changed over time so it meant that she could have more choice and control as to who was giving her that care support and I think that that made the biggest difference to her and her move. So that ended up being positive the second time around. So I think they were really, really good outcomes, just a lot of work in between and a lot of time as well.

# The importance of persistence

**Andrea:** I think persistence, isn’t it? I think lots of conversations and just being so persistent with every step of the way is really key, isn’t it, from what you’ve shared today, that hopefully you do achieve an outcome that makes all of this worth the process that the person endures.

**Marnie:** Yeah, that’s right. Absolutely persistence is incredibly important and one door might close and let’s have a look at another avenue, let’s have a look at what we can do. It’s really important to think about when you’re supporting that person’s housing.

**Lauren:** Something that we all know working with the NDIS is that it’s constantly changing and what you do last week isn’t necessarily going to work again this week. But persistence like just keep going, it can happen and there can be really great outcomes for participants, it’s just a matter of trying again and again until you find the right way to do it.

**Marnie:** Yeah, I think it really is a matter of being persistent but then also making connections with others that are working in this space and maybe having the same challenges or maybe able to offer some suggestions or advice linking in with organisations so that you can actually equip yourself and get tools that you need to support that participant and person. Knowing the system, ever-changing system of NDIS and what their protocols are and pathways and really trying to link into that as much as possible so that you’re educated on those pathways and then helping your participant to look at those pathways. It is a quick-changing space but when it does work the benefits are really fantastic so it’s worth putting in that time and being persistent.

**Andrea:** Thank you for listening to Episode 1 of the  *“Best Practice”* series. The Summer Foundation would like to thank Lauren Lovegrove and Marnie Roelink from MNDNSW as well as Vasemaca Loki and Joanna Findlay for their generous contributions to *“Best Practice”*. And thank you to Linda Hughes, our UpSkill lead. We would also like to thank Gandel Philanthropy for funding the development of this series.

You can find out more about the UpSkill program for support coordinators and for allied health professionals on the Summer Foundation website. Tune it to Episode 2 of “*Best Practice”* to hear how others in the workforce have supported people living in hospital to return home.