



Specialist
Disability
Accommodation
Alliance



Participant Stories

Stories

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The SDA Alliance would like to thank Peter, Angela and Carl for generously taking the time to share their experiences about their specialist disability accommodation journey - we are deeply appreciative.

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Peter's story

As an environmental scientist, Peter spent many years managing turtle tracking and monitoring programs in Western Australia, particularly in the Pilbara region where mining areas can impact critical nesting habitats for turtles. He also worked with government, managing environmental programs in Class A nature reserves - a crown land area in Western Australia affording the highest level of protection for valuable conservation or public land. Peter's deteriorating health eventually required him to leave his work in remote areas of the state. Peter returned to Perth several years ago and now lives in a specialist disability home with his wife, Kelly, three children – Kelton, Koa and Finley – as well as their dog and cat.

When Peter first learned about specialist disability accommodation (SDA), it was amid a housing crisis in Perth.

It was 2022 and Peter and his family were living in a rental property. For Peter, who lives with a degenerative condition, it was a struggle to live in a house that could not accommodate his wheelchair.

Like for many others, their rent increased in rapid succession and eventually doubled in price. Peter's mother was helping him to pay the rent.

Peter was keen to learn about SDA and most importantly, whether it could work for him and his family.

Over the course of a few weeks, he called over 40 SDA providers.

"Most of them said that they could find a room for me in a share home, but my wife and children would need to find alternative living arrangements," Peter says.

"No one told me about Appendix H," Peter adds referring to the component of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Pricing Arrangements which allows SDA-funded participants to live with non-NDIS family members (or others).

Peter did not give up. He continued to call providers and government asking questions, seeking information about how he could live in SDA with his family.

After months of sustained research, Peter found Housing Hub – an NDIS housing resource (and SDA Alliance member) who provided him with accurate information about Appendix H.



Over the next few months, Peter worked with Housing Hub who helped him to submit an Appendix H application to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Housing Hub also introduced Peter to Ability Housing – a WA based SDA provider (and member of the SDA Alliance). An experienced SDA provider, Ability Housing also offered information regarding Appendix H.

“The Appendix H application process was not straight forward,” Peter says. “It was a hell of a process – simply finding people who understood Appendix H was such a struggle.”

Eventually Peter’s application was approved. “But even then, there was an obstacle,” Peter explains, “as the funding amount was incorrect. Ability Housing helped to sort that out with the NDIA and eventually I received the appropriate funding amount.”

Once Peter’s funding was approved in 2024, Ability Housing offered Peter an SDA property for him and his family, however the home was still in the process of being built.

Peter and his family continued to live in rental accommodation until the SDA home was ready for occupancy. Peter’s wife, a nurse, was six months pregnant at this stage.

In early 2025, Peter and his family moved into their new home.

The home was worth the wait as the location is ideal: it’s close to their families, the children’s schools and amenities including Peter’s service providers. There is also a strong sense of community, which Peter and his wife appreciate.

“There are many young families in this area,” Peter says. “My children have friends in the street and every day after school, my son, who loves sports, plays basketball with our neighbour’s son.”

A new home – for the entire family

For Peter, living in SDA has been transformative.

For the first time in years, Peter says he can take a “proper shower” as his bathroom is accessible.

Peter now has access to the garden, where he can sit with his dog while drinking coffee – something which was not possible in his rental property.

But perhaps the sweetest thing SDA has offered Peter is the ability to read bedtime stories to his children – something he loves to do. Peter was unable to access his children’s bedrooms in his previous rental property - the hallways and doorways were too narrow for his wheelchair.

While Peter has been living in his new SDA home for close to a year, it still needs a few additional modifications to meet his specific needs.

Peter requested the NDIA install an automatic door system – a feature he believes should be mandatory for all SDA homes. “I can’t open the doors, so if I am home alone, I am unable to get out of the house,” he says.



Peter also requested the NDIA install a ceiling hoist so he can safely transfer between the wheelchair and the bed. After an 11-month wait, the hoist was recently installed. Prior to that, Peter had a manual hoist but as it did not fit under the bed its effectiveness was limited.

“Sometimes carers couldn’t manage the transfer successfully in which case my wife would manually transfer me from my wheelchair to the bed,” Peter says. “This situation was a risk – to me, the carers and my wife.”

Homes need to be client ready when a participant moves in, Peter adds as their cat affectionally rubs her head against his leg.

“Ideally there would be a system in place where participants can apply to the NDIA for everything they need before they move into SDA – this would reduce risks for the participants. Right now, people are waiting for essential modifications for months after they moved into their home,” he says.

My life, my choices

For Peter, the ability to have choice and control over his decisions, including his support providers, is paramount.

Ability Housing provides housing support only. Peter brought his own care supports to the home ensuring continuity of services.

But not all providers encourage choice and control, something Peter discovered after speaking to many SDA providers.

“Some SDA providers told me that I couldn’t bring my own supports, that I needed to use their Supported Independent Living provider,” he says.

But for Peter, this was a deal breaker.

“I have a great support team – they know me as a person and they know what my day looks like,” Peter says.

On top of that, Peter’s regular team of support workers and therapists provide stability for his family. “We have young kids so having support workers that we know and trust is important,” Peter explains.

“Our daughter is anxious and isn’t the best with men in general. It is important we have support workers that our kids are familiar with and are comfortable to be around.”

Quality services – what they look like and why they matter

For Peter, quality services are imperative to his daily life.

Peter, who receives supports five days per week, has been working with his main support provider for many years – a large provider that offer him services including speech therapy and physiotherapy. While he trusts this provider, one issue is the high turnover of staff, something he says is not uncommon in his experience.



Peter also uses other providers for key support roles as they can offer consistency – the same person delivering the same service weekly. For Peter, continuity of staff is a key component of quality service delivery as it means he does not need to repeatedly explain aspects of his care to a rotating door of staff.

“I have had experiences where staff have turned up knowing nothing about me or my condition,” Peter says. “It was clear they had not read my file prior to their shift.”

Staff holding appropriate qualifications and being suitably trained is essential.

“I have had staff arrive at the house who have never done a hoist transfer and they panic. If staff can’t manage a hoist transfer, they can’t effectively support me,” Peter says.

Staff also need to have relevant background checks, including a Working with Children’s Check, as there could be children in any home.

“So many disability organizations have cropped up in Perth, so you need to be discerning about their commitment to investing in safe services that respect the dignity of people with disability,” he says.

When selecting support staff, Peter not only looks for competency but whether the person will be the right fit for him. Astutely intelligent, Peter also appreciates the opportunity to converse with staff on the infinite number of subjects which interest him.

“If I have a support worker helping me, it’s great to be able to chat with someone who has similar interests,” Peter says especially if they are supporting him for a full day. “Also, knowing that staff are reliable and will do their job well, offers my wife peace of mind when she is at work all day.”

When services fail to deliver, Peter speaks his mind: he submits complaints, either to the service provider, the NDIA or the NDIS Commission depending on the nature of the complaint.

Ideas for change – how to improve the system

A systems thinker, Peter has ideas about how the NDIS system can be improved to better assist people with disability.

Drawing on his personal experiences as a participant, Peter makes significant contributions to the disability sector by engaging in participant reference groups with major disability organizations – the aim of which is to tackle some of the biggest issues within the sector.

Peter often uses the opportunity to discuss Appendix H and how it can be improved to help families (and others) live together in SDA.

Peter is concerned that the Appendix H arrangement does not offer investors any incentives, rather it “banks on the generosity of the SDA investor.”

“We live in a home designed for three SDA-funded participants,” he says. “Nonetheless, the investor of this property has agreed to rent the property to me and my family despite the fact that he is not maximizing his returns.”



Peter would like to see SDA homes designed so they are more tailored to families – such as additional bedrooms with no ensuites and a bathroom with a bathtub for the kids.

Finding an SDA property offering Appendix H arrangements should also be made simpler for families, Peter says.

“As there are so few properties that accommodate Appendix H, any that do should be clearly advertised as such as you can waste a lot of time sifting through unsuitable properties,” he says.

Peter is adamant that thought needs to go into the design of SDA and this requires specialist knowledge, participant engagement and a commitment for stakeholders to avoid cost cutting measures that negatively impact residents.

Another issue Peter would like to see addressed within the NDIS is the lengthy wait times participants often experience, for example when submitting a change of circumstances.

“If your health declines and you need more support, you can run out of funding while you wait for a plan reassessment,” Peter says. “I went without any care for 12 weeks as I ran out of funding. We had a newborn baby, it was hard, but we adapted.”

Peter’s problem-solving mindset, a skill which served him well as an environmental scientist, has been useful as he navigates the complexity of the NDIS.

Peter’s support worker, Grace (name changed), a young woman with experience working in disability in Australia and the UK, is getting ready to end her shift. Grace – composed, confident and cheerful - asks if Peter needs anything. Peter smiles at Grace, explaining what he needs before she leaves.

As Grace leaves the room, Peter turns to his son, Finlay, who is smiling in delight as his mum cuddles him. Soon it will be time for Peter to read his son a bedtime story.

Despite the hurdles, Peter and his family have settled into their family home, where one day soon, their youngest son will take his first steps.



Angela & Nelson's story

Angela's search for a specialist disability home for her adult son, Nelson, began almost four years ago. The journey of navigating the housing space has been long, arduous and fraught with obstacles. With a fierce determination, Angela has fought to secure her son's future: by finding an accessible home in Perth where he feels safe and can live comfortably in the long-term.

Nelson, who is 23 years old, was born with Angelman syndrome - a rare genetic condition that affects the nervous system and causes severe physical and learning disabilities. Nelson's symptoms include intellectual disability, lack of speech and some physical challenges.

Up until the age of 19, Nelson, who is a twin, lived at home with Angela and the rest of his family. His mother was his primary carer, providing 24-hour support.

As Nelson was becoming older, his family wanted to put long-term plans in place for Nelson: "I wanted to make sure Nelson would be okay if something happened to me – that he had a home and people caring for him," Angela says.

So, Angela began to look at housing options for her son. It was 2022 - several years after the NDIS had been rolled out across WA. As Nelson was eligible for Supported Independent Living (SIL), Angela worked with the NDIA to find a SIL home in Perth. This took a few months but eventually a home with 24-hour care supports in place was found for Nelson. For the first time, Nelson moved out of his family home.

One evening, Angela stopped by the home to drop something off. She knocked on the door, and no one answered. As the key box was empty, she called the SIL provider to request the key but there was no response.

Angela knew something was wrong. She called the police immediately and they arrived within minutes.

Nelson had been left alone in the house.

"The support worker turned up to his shift with his girlfriend, and after a handover with the outgoing support worker, he left the house leaving Nelson alone," Angela says. "Nelson was locked into his bed [an enclosed safe sleeper¹] – I don't know which support worker had locked him into his bed, but that was where we found him."

¹ The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's *Position statement: Safe surround beds and safe sleepers* outlines the NDIS Commission's position on the use of safe sleepers or safe surround bed devices – available [here](#).



“I got Nelson out of the SIL home immediately and reported the incident to the NDIA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission,” Angela says.

Applying for SDA & temporary accommodation

After leaving the SIL home in early 2023, Nelson was placed into temporary accommodation. During this time, Angela applied for SDA. While they waited for SDA funding approval, Nelson received short term accommodation funding to cover his accommodation costs.

Over the next 18 or so months, Nelson was moved four times.

For the first six months, Nelson lived in an SDA home (covered by short-term accommodation funding) until an incident occurred which placed Nelson at risk. Angela removed Nelson from the home and placed him into a SIL home.

“The SIL provider agreed Nelson could bring his own supports and transition to their supports once safe and comfortable for Nelson to do so,” Angela says, explaining that it normally takes Nelson at least three months to adjust to new people delivering supports.

“But after six nights, the SIL provider told me that unless they are providing all of Nelson’s supports, he will need to move out within 24 hours.”

Angela removed Nelson immediately from the home and lodged a complaint against the SIL provider to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

Nelson now needed immediate accommodation.

Accommodation was arranged at an accessible serviced apartment: he remained in the first one for two months and moved to another one (offering a longer lease) for 12 months until he was hospitalized and was unable to return; the accommodation was no longer suitable.

Moving into SDA – the first time

Nelson remained in hospital for a month, at which time his SDA funding was approved.

After working with the NDIA and SDA providers, Angela finally found a home for her son.

Nelson was released from hospital and moved into the property in late 2024. Nelson who is unable to share a home, lived on his own.

Nelson lived next door to an SDA resident who also lived alone.

After a few months, Angela discovered that this was not an ideal living situation for her son. “The neighbour would have lots of parties, play loud music, there was drug use and the police were constantly at the house,” Angela says.



Angela was worried about the ongoing problems this situation could cause including the possibility of Nelson's support staff quitting: "If staff feel threatened or unsafe with what is happening next door especially with the police turning up at all hours, they may not want to go to work."

Angela decided her son had to move to a new home.

This meant another upheaval for Nelson.

Another move – a new SDA

In 2025, Angela's Support Coordinator introduced her to Nesti Housing, an SDA housing provider and member of the SDA Alliance.

Right from the start, Angela felt reassured by Nesti's efficient and methodical approach. "Nesti staff arranged several meetings with me and Nelson. They asked for documents such as Nelson's behavioural support plans and allied health reports so they could obtain a detailed understanding of his needs. Nesti's staff asked a lot of questions and were careful to ensure Nelson was a suitable match for the property and that he had appropriate care supports in place."

A few weeks later, Nesti's Housing Engagement team offered Nelson a two-bedroom fully accessible home. Despite it being a two-bedroom home, the owner of the property was open to renting it to Nelson as a single occupant as they understood Nelson is unable to live in a share home.

The location was ideal: a twenty-minute drive from the city. Location was an important consideration – mainly as it plays a considerable role in ensuring continuity of services. Angela wanted to ensure Nelson's support team did not have an unreasonable commute to get to work. Nelson is supported by a team of 5-6 individuals per day (including an active overnight shift).

For Nelson, adjusting to new support workers can be very stressful and challenging.

"Nelson is nonverbal and his condition is complex - this can make it challenging for people to understand how to best support him," Angela explains. "We need to teach his carers how to support him in the way he likes, and it takes time to do that."

As the SDA property was already built, Angela did not have the opportunity to participate in the design and construction process of the home. However, Nesti offered the opportunity for Angela to inspect the property and request modifications that were required for Nelson to ensure his safety and comfort prior to him moving into his new home.

"Nesti sorted out the modifications we needed promptly," Angela says.

Angela explains that Nelson's home not only offers long term housing stability but exposes him to far less risk as his living environment is set up to meet his needs.

"Nelson's bedroom is large enough to accommodate his specialist bed, and the bathroom is safe for him to use. The rooms are sufficiently sized so multiple staff can deliver services. The home has a double garage which fits his van which means Nelson is protected from the elements when being transferred from the car to the home – this is important as Nelson has a history of respiratory dysfunction which can make breathing difficult," Angela explains.



Angela smiles as she explains that one of Nelson's greatest joys is gazing out the window and watching the world outside. His home has ample windows, designed at the right height, so he can spend time looking out the window each day

"After all the obstacles, I know this will be his forever home," Angela says confidently.

Quality services – what they look like and why they matter

When it comes to quality services for her son, Angela looks for great staff.

Nelson now has a professional and skilled team delivering a range of care supports, however Angela says this was not always the case: "The current team is fabulous – but to reach this point you need to discern what is good and what is not so good. Nelson has an intellectual disability and is non-verbal so it can be really challenging for staff to work out what he needs and wants. I want care staff that are engaged and interested, rather than those who just rock up for their shift and don't care."

Staff who are appropriately trained and capable of responding to incidences which may occur on any given day is critical for Nelson's safety.

Angela also talks about the importance of staff having a deep understanding of the NDIS system - as this can have an impact on whether her son receives an NDIS Plan that meets his needs: "As the NDIA need to understand exactly what Nelson's support needs are, I need to make sure his support team document everything accurately otherwise Nelson may not receive what he needs from his NDIS Plan. I cannot express how important it is to stay on top of everything to make sure everything works."

Angela, who is Nelson's advocate, talks about the skills required to manoeuvre the complexity of the NDIS including plan reviews: "Nelson's annual plan review is never a straightforward process: you need to be able to call things out that aren't right and not settle for second best."

For Angela, communication is also a key determinate of quality services: "There will always be issues so the commitment of a provider to discuss and address issues is critical. Nesti is a good example as the communication between me and Nesti staff is clear, transparent and frequent."

Comprehensive service agreements which are fair and transparent are also an important aspect of delivering quality services, Angela explains: "Service agreements outline expectations and ensure accountability. When I have experienced frustrations in the past with service providers not doing what they should be doing, the service agreement was useful to hold them to account."

For Angela, SDA has improved Nelson's quality of life – something he would not have experienced in any other kind of accommodation.

"Nelson is a lovely, loving young man," Angela says smiling. "And while the system is not perfect, I am grateful to be living in a country where the NDIS exists and where my son is supported."



Carl's story

Carl, a registered nurse specializing in mental health, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in 2010. He was in his late 40s and working in Western Australia's remote Goldfields-Esperance region. Over the years, Carl's MS symptoms worsened making it harder to live in the family home. After a year spent trying to secure SDA funding, Carl now lives in an SDA apartment in Perth.

After spending almost 25 years working for the National Health Service in England, Carl migrated to Australia. It was 2005. At first, Carl worked in residential aged care in Perth – a sector he found fulfilling.

After two years, Carl decided he needed a change – so he took a job as a registered nurse with a mine in the Goldfields-Esperance region. Carl enjoyed the wide-open spaces, outback towns and rocky landscapes of remote WA.

“Working in the mines was a lot of pressure as I was the only medic onsite. But I loved it,” Carl says.

A few years later, Carl was diagnosed with MS. Despite the symptoms, which Carl and his doctors were monitoring closely, he continued to work at the mine. He loved his nursing role and the chance to work in far-flung areas of the country. But after six years, his symptoms were worsening to a point where it was no longer safe to continue in his role. Reluctantly, he resigned from his job.

Carl decided to take some time off and visit family in England before finding a new job.

A few months later, Carl returned to Australia.

On his return, he met with his bank to discuss his mortgage. During the meeting, Carl tried to ignore the headache that had been plaguing him the entire day. Suddenly Carl felt numbness in his body. As a nurse he knew this was serious. He asked the mortgage advisor to call an ambulance.

“Why do you need an ambulance?” the mortgage advisor asked surprised.

“I’m having a stroke,” Carl replied calmly.

Carl spent a week in hospital. Eventually, his health improved and he returned to work – initially as a nurse before moving into the disability sector to work as a Local Area Coordinator – a position which enabled him to learn about the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) more deeply.

The SDA journey

A few years later, in 2023, Carl's MS symptoms continued to worsen. He now needed more help completing daily tasks.



The house became busy with a team of people delivering care and support to Carl including support workers and physiotherapists.

Carl's wife, Julie, struggled to witness her husband's deteriorating condition. Julie also spent part of the time working from home – and Carl knew this was challenging with the constant stream of support workers coming in and out of the home.

"Life wasn't brilliant at home," Carl admits. "The whole situation was putting pressure on me and Julie."

Carl decided to apply for SDA. A few months later, his application was rejected.

"I received a letter from the NDIA telling me my SDA application had been denied with no explanation as to *why*," Carl says.

Carl spent the next year trying to understand why his application was unsuccessful: he called the NDIA repeatedly to ask for an explanation. With each call, he received a reference number which he noted at the end of each call. Carl says he received no satisfying reason as to why his application was rejected.

"As I wasn't getting any answers from the NDIA, I contacted my local MP to request they intervene," Carl says. "After 6 weeks, I had a new NDIS plan at which time another SDA application was made and eventually approved."

Carl and his family began searching for SDA properties in Perth while waiting for the outcome of his second SDA application. Carl's son called him one day and encouraged him to look at an SDA apartment managed by SDA housing provider (and SDA Alliance member), Sana Living.

On his first visit to the apartment complex, Carl knew it was where he wanted to live. Located in Perth's inner north, the apartment complex has some 128 modern apartments, seven of which are SDA managed by Sana Living. A large pool surrounded by a lush green garden sits at the centre of the complex. Residents can often be found sitting by the pool – reading, sipping coffee or having a glass of wine in the evenings.

The complex, including the communal areas, are accessible and accommodate Carl's wheelchair.

After Carl's SDA funding was approved, he applied to Sana Living and was offered a one-bedroom apartment.

Carl moved into his apartment in 2024 – after a year of trying to secure SDA funding.

Carl's apartment met his accessibility needs, so he could move in straight away without any further modifications.

"Everything has been designed just right: the apartment has a smart door lock with face recognition technology so I can get in out and with ease. The apartment is accessible throughout – the kitchen has appliances and benches that are at a reachable height for me as a wheelchair user."



Carl's wife, Julie, continues to live in their family home - only a short drive away. Julie and their dog, a black labrador called Monty, visit every weekend which delights Carl.

Carl says moving into SDA has dramatically improved his life including his mental health. "It has taken an enormous pressure off me and my wife. I would be divorced if I were not living in SDA."

"My wife works very hard. She was burning herself out working all hours. The pressure the situation was placing on my wife was unfair."

Carl says that living in his SDA apartment has given him the confidence to be more independent – something which is very important for him. After moving into his apartment, Carl was able to reduce the number of hours he needed with a carer from six hours per day to four hours per day. He now has greater confidence to go out on his own to enjoy his many hobbies or a day in the city.

"While my wife feels sad that I am no longer living at home, she is happy to see me doing things I wouldn't normally do, such as spending an afternoon at Scarborough beach on my own," Carl says.

Carl also visits the family home on some weekends, spending the day with Julie and Monty. "I love spending the day and chilling with the family," Carl says. "At the end of the day, when I'm getting a bit tired, I can come back to my home. I look at this apartment as *my home* now."

Carl enjoys the friendliness of his neighbours – residents always stop to chat when Carl is in the communal areas or sitting by the pool having a coffee.

"It's a beautiful community here, and one which offers a sense of belonging," Carl says smiling.

Quality services – what they look like and why they matter

For Carl, it is important that NDIS participants have choice and control over their care supports and housing. Carl's housing provider (Sana Living) is completely separate from his care support services which are delivered by a different disability service provider.

Carl is supported by a team of five individuals that all provide different services – from physiotherapy to support workers. He brought all his support services with him to the SDA apartment.

"I have a great team of people supporting me, I wouldn't want to change them," Carl says. The continuity of services from his team is also something that is very important.

Understanding the NDIS is an important part of receiving quality services, though it can be very challenging, Carl admits.

Over the years, Carl's personal experiences have helped him to develop insights into the complexity of the NDIS. For this reason, Carl has decided to use his personal experiences to help others by working as a Support Coordinator – a role that works directly with NDIS participants to help them understand and implement their NDIS plan and connect them with service providers.



Living life to the full

“One of the most important things for me is the positive lifestyle that SDA has allowed me to lead,” Carl says.

“My apartment is centrally located – about a \$10 cab ride into the city which is great,” Carl says noting the importance of location when it comes to SDA.

“For example, last Saturday I popped into the city to buy some t-shirts before the WWE event – a big deal here in Perth!”

Carl goes fishing and spends a lot of time at the beach. An avid golfer, Carl has not played golf in ten years, but he has found a golf course with accessible facilities which he is keen to explore.

This year, Carl’s goal is to travel to England to visit his family, including his 87-year-old mother, his eldest son and his grandchildren.

“It’s just not as easy as getting on a plane anymore – it’s everything that goes with it,” Carl says referring to all the preparations that need to be in place as a wheelchair user.

Carl will be travelling on his own to England so he wants to make sure he can transfer between his wheelchair and other surfaces, such as a car, on his own. It will likely be the last time he will visit England, Carl says.

Carl’s optimism is ever-present – in the way he approaches life, most especially the challenges: “Despite my dramas with the NDIS, I’m very appreciative of the Scheme. Where in the world would you get this support apart from Australia?”



About the SDA Alliance

The SDA Alliance is a national peak body representing the best-practice SDA sector. Our members include SDA providers, institutional investors, developers, builders, financial institutions, allied health professionals and industry consultants. Our members make a significant impact on the lives of people with disability – by providing housing that is modern, innovative and designed to serve the needs of SDA residents.

With 73 members Australia-wide, together we:

- Represent approximately \$4.2 billion of total development costs for SDA projects
- Have delivered over 3375 homes with a further 890 under development
- Will provide housing to 6031 people with disability

The SDA Alliance is driven by three principles: collaboration, participant choice and control and excellence & innovation.

The voices of people with disability will always guide our work and influence our strategies. By engaging with governments and other key stakeholders, we seek to improve standards and regulations and promote the provision of excellence in SDA.

