



**Breakaway  
Retreats**

# **A Call for NDIS Short Term Accommodation (STA) Funding to be Available only to Properly- Managed, Standards-Based STA Providers**

**From: David Bycroft**

[Australian Homestay Network](#)

[Breakaway Retreats](#)

[MyStay International](#)

INTRODUCTION .....	2
FIVE IMPORTANT INCLUSIONS FOR A GOOD STA EXPERIENCE.....	2
STA IS NOT A HOLIDAY .....	3
WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY AFTER AN STA EXPERIENCE WITH BREAKAWAY RETREATS~ .....	3
THE VALUE OF STA POST THE NDIS REVIEW – VISION .....	3
THE VALUE OF STA POST THE NDIS REVIEW – GOALS.....	4
STA CASE STUDY 1.....	4
STA CASE STUDY 2.....	5
STA CASE STUDY 3.....	5
STA CASE STUDY 4.....	6
THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS AN OBLIGATION-FREE, CUSTOMISED STA PROGRAM AND QUOTE .....	6
INTRODUCING THE NEW DISABILITY HOMESTAY NETWORK (DHN) .....	7
DISABILITY SERVICES CONSULTING (DSC) REPORT .....	7
RECOMMENDED NDIS STA STANDARDS .....	8
RECOMMENDED QUALITY HOSTED ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT STANDARDS .....	8
CONCLUSION.....	9
CONTACT DETAILS .....	10

## Introduction

NDIS funded Short Term Accommodation (STA) programs are proven to be very successful in delivering exceptional results for participants when properly managed. Allowing NDIS participants the opportunity for a properly-managed STA is essential for the achievement of their goal plans.

A lesson can be learned from the highly successful Australian Homestay Network (AHN) and its parent company MyStay International (MSI). AHN was formed in 2007, bringing much-needed standards and processes to the very important and vulnerable international student hosted accommodation market. Today, the NSW Government recognises new standards and has approved an independent body – [NEAS](#) – as the endorser of quality homestay standards.

Breakaway Retreats was originally managed through a registered NDIS Provider. For the last two years the company has been under new management (as an unregistered provider) committed to standards, participant goal achievement, quality delivery and accountability of all programs.

The original Breakaway Retreats business achieved approximately 70 bookings per annum (21/22). Under its new management (with a focus on compliance and participant goal achievement), it is managing over 300 placements per annum.

As a group, AHN and MSI have been very successful in championing standards and ensuring poor providers leave the international student industry. Breakaway Retreats is now focused on achieving the same results for NDIS STA programs and is working in collaboration with AHN and MSI.

## Five Important Inclusions for a Good STA Experience

1. **Goal-oriented activities** – helping the participant with things such as:
  - Independence, community inclusion, confidence and career options
  - Maintaining positive relationships with family, carers, and other informal supports
  - Making new friends and connections
  - Trying new things
  - Achieving personal milestones
  - Developing new skills
  - Overcoming challenges and fears
  - Providing life changing opportunities
2. **Meals allowance** – which provides the participant with flexibility and options to get out and about in the community
3. **Appropriate support** – ensuring flexibility to suit the varying needs of participants including:
  - Regular carer / support worker + appointed support worker OR
  - Appointed support worker only OR
  - Regular carer / support worker only
4. **Special equipment as required** – to ensure maximum success in goal achievement

**5. Specially selected accommodation** – to help facilitate a life changing experience, including such things as:

- Quality, well-located accommodation options e.g. hotels, holiday parks, motels, managed apartments / houses, etc. offering a variety of room configurations
- Appropriate accessibility features
- Great location e.g. preferred setting, good amenities, accessible public transport

## **STA is Not a Holiday**

**But, for it to be successful we have learnt:**

- We need to create life changing moments for our participants
- Having respite in a great setting / location provides the background for achieving excellent results
- By design and through targeting goal achievement, an STA is NOT a holiday...
- ... but we know, from experience, that a good STA experience should look and feel like a holiday

For a properly-managed STA experience, participants generally use their Core NDIS funding and not STA-specific funding as the provider concentrates on NDIS-planned goal achievement when customising the participant's program.

- Many of our participants have told us that their experience was 'life changing'
- Over 50% of our bookings are returning customers
- By focusing on the participant's approved NDIS goals, an STA is usually successful in reducing other long-term costs

## **What Participants Say After an STA Experience with Breakaway Retreats~**

- 100% rate their experience as either Excellent (70%) or Above Average (30%)
- 95% feel that their expectations were fully met
- 84% rate their experience with our program coordinators as Excellent
- 90% rate their accommodation as Excellent or Above Average
- 90% rated their experience with our support workers as Excellent or Above Average

*~ Independent review of Breakaway Retreats Feedback Forms conducted March 2024*

## **The Value of STA Post the NDIS Review – Vision**

### **NDIS Supported Program Summary**

- Overarching goal: a fair, just, and inclusive society for all
- Independence is priority
- Treating participants with respect and dignity
- Accessibility, Availability, Affordability, Accountability
- Evidence-based process focused on solutions that meet plan goals

## **Bill Shorten Quotes (delivered at DSC Annual NDIS Conference, March 2024)**

- *“NDIS provides eligible people the support to participate in the community”*
- *“...a more inclusive and accessible society”*
- *“...life changing impact”*
- *“make life better... live fulfilled lives”*

## **The Value of STA post the NDIS Review – Goals**

### **Goals in Focus for the NDIS**

- Putting people with disability and their families first
- Increasing community and mainstream supports (i.e. foundational supports)
- Better outcomes from Supported Independent Living (SIL)
- Supporting individual choice, control, purpose and community inclusion
- Long-term planning

### **An overarching goal of the NDIS Review is to put people with disability back at the centre of the NDIS.**

An effective NDIS will improve outcomes for people with disability and their families and carers

- helping them achieve their life goals
- participate in social and economic life
- participate in society
- strengthening communities

A properly-managed, standards-based STA program will comprehensively deliver all of the core NDIS Review goals for participants. Please refer to a sample of case studies below.

### **STA Case Study 1**

**Demographic** 34-year-old male, above-knee amputee (recent), separated with two children

#### **Background**

This participant wanted a break away from everyone and his life in general.

- He thought maybe a formal STA wasn't for him (i.e. didn't want customised packaged activities / support)
- He asked if he could just stay “in a closed dark room by himself” for his STA

Our Program Coordinator worked with him to:

- Support and encourage him
- Build a program to get him out of his room to challenge him

A male support worker of same age with similar interests (i.e. pre-amputation) was engaged.

- The participant has now had three STA experiences with Breakaway Retreats

- Fishing and jet skiing were his *“life changing”* moments
- He improved his independent living skills and community inclusion
- By his third STA he was going to the surf club by himself

The participant sent a video thanking our team for persevering with him and ensuring we challenged him, and I quote:

- *“I did a lot of things I usually wouldn’t think about doing”*
- *“Prior to my STA I locked myself in a room a lot”*
- *“It was a one-of-a-kind respite chance for me”*
- *“I’ve worked out a lot of kinks in my life from it”*
- *“I feel better within myself”*
- *“You have shown me another side of life”*

## STA Case Study 2

**Demographic** 39-year-old male, single-leg amputee

### Background

This participant had community inclusion goals and wanted to attend a mobility clinic. He had travelled from interstate for his STA on the Gold Coast.

- He wanted to be challenged, try new things and explore
- He also wanted to reconnect with family in QLD

As a result of his STA experience the participant:

- Went to the beach
- Reconnected with family and friends
- After his second STA he decided to move back to QLD
  - He is now golfing
  - He spends valuable time with family and friends

This participant has asked if he could work *“to become an ambassador for Breakaway Retreats”*.

## STA Case Study 3

**Demographic** 33-year-old female, severe genetic mobility disorder

### Background

This participant *“hadn’t had a break away from home and normal routine for forever”*. She decided to book STA with Breakaway Retreats in April 2024 to *“try it out”*.

The participant:

- Wanted to increase her travel confidence (both domestic and hopefully overseas)

- Initially planned to bring her own support worker (was shy and anxious) but *“needed a break from her normal routine”*
- During the STA planning process, she became more confident
- She decided not to bring her own support worker and step out of her comfort zone – we found a perfect support worker for her and set up a zoom meeting for them where they immediately *“hit it off”*

After her STA, the participant reported that she had the *“best time ever!”* and *“hadn’t been able to do anything like this”* and was *“so happy”*.

- The participant cried as she gave the program coordinator her feedback *“This is what I want my life to be like”*
- She has recently completed her second STA stay and reported being tired *“from a night out at Karaoke”*

## STA Case Study 4

**Demographic** 49-year-old married male, severe epilepsy with communication challenges

### Background

- The participant’s wife is his regular carer
  - They *“hadn’t been away together for a long time”*
- For the STA experience they travelled to Brisbane (they live in the country)

They reported post-STA that:

- It was the *“Best experience ever”* and *“it blew our minds”*
- A personal objective for them *“reconnecting”* had been achieved
  - *“We felt like a couple again”*
- The participant *“loved”* his support worker
  - The support worker took the participant out on activities which gave his wife a break
  - He did a river cruise and enjoyed the typical city highlights
- His wife had a more relaxed time and when they had dinner together in the evenings, they could share stories about their different days
  - The participant’s wife (and carer) said that she *“felt so relaxed that (she) had started sewing again after not doing it for years”*
- The participant has already booked his next STA in Byron Bay at around the time of his 50th birthday

## The Key to Success is an Obligation-Free, Customised STA Program and Quote

### No Obligation Stage One Program design and Quote

STA providers need to adopt a ‘no obligation’ program design and quote during the initial contact stages. This will ensure sufficient attention is applied to the STA provider

understanding the specific needs and NDIS goals without the participant having to pay for the program design and quote part of the service.

Once all is agreed the program, contract and quote is sent to the participant and their key supports including plan manager if appropriate. This needs to be signed off by the participant / key support person (and the plan manager when applicable).

Once the participant and their key supports are happy with the package and the service agreement is signed, the respite accommodation and activities are confirmed and booked.

## Introducing the New Disability Homestay Network (DHN)

Breakaway Retreats has formed a partnership with the Australian Homestay Network (AHN) to help launch their new Disability Homestay Network program.

The [Disability Homestay Network](#) (DHN) will be providing high-quality accommodation and personalised hosted support for NDIS-eligible Australians.

AHN will work in conjunction with NDIS-specialist partner Breakaway Retreats to deliver amazing experiences that will help participants achieve their goals, develop long-term friendships and build positive community connections.

**Breakaway Connect** – hosted STA packages that include:

- Goal-oriented activities, meals, support and special equipment hire as required
- Stays in high-quality hosted accommodation provided through DHN
- Ideal for participants seeking 24-hour companionship, networking and support to connect with the host and their community to foster meaningful experiences

**Breakaway For A Day** – hosted day support that includes:

- Engaging activities and new community interactions centred around the host's home
- Up to 10 hours a day with a specially-trained host provided through Disability Homestay Network (DHN)
- Ideal for participants requiring new networks, experiences and personalised support

## Disability Services Consulting (DSC) Report

In 2021, Disability Services Consulting (DSC) was commissioned by Disability Homestay Network (DHN) to explore the feasibility of the DHN model to use online platforms and stringent management processes to engage host families and match them with NDIS participants for STA or Respite.

A letter received from DSC at the time included that:

*“The level of **stringent management and compliance**\* that an operator such as DHN could offer would be attractive to participants and their families / supporters.”*

*“This model has an opportunity to be **a game-changer for people with disability** to be able to experience the safety and security of a family home setting whilst enabling their support network to take a short break from support responsibilities.”*

*“It is highly likely, **as relationships are formed between hosts and participants** that there would be **repeat placements** each year as well as rapid growth in new placements.”*



\* Advice on exact compliance requirements is pending from the NDIS Commission and will be incorporated within the final and complete feasibility report.

## Recommended NDIS STA Standards

1. **Goal-oriented activities** to demonstrate NDIS Plan goal achievement such as independence, community inclusion, confidence and career options.
2. **Meals allowance** to provide the participant with flexibility and options to get out and about in the community.
3. **Appropriate support** to suit the individual needs of the participant with goal achievement as the priority.
4. **Special equipment as required** to ensure maximum success in goal achievement
5. **Specially selected accommodation** to facilitate a life changing experience
6. **The organisation managing the STA program must:**
  - be transparent and able to demonstrate outcomes for participants that are core to the participant's goal achievement
  - act within a "reasonable and necessary" framework at all times
  - offer all participants the opportunity to provide formal feedback post-STA and keep records of such feedback
  - maintain appropriate insurance
7. **The organisation managing the STA program must provide an obligation free quote detailing:**
  - the participant's NDIS plan goals and goal achievement strategies to be explored through the STA program
  - inclusions such as agreed meal allowance, prepaid activities or activity allowance, hired equipment
  - a schedule of supports including itinerary and support worker shifts
8. **All STA programs must align with core NDIS goals including:**
  - supporting a fair, just, and inclusive society for all
  - strengthening communities
  - prioritising independence
  - treating participants with respect and dignity
  - ensuring accessibility, availability, affordability, accountability
  - delivering an evidence-based process focused on meeting plan and life goals
  - improving outcomes for people with disability and their families and carers
  - helping participants with their social and economic life

## Recommended Quality Hosted Accommodation and Support Standards

**1. An Online Portal** for registering, tracking and monitoring all placements with secure log in access available to STA hosts. The portal shows 'real time' data, personalised notes for each participant (guest), invoices and payment history, and detailed reports for each stakeholder.

## 2. Appropriate Compulsory Insurance Cover including:

Coverage Type	Amount
Legal liability for guests (including damages)	\$20 million
Host liability insurance for guest personal injury and property damage	\$20 million
Contents insurance covering personal effects for guests while in the host's home	\$10,000

**3. Sophisticated Application and Placement Process** to make the best guest / host match possible and lay the foundations for a successful stay.

**4. On Call Representatives for Operating Regions** to ensure there is support to assist with any requirements and / or issues as appropriate.

**5. Compulsory Host Background Checks, Host Home Inspections, Host Interview and Host Training** for approved host families and supporting records to demonstrate this has taken place. This ensures that all approved hosts have the appropriate personal clearances and meet required NDIS industry standards.

**6. Commitment to the Safe and Ethical Delivery of Services and Supports for People with Disability.** This includes adhering to the NDIS Code of Conduct and ensuring that any external support workers engaged to provide support to guests have appropriate clearances and training.

**7. Pre-Arrival Orientation for Guests** which is documented and comprehensive. This ensures the guest has access to adequate and appropriate information about the accommodation and their host prior to arrival.

**8. Comprehensive Policies and Placement Documentation** outlining expectations of each placement and responsibilities of hosts, guests and the STA / program provider. This includes a confirmed Host Agreement signed by host families outlining appropriate policies, agreed activities and the host obligations.

**9. Professional 24/7 Emergency Support** and critical incident strategy where professional staff are fully trained to triage the call and follow documented protocols.

**10. Accountable Payment Processes** ensuring that there is ongoing transparency, management and accountability for all payments made on behalf of the guest to the host and support workers (if required).

**11. Evaluation of the Placement** from the guest, the host and the guest's agency / coordinator (if applicable) to gauge guest / host satisfaction and monitor the quality of the program for the purpose of continuous improvement.

## Conclusion

NDIS funded Short Term Accommodation (STA) programs are proven to be very successful in delivering exceptional results for participants when properly managed.

The NDIS sector and government need to learn from other industries regarding the

importance of strong standards for all providers delivering STA, hosted accommodation, and hosted support.

All providers must be committed to agreed standards including participant goal achievement, quality delivery and accountability of all programs.

We would be happy to discuss the best way to implement such a strategy.

### **Contact Details**

David Bycroft

[David@BycroftConsulting.com](mailto:David@BycroftConsulting.com)

0402 925 632