New Zealand Productivity Commission
PO Box 8036
The Terrace
Wellington 6143

23 June 2015

RE: More Effective Social Services

My name is John Herring

I would like to make a submission on the "More effective social services" report, with specific focus on Chapter 11: Client choice and empowerment.

I am the parent of a 9 year old son with Cerebral Palsy. My son Johnny has very high complex needs and I use Individualised Funding (IF) to manage his support. Prior to using IF we received support services via alternate mechanisms, including carer support and other such restrictive, disempowering and infuriating services.

IF has made a huge difference to our lives. Before we moved onto IF, we frequently could not access support due to the restrictive nature of the service constraints, often our allocation of funding would go unused as a result of the difficulty in complying with funding requirements. Now we have the freedom to utilise the funding allocation in a manner that suites our situation, which is fairly unique.

The IF system allows us to employ people to meet Johnny's needs, but also gives the flexibility for us to accommodate employee's situations, creating a win-win for all involved. This in turn leads to longer tenure of employment, with lower staff churn benefitting Johnny and the wider family. It also helps me find better quality staff, as we can often accommodate their personal circumstances also, making employment with us more attractive. I would also note that being "appropriately" trained is no indication of the quality and commitment of any employee.

As Johnny is part of the wider family, the family is best placed to make decisions about how to achieve the life we want, and what support is best. When Johnny grows into an adult, despite having complex needs, he will be the best person to decide what his life should look like. Any support service needs to be cohesive with this as Johnny will need assistance to make this a reality, to date only the IF model has achieved this for us.

I cannot stress enough the huge benefit IF has brought to our family and I would urge the government to look into IF and specifically the empowerment it brings to the individual and wider family, this is what should be the core tenant of any new structure.

I have fully read chapter 11 of the report, and feel on balance, the commission has a good handle on many of the complex issues requiring address on this topic. However, being active in the disability sector I can inform you the primary issue facing those with a disability is one of empowerment, and I would like to see the

significance of this challenge weighted more heavily amongst the implied list of challenges facing those with disabilities in this report.

Finally I would like to comment directly on section 11.8 (p230) “Submitters concerns about client directed service models”, as some of the objections listed focus on the needs and wants of their particular interest group, above the core benefit of the CDSM model; empowerment.
Although this section rightly points to some risks that must be mitigated in any future amendments, the pervading sentiment is one of disempowerment. The IF model has been selectively used since the early 2000’s, providing a solid foundational understanding for implications of this model. Much of this negative feedback is underpinned by the assumption disabled people are incapable of making appropriate decisions for themselves. As a parent of a child with very high complex needs I strongly reject this concept, and can attest that I want nothing more than my son to be the master of his own destiny. Any system of support MUST reflect this, or he is doomed to a life defined by others, which is unacceptable.

Kind Regards,

John Herring.