

Community Support and Services Committee

From: ZStankov [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 18 November 2021 2:47 PM
To: Community Support and Services Committee
Subject: QPT concern from Disability Support Worker

My name is Zorica Stankov, I hold the position of Disability Support Worker and I have been employed in this field for over 20 years.

I provide Community Participation support to a number of people who reside in houses supported by AS&RS (Accommodation Support and Respite Services) Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP).

Majority of the people I support have the QPT (Queensland Public Trust) as their financial administrators, unfortunately not many have relatives or advocates who are their financial administrators.

Up until 1 July 2020, clients were able to have access to their own cash money for outings because AS&RS staff would support the individual's to the bank weekly to withdraw a certain amount of cash. As a Support Worker before I took the person out for their Community Access outing I would sign and date an MCFA (Managing Client Financial Affairs) document stating the amount of personal spending money the individual was needing to take with them for the outing. This allowed me to support the person to purchase a drink, food, activities of their choice or personal items whilst out in community. Upon return to the person's home, I would produce a receipt of monies spent along with any change. This was the process followed so that the individual was able to have access to their own personal funds during their outing.

Back in June 2020, without consultation with the people being supported or their families AS&RS informed us that as of 1 July 2020, clients were no longer able to access their own cash money to take out with them with their Support Worker to buy a coffee, or buy lunch, or even go to the cinema or participate in an activity of their choice. AS&RS stated that these instructions were coming from QPT. Some solutions were thrown around from QPT. Suggestions that the Support Worker pay for the outing (food, activities etc), keep the receipts and then claim payments from QPT. Another suggestion was for the Community Linking Provider to be given a monthly budget for each person they provided support to from the QPT which that business would be accountable for. Both of these suggestions were fraught with difficulties both for the support workers and for the organisations providing the support. It was felt that it was unfair to ask Support staff to have to come up with money they may not have available from their personal funds to cover goods purchased by the person they were supporting and wait to be reimbursed. They may have been supporting a number of people each week so the cost could have been over \$100 each week.

The option suggested for organisations to manage individual's personal spending funds was morally wrong and would also force organisations to put systems and staff in place to ensure accountability which would be costly to them but with no reimbursement to cover these extra overheads. Organisations would have had to charge the person they were supporting a fee to ensure accountability for expenditure. Each individual already pays a fee to the QPT to administer their personal funds so for PTQ to ask organisations to do this for them was wrong.

The organisation that I work for, felt that the solutions provided by QPT were unreasonable, unacceptable and against each individual's Human Rights. After months of discussions with QPT and a case presented to the Public Advocate, a solution was finally reached for each client to have a monthly budget and the amount be available on the person's own debit card at the beginning of every month which was arranged by the QPT. The Organisation that I work for, has signed an agreement (December 2020) with QPT to enable Support Workers to assist the people we support in making purchases for food/drink and activities using the person's own debit card. However, I am aware that there are a number of people living in AS&RS houses that do not have these debit cards and are not able to purchase anything, let alone a simple coffee during any outing.

Over the past few months, I am hearing directly from AS&RS house staff that all individuals who have QPT as their financial administrator now have an extremely tight and unreasonable household budget. AS&RS staff are no longer able to make purchases on-behalf of the person they support like they have been previously able to do for years. Everything must first be approved by QPT, via the AS&RS Team-leader.

Some examples that I have heard firsthand;

- The household needed a stick blender (under \$50 purchase) to purée food for 2 people who reside in the house who are required to have a modified diet approved by a Dietician. The AS&RS staff member had to fax 3 quotes to the AS&RS Team-leader, that gets passed onto QPT, and AS&RS staff member has to wait for an answer that could take weeks.
- An individual's parents directly expressed to QPT that their daughter had lost a lot of weight and needed to purchase new clothes. This request was declined by QPT, the parent got a flat NO answer.
- Haircuts, everyday/seasonal clothing, pair of socks, underwear, bedsheets; all now have to be itemised with quotes/pricing and faxed to the AS&RS Team-leader, then this is forwarded via email to QPT for permission of purchase.

Household food budgets per individual are now very strict, if food spending is over by as little as \$5, the AS&RS staff member has to inform their Team-leader then permission maybe granted from QPT if there is good reason why food budget went over. I am not aware of the food budget costings but I have heard per individual it's below the poverty line.

I am very passionate in advocating for vulnerable people who require support in the community. They cannot speak out and cannot express how this treatment is affecting them on a day to day basis. I can see it first hand, every house is feeling the pinch of this strict new food budget and the long drawn out process of having to get quotes etc off for the most basic every day necessities. For basic items that you and I could easily go to a store and purchase, the people I support no longer have that privilege. Instead they have to first get permission from QPT, which is a long process in itself because any correspondence that is sent through can take weeks to be addressed. This is extremely concerning, I feel that all individuals no longer have fair access to their own money, their basic Human Rights are being denied.

If I don't voice this unfair treatment, then how will anyone else know this is happening? I am sure that if the general community knew this was going on, they would also be very concerned.

Thank you for your time in reading my email.

Regards, Zorica Stankov