



<b>Breaking Ground</b>	<b>1- 3</b>
<b>Interesting Links</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Survey Opportunity</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Guide to Spending</b>	<b>5- 6</b>
<b>Disability Dis- cos</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Building Inclusive Communities</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NDIS update</b>	<b>8</b>

# Self Managed Options

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## “Breaking Ground”: The Damien Conte Story

*Many thanks to Cheryl Gardner and her son Damien for contributing this wonderful story.*

It is the 11<sup>th</sup> December 2009. We are at Studio 44 at Fingal Head, a magical place on the banks of the beautiful Tweed River in Far Northern NSW.

What’s the occasion? It is “Breaking Ground”, the inaugural solo art exhibition for Damien Conte, a young artist from Murwillumbah who has been part of Ability Option’s self-managed program since April 2008. I find myself stopping to have a “moment” as I look at Damien’s beautiful artworks adorning the walls and watch all the wonderful people that have contributed to this day adding the final touches before the official opening time. Damien is seated on the couch – he knows this evening is for him – we have talked about it for so long, and yet he doesn’t really know what the evening will bring – his excitement is obvious.

The journey to Studio 44 had been both exhilarating and challenging, exactly what you would expect from a young man who left school at the end of 2007 with hopes, dreams and desires for his future. Except that Damien has autism which severely limits his ability to communicate verbally or interact socially. And so began a journey that for me, his mother, has been my great privilege to travel with him.



*Continued on pages 2 and 3...*

But where to start? Fortunately Damien had the opportunity to attend a series of creative workshops facilitated by artists from “Crossing Divides”, a Gold Coast based arts organisation whose vision is to promote economic and social inclusion for young people including those experiencing disability and disadvantage by developing skills through innovative and creative programs.

What Damien and I discovered was that Damien loves to paint – he loves everything about it – the colours, the textures, using brushes, fingers, whatever, to create. He gets lost in his work while painting, his focus is dedicated to bringing the creativity from within to the canvas. He also enjoys music and using clay. So we began to seek out the artists that would mentor Damien to develop his skills as a painter and sculptor. Everyone we approached was really keen to facilitate Damien’s journey as an artist and all have shown an unwavering belief in Damien’s abilities.

One artist in particular, Jhana Bowen, was so taken with Damien’s passion for art that he organised Damien’s exhibition at Fingal Heads. He did this with assistance from Accessible Arts NSW as part of the “Don’t Dis My Ability” events being organised in conjunction with the International Day of People with Disability on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. And so here we are, Damien’s first solo exhibition.



The musicians arrive and start to play. People arrive, look around at the art, have a drink, stop to listen to the music. The atmosphere is relaxed and happy, people are really enjoying themselves. Damien is also enjoying himself in his own way, he loves the music and the praise that he gets from random people stopping to tell him how much they admire his art. People are asked to write their comments and from these a poem is created:

*Through inspiration every moment  
A journey to the real world*



*Surprised at how each piece is different  
Beauty expressed from a genuine place of soul*

*Colour, movement, connection unique  
I'm lost in the depth, the place is cosmic  
Disability is not a lock but a golden ticket to express the creator  
and artist within*

*The love of art reflected vibrantly on canvas is truly unique and  
special*

*His work is deep-seeing, far-seeing crossover between art and  
freedom*

*Giving his gifts for all to share*

*Canvas and sculpture to this exhibit he brings*

*Keep doing your thing*

*Red, golden orange and pinky bronze,*

*Metallic biology it keeps going on*

*Cellular Memory, The Sunkissed Land*

*They are winners, they resonate from where I stand*

“Breaking Ground” was a truly magical and successful exhibition, which from Studio 44 went on to hang in the Tweed library for the following three months.

Some of Damien’s work can be seen at [www.myspace.com/damiencontart](http://www.myspace.com/damiencontart)

When he’s not creating, Damien enjoys horse-riding, bike riding, going to the gym and swimming at the aquatic centre.

He also enjoys his weekend job feeding the animals at a farm school.



## Links of Interest:

<http://www.velmaspetsastherapy.com.au>

A charity based in Ryde (Sydney) that runs a pet therapy programme and can visit your house with a pet of your choice.

<http://www.supportedliving.org.au>

A wealth of information on people with a disability living independently the way they want to, with examples from around Australia and the world.

<http://www.idrs.org.au>

The Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) is a community legal centre in New South Wales working with people with an intellectual disability to exercise and advance their rights.

<http://www.communityhousing.org.au>

The NSW Federation of Housing Associations is the peak industry body for housing associations in NSW. Housing associations are non-profit managers and developers of low cost housing.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAoI0wIPe\\_Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAoI0wIPe_Q)

A short video on a NZ girl with Down Syndrome who is only one of two people with Down Syndrome in NZ to have their full drivers license. (thanks Rick!)

<http://www.pin.org.au>

PIN (Planned Individual Networks Inc) is a WA family-run non-profit working to support families plan and create a secure and fulfilling future for their relative with a disability. A good source of information and contacts.

<http://www.inspiringcommunities.com/abcd.html>

Information on the Assetts Based Community Development (ABCD) model of community development.

### Note on our Facebook Fan Page:

Thanks to everyone who has joined our Facebook fan page so far. Unfortunately, consultants are having trouble accessing Facebook due to the organisation's internet filtering software but we hope to have the issue resolved soon. In any case, it is our hope that over time it will grow into an active online forum where families from around the state can exchange news and ideas. You can start a discussion on the 'discussion' page by posting a new topic or chat with other fans through the chat function.



### Change to the mileage rate:

Please take note that due to changes to the SACS Award, the Award under which our community inclusion workers are employed, we are now required to reimburse 74c per km for mileage claimed, up from 57c per km. If your budget has a sizable component set aside for mileage, then this change may have a significant impact. Your self management consultant will talk you through any budget adjustments required. The change took place on January 1 2010.

## Survey Participation

To be part of a research study being conducted by the University of Technology Sydney for the Australian Sports Commission on the sport and active recreation of people with disabilities go to the link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RVNQKW>

Participation in this study is highly valued whether you are participant or a not. The organisers are as interested in the reasons for non participation and the constraints to participation

that people with disabilities face.

Those fully completing the questionnaire have the opportunity to go into a guessing competition to win 1 of 5 \$600 vouchers for Inclusive Sport & Recreation Equipment. For further information on the equipment available, please visit [www.teaching.com.au](http://www.teaching.com.au)

The findings will be used to review current approaches to sport and recreation and to improve access provisions. You have until the end of March 2010 to get involved.

# Guide to Spending

## What can I spend my funding on?

Generally, community participation funding is spent on “hours of service” that allow participants to access, participate, and contribute to their local community and build genuine friendships and support networks.



The following is a list of typical expenses encountered as part of the Self Managed Community Participation and/or Life Choices programme and the goals developed:

- Staff support
- Mileage for staff
- Group activities (including brokerage to other organisations)
- Gym membership
- Professional services, eg. personal trainer, art/craft teacher, tutor
- Travel expenses / mileage to activities
- Costs associated with volunteer work (eg. uniform)
- TAFE / community college course costs
- Swimming lessons, pool entry/membership
- Social outings, such as concerts, movies, theatre
- Incidental costs, such as meals, whilst on the programme
- Music therapy
- Dancing / drama classes
- Cooking classes
- Massages
- Sport
- Material costs related to the goals outlined in the Person Centred Plan

Obviously this is not an exhaustive list, so any queries regarding funding and expenses should be directed to your self management consultant at Ability Options. Ability Options can only approve costs detailed on your Funded Support Plan. Costs outside this may result in non-payment.

### OK, so what can't I spend my funding on?

Again, community participation funding is spent on "hours of service". The general rule of thumb is that one-off "big ticket" items will not be approved – things like computers and holidays – as ADHC will not view this sort of spending as getting value for money when the funding is designed to be spent on "hours of service". Again, your self management consultant will be able to guide you as to what is likely to be approved and what isn't.

### I've heard people talking about "equipment and modification funding"...what's that?

Equipment and modification funding is a separate pool of funding that participants in the self managed programmes can apply for. It is intended to be spent on one-off items of equipment or modification that fundamentally assists people to participate in their self managed programme. It has a very specific focus and each application ideally requires very strong reasons as to why the particular piece of equipment or modification is necessary along with a demonstration as to how it will be integral to facilitating participation. Your self management consultant can advise and assist you in this regard, and completed applications are submitted by Ability Options on behalf of the participant. ADHC forms regular panels to assess each application on its merits before a decision is made.

An information booklet and application form are available from the ADHC website:

<http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/dadhc/People+with+a+disability/Equipment+and+Modifications+Fund+2009-10.htm>

Or else request a copy from your self management consultant. Examples of items that have been approved include a \$350 sling to help a wheelchair-bound man get into and out of a pool for hydrotherapy, and Auslan interpreting.



## Disability Discos

Northwest Disability Services and Castle Hill RSL have joined together to launch monthly discos for people with a disability at Castle Hill RSL - 77 Castle St Castle Hill.

They are held every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 6.30pm - 9.30pm. Bring along your friends, meet new people, and join in the fun in a safe environment. Cost is \$10.00 per person and bookings are essential: call North West Disability Services on 9686 4155

# Building Inclusive Communities

A question that self managing families often ask is “how exactly do I build an inclusive community for my son/daughter?” or “how do I go about building genuine links within my community?”

One of the flip sides of self managing, especially for rural families, is that people can actually become isolated and develop an attitude of “doing it on our own” as a result of not being part of that interaction and sense of community that often develops around centre-based programmes. Building natural and genuine links within your community that fosters and nourishes the desires and aspirations of your son/daughter (not just disability-specific activities and services) is what self management is all about. But it is not something that happens overnight; it requires long-term effort and planning, cooperation, unexpected progress and setbacks, and the boldness to simply ask. In short, it is an ongoing organic process rather than a prescriptive one. It is all about turning a “client” into a citizen.

Having said that, there are some models and frameworks out there to help shape your thinking and effort. Kelly Piper recently attended a workshop on “Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)” and will have a booklet available for families to look through at the upcoming seminar. If you can’t make the seminar but are still interested in reading about ABCD, please ask your consultant to send you a copy, or visit Community Builders NSW ([http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/getting\\_started/needs/abcd.html](http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/getting_started/needs/abcd.html)) for a toolkit.

A community is what you make of it and what you want it to be for your son/daughter. Instead of being passive recipients of programmes and services, the idea is to build your own inclusive communities and networks, working with existing assets and forging new links.

Here are a few extracts:

- ABCD is a way to find and mobilise what a community has, and each community has to find its own unique path to success; there is no one model or recipe.
- Meaningful and lasting community change always originates from within, and local residents in that community are the best experts on how to activate that change.
- The wisdom of the community always exceeds the knowledge of the experts.
- Building and nourishing relationships is at the core of building healthy and inclusive communities.
- What we focus on becomes our reality. If we focus on what is wrong or what is missing, we tend to see everything through that filter. Instead of asking ‘what’s wrong and how do we fix it?’, ask ‘what have we got, what’s worked, and how do we get more of it?’.
- Focus on the resources, capacities, strengths, and aspirations of your community and its residents.
- Every single person has capacities, abilities, gifts, and ideas. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, gifts given, and ideas shared.

Damien’s story about his art exhibition in this issue of the newsletter is an excellent example of forging community links and creating genuine, socially-valued roles.



### **Self Managed Programmes**

We warmly welcome contributions from readers, however long or short they may be. If you have an event or news item you would like to share, views or comments on any of the items in this newsletter, or would just like to share an excerpt from your experiences self managing, then please let your self management consultant know. We would love to hear from you!

#### **Please note:**

Due to the Easter public holiday period, March statements that would normally be sent out on April 10 will be sent out on April 16.

#### **Consultant Contact Details:**

Ally Vincent-Penisi: 88111 742 or 0451 372 133  
Caroline Portolesi: 88 111 746 or 0410 577 250  
Kelly Piper: 88 111 731 or 0405 229 793  
Matthew Dimmock: 0450 955 346  
Melise Bourne: 88 111 734 or 0424 173 078  
Ulli Zaulich: 0425 208 549 (currently on maternity leave)

#### **Address for payment requisitions/invoices:**

7 - 11 Rowley St OR PO Box 165 Seven Hills NSW 2147

**Timesheets:** Fax: 8811 1765

Email: [payroll@abilityoptions.org.au](mailto:payroll@abilityoptions.org.au)

#### **REMINDER!**

Our first seminar of the year will be held at **Ashfield Leagues Club** 115 Liverpool Rd Ashfield on **March 16 9.30am-2.30pm**.

The rest of the seminars for this year will be held at the usual venue of Burwood RSL and will be held on the 1st June, the 10th August, and 9th of November.

### **Update on National Disability Insurance – The Disability Care and Support Inquiry**

On the 17th February, the Productivity Commission inquiry into a National Long Term Care and Support Scheme for people with a disability and their families received its terms of reference.

The Productivity Commission inquiry will examine the feasibility, costs and benefits of replacing the current system of disability services with a new approach which provides long-term essential care and support for people with severe or profound disabilities however acquired. They will be holding public consultations as part of its inquiry, which is your chance to say how you would like the system to change for people with a disability, their families and carers in this country.

If you want to be kept informed by email or post, or to make a submission on the issue, you can register on [www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/disability-support](http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/disability-support). Or you can also download a registration form, to be sent to Disability Care and Support inquiry Productivity Commission, GPO Box 1428, Canberra City ACT 2601. The final report to the government is due in July 2011.

#### **For the Diary:**

**In Control Australia - “Self Directed Support in Action: Supported Living” August 9 2010.** Greg Lewis of My Place WA and Jill Hole of Homes West QLD will draw on their experience in supported living to share elements that enable people with disability to have a home of their own. Eddie Bartnik of the Disability Services Commission of WA will look at the role of government in facilitating these opportunities. More details to follow.

**“That’s What Friends Are For” - May 1, 2010 9.30am - 3.30pm. \$55 per person. Rydges Hotel, 116 James Ruse Dr, Rosehill.** Associate Professor Keith McVilly, and eminent behavioural psychologist from Deakin University, will be running this workshop on supporting young people with Down Syndrome make and keep friends. For enquires and registration, please contact Siena O’Brien: [workshops@dsansw.org.au](mailto:workshops@dsansw.org.au) or 9841 4411. Registration closes 23rd April.