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Case Examples

A number of people with problems they had with other RTO's have come to our attention in the TAFE Career Development and Counselling Service –

1. A lady with an overseas degree who had attended a large English Language provider for her 510 hours, then further hours to do over 800 hours of English. She and her husband came to consult about further study, but her language skills were still so basic that she would need to do more classes in English as a Second Language.

Her husband became annoyed with her and started to blame her, but she had been exposed to only a room and a computer and very little English training. She could not work at her professional academic level and would need to take even longer to get the necessary skills to adapt to life here and to help her family through employment.

She lost time, confidence and motivation that she could ever function as a professional in Australia, and to rectify her lower language skills, she would be penalised by having to pay for her additional further studies. This put more pressure on her husband and there was obviously greater friction and pressure on their marriage.

2. A young woman from a CALD background had done a Certificate III at a private college and was referred to the TAFE Counsellor by the TAFE Children's Services teachers, as she was having serious problems in her Diploma course. She felt the teachers were picking on her because she had been to a private college. The teachers reported she could not understand the most basic concepts even for first aid and children's safety.

She told the TAFE Counsellor that with her First Aid quiz at her previous college, she had the original material with answers on it and just had to copy them onto her quiz. It was obvious she did not have to understand, or recall anything, and could not use any of the intended knowledge to care for children in her care.

I assessed her and did a report for her to gain a Disability Support Pension from Centrelink as she had an intellectual disability and needed to get access to Disability Employment Services. She still wants to do the Diploma course as she likes working with children, but the teachers from the section advised if she had come to TAFE for this course they doubted if she could ever have achieved the competencies required of such a worker, even at the CIII level.

TAFE Career Development and Counselling Service Staff would have assessed her and with the Disability Consultant placed her in the correct course with good employment outcomes. Funding is needed for this and specialist staff are needed to carry out the service.

3. A young woman from a CALD background came to discuss courses, as she had been doing at a private college in the city in Sydney - two Diplomas in Counselling and Community Services.

She had been told at the outset that it was "free" and "don't worry, as you pay it back later". She did not understand the opposite meaning of these two statements. She did not understand this as she described that she had problems with English.

After six months she was kicked out of this college. She did not understand why, as she put in all her assignments. She had cut and pasted all her work and knew nothing about plagiarism.

Before this private college she had been doing the Certificate I in Adult Basic Education in TAFE.

The VET Fee Help debt she is now carrying is for \$20,000! But she kept her pink i-pad!

She joined an appropriate level in the Certificate II in Adult Basic Education to try to build her basic language and study skills.

In the process of our time together I noticed she had a compliance letter from Centrelink that she did not know what to do with. I asked if she would agree to me getting her information from TAFE and pass this on to Centrelink. She agreed and this was completed.

But Centrelink needed more – they needed details of her private college studies. I asked her to go to this college and get the same information. She returned to me the next day and told me no-one would speak to her after she waited 5 hours for help. I asked if she would authorise me to ask them on her behalf. This was done and I had the information by the following day and passed it on to Centrelink.

But with all the pressures, her brother advised she ended up in a psychiatric hospital and he agreed that I advise Centrelink of her most fragile state, that also helped to explain some of her confusion and attendance problems in her courses. But she should never have been put into courses just because she said she wanted to do them. She never had the capabilities to undertake even the most basic of courses and needed intense support.

4. In another case a young man who was sold a Management Diploma by a private college. When he completed it he found there were no work opportunities after this course, so he decided to take his parents' advice to learn a trade. However, when he enquired about the price to become a qualified Tiler (through Wall and Floor Tiling Certificate III) he was told it would cost \$13,210! He then asked "how about becoming a Carpenter?" however the price for the Carpentry and Joinery Certificate III course was even worse at \$14,360!

It was then he realised not only had the private college set him up with a debt of over \$18,000 to pay off, they had also robbed him of his ability to afford to go backwards to do a trade and to get skills that were in demand as a qualified tradesman. He had also not been provided with any advice about the consequences of his decisions.

By training at a level of Certificate IV, or above, many graduates are finding themselves sentenced to a lifetime without a trade, or entry level qualifications to gain work.

5. Perhaps most unfair of all is the price for those with overseas qualifications, who despite their qualification not being recognised by Australian industry, they find themselves now priced out of the training market.

An overseas migrant recently approached a TAFE counsellor in search of funding options for a Certificate III in Aged Care to become an assistant nurse. They were told the price was now \$6,100. With no way of receiving a VET Fee Help loan, this meant it was no longer affordable for them to retrain into this skills shortage area.

These are just some examples of cases where these RTOs would seem to have taken advantage of the person and not delivered enough training at appropriate levels, or made people believe that they could do anything with no responsibility on the provider's part to assess and place or refer them to appropriate course levels for their background skills or abilities - then go on to blame the student for their failure to succeed. This is most damaging to them and any future study they may consider.

While the government may assume they have eased a looming unemployment crisis by offering scholarships to students who were already given a concession fee, they have not even begun to fix the far larger issue of pricing courses for the vast majority of students.