

'Like the Beatles said, money can't buy me love.'

Jane Sherwin

If we look at the way we live our lives, we might think that we all believe that having lots of money and material possessions will bring us happiness. However the Beatles song reminds us that 'money can't buy me love'. Of course money might make life a bit easier, but it is generally accepted that money and material things do not bring things like deep friendships or a deep sense of fulfillment. In a similar vein, good things come from the smaller things in life, like the sound of a child's laughter, a sunset, a cuddle, chocolate, the smell of rain and the sense of having done something as well as we can. It is having a friend to call, a good book or a good laugh. It is reading a good book, having a belly laugh, or just being able to call a friend.

So too with the NDIS. Money through the NDIS will not automatically make the sorts of differences that are fundamentally needed. It depends what the money is spent on.

One of the big problems that faces people with disabilities is the pre-judging that happens based on their impairment. Being equated to their label, like intellectual or physical impairment, sees a life path mapped out to be 'just like their own kind'. Low expectations see potential unfulfilled. Money will not buy a school principal with principles, a respectful shop assistant, or an employer willing to give someone a go.

The following is a list of five essential things that money can't buy, although it might help. Other qualities like having a good heart, good thinking and having good people around you will see the fruition of the following.

- (i) **A vision of a lifestyle** that is typical for anyone else of a similar age, gender and culture. If there is a vision of a positive future, then this can form the filter for all future decisions about using NDIS funds: will buying x bring us closer to our vision?
- (ii) **Being listened to, with feeling and openness.** It is possible that the planner from the National Disability Insurance Agency will be open to your ideas about a typical life and if not, then it is suggested that you help them to be open to the idea that you would like your son/daughter to have a life like others take for granted. Therefore the goals that they identify with you should help you along the path to this life of potential and richness.
- (iii) **Purpose.** Having a reason to get out of bed each day is important for each of us. Sometimes this is about the things we do to contribute. Other times it is about the things we do that we are highly interested in. Other times we get up to do things that make us feel good. Generally it is the roles that we have in life that give us purpose, like being a student, employee, knitter, photography enthusiast, history buff, community garden member, library user, music lover, model train builder, football player, dancer, scout and hockey fan.
- (iv) **Relationships** are like our thumbs: we miss them most when they are not there. Otherwise, we take them for granted. Connections to people cannot be bought. However, money might be used to assist someone to be in places and in roles where they have a chance of making an acquaintance who might then become a friend.
- (v) **A good reputation.** Money in itself cannot stop people focusing on the deficits and talking about them or keeping a file on your son/daughter that lists all of his or her difficulties and challenges. Money can't buy respect. It also can't buy the

creativity or good thinking that will be helpful to meet your son/daughter's needs. What money might help with is the supports to help your son or daughter be as skilled and to look as good as possible – this means that they get to put their best foot forward and be seen in the best light. This might be, for example, through arranging really good tutoring in skills that would be helpful or making sure that adaptive equipment is attractive and even seen as highly desirable for that age group. The point of these efforts is to help sons and daughters to be respected and treated well.

The sort of riches that NDIS might help with is not about the size of the grant but rather the richness of life's experiences that can be made possible. Shifting from a focus on money to a focus on a bright future will be a worthwhile path.

About the author

Jane is a Brisbane based consultant who works with individuals, families and organisations towards transforming communities, on the assumption that communities are richer when people who are typically marginalised have valued roles and relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the rich fabric of our society.

sherwinconsulting@gmail.com

www.sherwinconsulting.com.au

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