

Podcast series 3 ep 4

GT: Hi, listeners and welcome to Reasonable and Necessary, Australia's premier podcast series on everything you ever wanted to know about the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

I'm your host, Dr George Taleporos and today's episode is all about housing.

You'll know about recent changes to specialist disability accommodation and you'll also hear about some great initiatives here at the Summer Foundation to get people housing to suit their needs.

My first guest today is one of my favourite people on the planet, Luke Bo'sher, CEO of Summer Foundation.

Q: Hi, Luke, welcome to the show.

A: Hi, George, thanks for having me.

Q: So for people who don't know what specialist disability accommodation is, and I had to learn accommodation, but we'll have to live with it, refers housing, so for people who don't know what it is, can you give us a very simple explanation?

A: So, a specialist disability accommodation is a new concept in the NDIS and that concept is that people with disability who have very high support needs and what the NDIS call extreme functional impairments are able to access some additional funding in the NDIS to pay for the cost of their housing. And that's really in recognition that housing for people who have very high support needs is likely to be more expensive than the average Australian because of the cost of more accessibility or technology within the home. So, what the NDIS does is provide people with disability in the scheme, who meet those requirements, with an additional payment in their NDIS plan, but they can then go out to the housing market and find a housing property that meets their needs, that's enrolled as specialist disability accommodation.

Q: That's the best explanation I've ever heard, thank you, Luke. Now obviously like everything to do with the NDIS, there's a bunch of rules and they call it their SDA framework. And under that, there's a set of rules that you need to follow and one of them is, you need this particular level of impairment and depending on your impairment, there are different types of housing that you might be able to access. There's one called Robust, I believe, and then there's, what is the other one? There's one that has to do with people who might have not high needs, but improved liveability, I think they call it. So, there's a range of different types. Now for people who want to understand the framework, can you just give us an overview of how it works?

A: Sure, so maybe I can talk just a little bit about the substance of a specialist disability accommodation and how it's designed and then talk just a bit about the process and the kind of architecture that sits there to support this new idea of specialist disability accommodation. So on the substance of how, what does a framework say, so there are a couple of really important concepts in specialist disability accommodation that are quite new and different compared with most of the previous ways that housing was funded for people with disability prior to the NDIS. So I think there are three really important things to think about in SDA

that are quite different to how people might have understood the pre-NDIS system. So the first one is that funding for housing and funding for support have been separated in the NDIS, so this idea of separation of housing and support is designed to give people with disability more choice and control because they can use their housing subsidy (SDA) to be able to purchase or have access to a property. And then if they don't like the support provider, because the funding is separated, they can choose to change that support provider over time. So that's a really important change in SDA, that's saying that the framework sets out really clearly that this is a housing related subsidy, not a subsidy for the cost of support. And the second thing that's changed in SDA is this idea of portability, that the SDA payment sits with the person with disability. And they can go out and shop in the market and find a whole range of housing providers that deliver a whole range of different types of housing and can negotiate with them to access SDA that meets their needs. So that means that people with disability have a lot more choice and are a lot more empowered to shop around in the market, so that's another important thing that the framework sets up. And then the third thing is that this subsidy is paid kind of month by month, year by year to the housing provider, so rather than an upfront grant, which most of the previous investments in disability housing were made using upfront grants. This requires a provider to continue to claim through the portal each year for the cost of that housing, so that means that providers really have a strong incentive to make sure that what they're delivering is really high quality right here and now. but it's also going to be relevant and lasting and high quality in to the future, so that encourages them to really make sure that they're building to the needs that people with disability have, but they're investing in the kinds of accessibility that people will need over time and that they maintain that property because if they don't, the person with disability who lives there, they might move out and move to a different property. So, there are some important things that the framework set out, the NDIS then looks at the framework and creates some prices for specialist disability accommodation. So, NDIA set out the subsidy or the price that providers will be able to access to be able to pay for that housing, and that's a relatively complicated formula and there's a nifty little price calculator on the NDIS website for providers. So that's a bit of a summary of what the framework itself says and then I guess just to comment on the process, because this is quite different to the way that other supports in the NDIS have set up. So, SDA is just one support in the mix of all the things that the NDIS pays for, but SDA is the only support that has both a whole framework agreed by COAG, by the disability reform council, it's not only support that then also has a rule, what's known as a specialist disability accommodation rule, which is a piece of legislation that sets out how this whole thing will work, and then it's the only support in the NDIS that has its own price catalogue just for SDA. So, there's a whole bunch of, I guess it's, of this architecture that are agreed by the states and the commonwealth, through the framework by the Commonwealth Parliament. Through the rules and then the NDIA, through the pricing for SDA. So that means that there are a lot of safeguards for those investing in this sector in the sense that there can't be quick radical changes to the way this works. This is a long-term commitment from government and it's got that certainty that it's going to be long term because to change, it requires the agreement of all of the states and also the Parliament.

Q: Speaking of changing it, there were some problems, weren't there in the initial roll out and I think it's been going for just over two or three years now and we were seeing that people weren't necessarily getting funding. So, we know that very few young people who were stuck in aged care were getting funding and originally and we were seeing that there

were a lot of providers that were really concerned. But there weren't going to be enough people with these payments to warrant building lots of SDA. Now there was a review quite recently and that review was really aimed at addressing some of the issues. Can you maybe tell us a little bit about the changes that resulted from that review and let us know what you think about those changes?

A: Yeah, George, that's right, so this idea of specialist disability accommodation, the funding for SDA has been around for a few years now, and it's a really big change, as we were talking about, it's a really new way of funding housing for people with disability and that change takes a while for providers, for investors, for banks and for people with disability and their supporters to be able to really understand what this opportunity looks like, so we didn't see as much growth in SDA in the first kind of few months or the first year and a bit as we'd been hoping. And some of that led governments to say, actually, we should step back and just have a quick review, see how things are going, see how we could make this better, so they did that throughout the second half of 2018. They got KPMG to go round the country, run a whole range of forums, talk to a lot of people with disability, to providers, talk to banks, talk to governments, look at what's going well and what's not going so well. So there was a lot of listening that went on and then we think that what they've done in response to that is really going to make a big change to how SDA works. So a couple of changes that the governments announced are really important to people with disability to understand, so one of those changes is that there's now a national process for determining SDA eligibility and that process will be fast tracked for people with disability who are in really urgent need of getting their housing situation sorted. So the people who are in a hospital bed, people who are in an aged care facility, they'll be fast tracked through this new national process for determining SDA eligibility and then a whole range of other cohorts, including people that are currently in group homes who want to change the housing situation, people who are at home with ageing parents who are looking to access SDA. Those people can also access this new panel process who will make decisions a lot quicker, so we think that will go from seeing only a couple of dozen people in aged care facilities approved with SDA to a whole range of people being approved over the next few months as this new national panel process works its way out, so that was a really big change in the framework review and it's one that I think will mean that the experience and the pathway for people with disability to get this approved will be much, much faster.

Q: And I know that in season one, we did an episode about people having to do a housing plan and one of the things that we said is that the information that you exhausted all other options and before applying for SDA, my reading of the changes is that they're not going to be quite as strict on that and also that there's the opportunity to have an SDA payment in the plan without necessarily having found an SDA property.

A: Yep, that's spot on, George, so they're two other really important changes in the framework review, so just to recap on those, so one is that going forward, people don't need to have explored, in detail every other option that might have existed except for SDA. So the rules will stay the same, but you've still got to have shown that SDA is the right response, that private rental or public housing isn't the right response for you and that's still saying that will be there. But that's something that can be dealt with really quickly because we know that for most people with disability, for example, who use a wheelchair, there are not very many accessible private rentals out there. So rather than having to go through and meticulously

look at every single listing that might be on Domain at any particular point in time, this new process will be much more accommodating of the fact that you know that those options don't really exist for people with disability. And then on the second change that's in there about getting SDA approved before there's a vacancy. We sometimes saw people get stuck in this kind of circular loop because the NDIA sometimes said to people, you have to have an SDA offering in order to get SDA in your plan. And then providers would say to people with disability, we can't offer you a property until you've got the payment in your plan, so people got stuck in this kind of vicious cycle and what the NDIA said is, we don't need people to have an offer any more, we can just assess whether or not someone's eligible for SDA in principle and make that decision. But then they can go out and look for a property, so that's going to mean that what we'll hopefully see is a whole lot of people with disability preapproved for SDA, being able to go out and shop in the market and talk to providers about what they want. And get providers to build what they want to build, rather than providers having to really take a stab in the dark and build some things and hope that that's what people with disability want.

Q: That's really good because that also means that people can get on to the housing hub and look for property and they can basically know that the funding is attached to them in their plan and that they've got that option and I think that's a really important change. Is there anything else that you think is important that you know about the framework?

A: So, there's a range of changes in the framework from this review that effect providers and those who are providing the finance to build SDA properties. So I'm sure that for those people listening to the podcast who fall in to that category, they will have been following closely what the changes were on pricing. I think just one message to make about that is that the review also acknowledged that some of the prices weren't quite right in order to provide a sufficient amount of money to pay for housing, in what has been a quickly growing housing market, and a growing cost in the housing market across Australia over the last few years. So what had happened was that some of the SDA prices got out of step with the growth in the housing market and sometimes people with disability were approaching providers to build housing in places where the provider would say, well, we'd be happy to build a property there, but the price that NDIA will pay is not going to be sufficient given the high cost of land in some of those locations, particularly in capital cities. And the pricing review recognised that there might be some of the prices in SDA that aren't quite high enough to meet what's been a quickly growing housing market. So one of the things that people with disability should know is that even if you've been and had some conversations with housing providers in the past about what you needed, that there are currently some reviews about pricing going on, so if providers say they couldn't build you what you felt like you needed in the past, it's worth having that conversation again in the next couple of months because some of those prices will change and that will create some more options for people with disability.

Q: That's good because some people might want to live in the more upmarket areas and that it's good to know that hopefully, that they'll be more options for people in a sense of where they can expect to see future SDA properties.

A: That's right and I think that one important thing to remember is that it's like everything in the NDIS, the insurance component of the NDIS plays an important role here as well. So when the NDIA is looking at specialist disability accommodation as a reasonable and

necessary support, just like everything else in the NDIS, they're thinking about the insurance part of the NDIS. And they're thinking about if we fund the cost of new living in this area, which has really good access to public transport where there's a supermarket close by, where there are opportunities for participation in the community close by, that means that the person's experience both with their outcomes and the cost of other supports, their outcomes will hopefully improve and the cost of other supports might reduce. Because rather than having to get an accessible taxi every single time you want to leave your house to go somewhere, rather than meeting a support worker or an assistant to take you out to go somewhere, the SDA should enable people to live in really high amenity locations that reduces the cost of that support. So certainly people with disability who are looking at SDA options should be really expecting that those options will give them access to the community in a much more cost effective way because hopefully, those SDA options will be close to the things that people with disability need like transport, like supermarket and access to other community amenities.

Q: Yeah, and we also know that people have good outcomes when they're connected with their friends and family and we want to see SDA in all parts of the country. So that people can continue to remain living in the community that they like or if they hate their community, they can just get out of there.

A: That's right and that's the idea of mobility with SDA, is that you should be able to move around and there shouldn't be huge barriers to being able to move around. So hopefully, SDA means that some people who might currently be in a group home or supported accommodation property that isn't really meeting their needs because it's not in the place they want to be, it's not with the people that they want to be with and it's not using a support model that gives them the best opportunity to live independently. That everyone in a group home who is experiencing any of those issues should really be thinking about well, what else could be possible? What would meet my needs better and going on to The Housing Hub and looking at the vacancies that are there, gives you a really great way just to expand your thinking about well, where could I be living and what do those other options look like?

Q: Absolutely, just before we go, do you think that more needs to be done in this area? Do you were you happy with all of the recommendations? Are there any changes that you would've liked to have seen that were not included?

A: Well, there's one really important change, George that we still need to make and we still need to get across the line and it's part of the way there. But we still have to do a bit more work to get it all the way across the line, and that's about allowing families to live together in specialist disability accommodation and not just families, but also any person who a person with disability might want to live with. So the way the SDA rules are currently written, it makes it really tricky for providers to allow a person with disability to move in and also have their partner or their children or some other person who the participant might want to live with move in. Because the SDA rules in lots of ways were designed around the idea that everyone who lives there would access the specialist disability accommodation payment, and certainly from Summer Foundation's work, we know that a lot of people in aged care who are in the NDIS have a partner or they have children or they just have a preference for living with another person. But that person might not need to have a disability, so currently, the rules make it difficult to make that happen. One of the great outcomes from the review was that

government said, yes, we want to be able to allow families to live together and we want to make that happen because that's good for people with disability, but we just hadn't worked through enough exactly what changes were needed to make that happen. Because as you said before, George, it's a really complicated policy with lots of kind of regulation around it, so they didn't want to change the regulation and make the problem worse or not quite fix the problem, so this is the one area where there's a bit more work to do over the next couple of months. Which is to work out which changes to the rules need to be made so that people with disability who get the SDA payment can live in that property with whoever they choose and that choice can include family and people without disability in the same way that every Australian should have that opportunity to live with their family or with a person of their choosing.

Q: And I remember when I first heard some of the case studies around people who had kids and suddenly found that there were other options for them to live with their family and this isn't right, we need to fix it and we've been fighting this for a while, haven't we, Luke and we're getting closer but hopefully, we'll get there eventually.

A: That's right, well, hopefully, we are going to get there in the next couple of months. So I would say if you're a person with disability out there who wants to live with a family member or wants to live with someone who doesn't have SDA, you should be absolutely looking for those options. And telling providers that this is something that will be possible because there's a really clear commitment that this is going to get fixed, it's just about working out the legal wording that will make it get fixed in the SDA rules. So that change is intended to take effect around the middle of the year once this kind of finer detail is worked through, but my message to people with disability would be this, come the middle of the year, it's absolutely the case that there'll be solutions to how families can live together in SDA, so you should be thinking about those options and working on those options so that when that change is made, that you're able to very quickly move in to the kind of housing setting that you want to live in.

Q: Absolutely, Luke and you are the world's leading expert on specialist disability housing, thank you for joining us.

A: Well, I'm sitting here with you, George, I can't be the world's expert on specialist disability accommodation when I'm here with you because you're such an expert on all these things.

Q: Well, I learned from the best, Luke. Thanks for your time, Luke, thanks for joining us.

A: Thanks, George.

Q: Now that we understand the SDA, let's look at how we can find some housing with a bit of help from Alecia Rathbone, General Manager of Housing Matching here at Summer Foundation.

Q: Hi, Alecia, welcome to the show.

A: Thanks, George, it's great to be here.

Q: So tell us what do you do here at the Summer Foundation?

A: Sure, at the Summer Foundation, my role is to be the general manager of Housing Matching and what that means is we're looking at setting up a new social enterprise that's all about how we find appropriate housing for people with disability and actually put the decision making in their hands, so provide opportunities for people to find a house for themselves.

Q: Wow! Excellent, and I know that you head up two pretty awesome projects and one of them is called The Housing Hub, can you tell us about that?

A: Yeah, sure, so The Housing Hub's been going now for about 18 months and it was started really to look at how do we, with the new NDIS that's come in, and with housing now being really different to what it was before, so going from being allocated to people with not much choice to now people having full choice over where they live, who they live with, we needed to create something to sit in between the people who have the housing and the people who are looking for the housing. So we created The Housing Hub.

Q: Wow, it sounds like Tinder for housing.

A: (Laughs) No, well, maybe, that sounds fun.

Q: So tell me what kind of housing can people expect to find on this Tinder for housing?

A: Sure, so we actually want it to be all sorts of housing, so I guess just like Tinder, it's for all sorts of people. It's all sorts of housing where people can go on and look for what's right for them. So I guess people with disability are all really different and have different needs, so we're not partitioning it down to a certain group of people. So accessible housing, some people will say disability-friendly housing, so all the different types, I welcome them to list on our website, for people to go and have a look at. And I guess the more specific examples of the types of housing would be people might have a house for rent or for sale, they might have an apartment, it could be a share house situation where people want to find a flatmate or it could be a group home or a more traditional different accommodation.

Q: Okay, and my understanding is that a lot of the current housing options that the government offers are no longer going to be managed by the government, in fact, they're going to be able to come to The Housing Hub to see what's available, is that right?

A: Yeah, absolutely, George. So, in the past where if you needed a house, as a person with disability, you can put your name down and be allocated a property by the government. So that's no longer the case and actually housing providers now need to match up with housing seekers to both decide where people want to live and who they want to live with.

Q: Okay, we're talking about people who have NDIS funded specialist disability accommodation funding, is that right? So people who have a payment in their plan, that's called SDA where previously, that funding would've been used for say a placement group home where the government says, here you go, there's a house in Mordialloc, yep, it's vacant, come and move in, we're turning the tables on that, aren't we?

A: Yeah, absolutely, so for people with specialist disability accommodation in their plan with the NDIA, people actually have the chance to get that approved and have that money allocated to them as a person to then choose where they want to live and who they want to live with. So yeah, no more situation where someone calls you up and says, you now need to

live in Mordialloc with these other people, you can actually use your money in your plan and decide where you live.

Q: That's excellent.

A: Yeah, it's great.

Q: That's really good, so it's good for people to have these payments in their plan, but it's not just for them, what I'm hearing that there could be other options, so if someone had built a house and that house happened to be accessible, they might advertise it on The Housing Hub and there it is.

A: Yeah, absolutely, we want to make it as broad as possible so that we are serving all people with a disability, not just the people who have the specialist disability accommodation in their plan. So people might have different accessibility features like you mentioned in a house and it might be for sale and they might say, actually, I'd like to advertise it on here, not just on the mainstream website, so that those features can go to use, so it's been a real problem where a lot of accessibility features are developed, but then maybe go unused in different situations, so we want to try and make that discoverable as well.

Q: That's fantastic, now I've visited The Housing Hub a few times, I've seen it goes for various information. I know that the first version wasn't that great, then there was a second version and that one's been a bit better, but I understand that there's a version 3 coming out, is that right?

A: Yeah, that's right, George, so yeah, like you say, the first couple of versions have been what we would call a minimum viable product. So, where we really wanted to have a website that we put up, then we test out to see this does actually serve the needs of people with disability looking for accommodation, so we have found that thousands of people, almost thirty thousand people have used it. So we're now at the point where we can say let's do the next version. So we're calling that version 3 at the moment, not the most fun title, but it's going to be a great website. So our whole focus is going to be on the features for people seeking housing, so that when you go to the website and have a look, you can type in what it is you're looking for, what sort of house you want, who do you want to live with, where do you want it to be, what are the kind of features and you can actually set up a profile to save that in the website.

Q: That's very Tinder, isn't it?

A2: Yeah, although I have to say I haven't used Tinder myself, I've had friends who just got married on Tinder.

Q: So you have friends who got married through Tinder?

A: Yeah, just two weeks ago, their wedding.

Q: I hope it lasts.

A: Yeah, me too, they've been together for a few years, so it's looking good, but with the profile, the really cool thing about this-

Q: And if it doesn't last, they just go back on Tinder.

A2: Yeah, we know it's going to last, it's going to be fine, they just got married, George.

Q: Shout out to them?

A: No, I won't shout out to them. So if I go back to the profiles, what I think's really cool about this and hopefully everyone else will too, when they use it at the moment, when you go on a search, you have to search each time, but in the future, if you set up a profile and tell us what you want, what we can do is each time you come to the website, it can just tell you here are some new listings that come on, that match what you said you want. Or you could even ask it to email you and tell you when new listings come on to the website. So it's much more about a good user experience for people with disability to really get the information around what it is that you're looking for.

Q: That's really good because that means that you don't have to be on the website every day, but you get an email that says a two bedroom house in an area that you've chosen and you'll be alerted to it.

A: Yeah, exactly.

Q: That's pretty good, I like that.

A: Yeah, I think it's a much better experience, so less work that you need to do if you're looking for a house and also being able to communicate through the website, so if you do see something that you like or you might have a question, you can actually email the housing provider through the website and ask the questions on the platform so you don't have to do that stuff, really outside of the system.

Q: That's really good and I saw that there were some pretty awesome options up there and I was wondering if you wanted to tell us a bit about the ones that are worth looking at now. So I saw that there's some housing done up in Oakleigh, and looked pretty cool, close to Chadstone.

A: Yeah, for sure, actually, we've got advertised at the moment as 10 brand new apartments in Oakleigh. So, they're in a brand new development and there'll be 10 apartments peppered throughout that development for people who have, or are likely to get that SDA funding we were talking about before.

Q: And peppered means spread out to that apartment, doesn't it?

A: Yeah.

Q: And I was thinking salt and pepper, and I thought, that sounds tasty, but it means that there are 100 apartments and then there are 10 that are specially built for people with specialist disability accommodation.

A: Yeah, that's right and it means that there are 100 developments, so they're not all next to each other, and on different floors. So they're all over, so in that way, people will move in to those apartments and will be alongside everyone else and participate in the community in whatever they want to do just like everyone else.

Q: That's great, and are you excited about any other ones on there?

A: Yeah, so there are those 10 in Oakleigh, which is in Melbourne, so like you said, just near Chadstone. So that's 10 for people with high physical support needs and who would like to live alone in their own apartment. Likewise there's another 10 in Brisbane at the moment that we're looking at with a similar arrangement. So, 10 apartments and then also in Sydney in Penrith out in the west. So another 10 apartments there, so all beautiful, brand new, which are really great examples for people to have a look at and see if it's right for them.

Q: That's fantastic, now for our listeners who are familiar with really high physical support needs, can you just maybe tell us sort of how would someone know that they had high physical support needs, and then I know that the NDIS will make a determination based on the person's support needs and their functional impairment, and are there words that we love using, but for people who just want to understand what that means, can you help explain that for us?

A: Well, I think a good explanation, I think what you just said too is really good, George and they're the technical definitions that the NDIA work to. I think people who really can't use all of their limbs all the time and actually need some support from somebody. So I think one of the ways to think about it is how many hours a day of one-to-one support you might have, so we usually say we have over 6 hours a day, that's just one way of working it out. But if you are someone who has a lot of one-to-one support and you hear about this and think, yeah, I would be interested in that, you can certainly contact us and we can talk through in more detail with one of our team. But also on our website if you prefer to look at a website instead of calling somebody, you can do that as well, if there's information about a detailed eligibility criteria that the NDIA put out, for that as well.

Q: And I recently visited one of these high physical support needs apartments and what was really obvious to me was that it was really built for somebody who had a large wheelchair. So it meant that I could turn around in the apartment and not take down half the wall if anyone happens to stand in the apartment. The bathroom was amazing in that it was very open and quite wide in the sense that you often need a wheelchair and a hoist and a person and a change table and all that stuff that we often need and there was room for that as well. It was obvious that you could use the kitchen so even though it was like a regular kitchen, there were some features, so I saw that the drawers came out from under the sink and some now can get under, yeah.

A: You can push it back in and it wouldn't look any different to anywhere else, yeah, it's been really well thought through. And what I understand is it's bought as what would've been a two bedroom apartment completely off the plan, redesigned so that you have your kitchen all along one side and actually a lot of space to move like you said, if you are in a wheelchair that you can move around and even things around being able to use the balcony or the heights being adjusted so that people can go in and out and just use the whole apartment.

Q: A balcony, what an innovation.

A: Yeah, and that was cool and the doors all open using different technology as well so you don't need to worry about opening the doors and blinds.

Q: And the other thing that I thought was cool was that in the bedroom, it was a bit creepy, but it was also good, there was a sound system where you can call out for assistance, the

voice activated. And I thought that was amazing that you can be in your own home and then the support is available in the apartments on site.

A: Yeah, that's right, so the on site support is really important, so for these apartments that we visited, as well the other ones I mentioned before, the model they all have is that there are ten apartments and there's always an 11th apartment with someone there 24 hours a day, where you can call out for that support if you need it. And that's in addition to the support that people would already choose for themselves as their one-to-one day support.

Q: And that would provide quite a bit of saving for the government, wouldn't it, in the sense that it means that people who need overnight assistance, there's that available that can be shared between 10 people.

A: Yes, that's right, it's between 10 people.

Q: The problem is we all need to choose 1 provider, is that right?

A: Yeah, so the way it works is the on site support that people, the 10 people I guess will have a vote on it and they decide, it's a majority, which provider it will be. But everyone absolutely chooses their own full support organisation who's with them the most of the time, some people have a choice in that.

Q: Right, so you can use the backup support and all decide who provides that for your plan support for yourself, you can choose whoever you want, that's good, choice and control.

A: Yeah, exactly.

Q: Now the other thing that you had up is a housing matching service, it sounds quite interesting.

A: It's interesting, would you like me to talk about it?

Q: Yeah.

A: So this is a service where the housing providers generally at this point will come to us and say, we've got say 10 properties in Oakleigh and could we find some people who would like to live in those and also who are eligible to receive the SDA funding. So, this is largely for the properties that are under that SDA category we explained. So as they're developed, we then do work in the community, so we have our team members out in the community all across those 3 states I mentioned. So Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and we really hope to be expanding into the other states later this year, running community engagement forums and education sessions so people can find out and know about what is SDA, and what are the housing options available and how you go about getting that SDA into an NDIS plan. So we do all that and then people will come forward and say, I'm really interested in having my name put forward for one of these properties, and then we work with that person to understand their needs and to make sure it is the right place, that that's what they want and can get that funding.

Q: So you're like a real estate agent for specialist disability accommodation.

A: Kind of, but not exactly like a real estate agent, but yeah, kind of, we-?

Q: How are you different?

A: Yeah, well, the way we'd say we're definitely different and this is what's unique about Summer is that we represent people with disability. And that's one of our core values for our team is that for people with disability are at the centre of our work. And that's who we look to see and what they need, so while the housing providers will ask us to support them to find people, we're really clear on our approach, it's that we don't just work for them. What we actually say for people with disability, if they look at one of the properties and that's right for them, that's fine, but also there are other options as well. So, we're pretty clear that that's who we work for here.

Q: Great, so if someone listening is thinking, I'm looking for somewhere to live and I need high physical support housing, what's the closest? So I'm thinking that obviously, they'd call the Summer Foundation, ask for Alicia?

A: Yes, that's fine.

Q: Yeah, and then what happens? Is it a long process? Do you have to fill out lots of forms?

A: Yeah, we try to make it as easy as we can, but there are forms, yes.

Q: There have to be forms.

A: Yeah, so I think the first thing I'd say if you are sitting there and listening and saying, I think I would be likely to get high physical support, even if you're not sure, still don't be put off by that terminology. You can give us a call and speak to the Summer Foundation, you can ask to speak to me if you want. But we also have people on the team across the country, like I said who can have a chat with you on the phone, is the first step and just understand what your support needs are. What sort of apartment or house or home you're looking for, where is that and understanding your different needs and then from there, if we do work through that with you and it seems like it's the right thing for you, we can then ask you to fill out some forms, which is where you tell us a bit about yourself. What your needs are and then we also ask for things like your OT reports and things like that, so that we can then help your support coordinator to write your housing plan. So we need lots of that evidence and information that helps go into that, and that in the end, right at the end of the process goes to the NDIA and that's what they approve, so that you can get that funding and then move in to the property.

Q: And if people feel a bit confused and not quite sure, they can call you and have a chat, do you have any advice for people who are sort of looking for housing who have high support needs, any tips or tricks?

A: I find that a little hard because I'm not a person with disability, so myself I haven't got that lived experience-

Q: But I guess what are you looking for with people who contact the service? What kind of things do people benefit from knowing?

A: Yeah, I think knowing about sort of having a think about it first, what is it you really want from housing? What are your housing goals for yourself? Where do you want to live? Who do you want to live with? How does where you want to live make a difference? So for example, if you want to live on your own in an apartment, how does that improve your ability to participate in the community? Or do the things you want to do in your life? I think things like that are really important and that's one of the first things that we work through when you

do call up and also if you know about, you might have already talked to your support coordinator about some of these things as well, so having whatever you've got ready.

Q: Yeah, make sure that you've done a little bit of work maybe with your OT, your occupational therapist to work out the sort of housing needs and support needs and the kind of equipment that you might need in the house. Because I think that people need to remember that ultimately, that there's the house, that there's all the stuff that you need, so you might need a hoist or you might need a certain type of bed, you need to make sure that you can get all the stuff in to where you're going to live, so a bit of preparation.

A: Yeah, and also if people want to, if they're maybe just thinking about it too and don't want to feel overwhelmed, so like I said, if you want to speak to someone, we can help work through that as well.

Q: Yes, and just so listeners know, everyone who I've met seem very friendly, very lovely people to work with, so I'm sure they'll have a really good experience.

A: Yeah, thanks, George, I agree with that if they are and that's why they're here.

Q: Good outcomes, that's what we're about.

A: Exactly, that's right.

Q: Thanks for your time, Alicia.

A: You're welcome, thanks for asking me.

Q: That's all we have time for on today's episode of Reasonable and Necessary brought to you by the Summer Foundation.

Check out our Facebook page which is at Building Better Lives, you can find all previous podcasts and transcripts.

We also really love hearing from you, so please leave your comments and suggestions for future episodes.

Until next time, stay well and reasonable.

END OF TRANSCRIPT