

## **INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS**

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

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22 February 2005

Legislative Council  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW, 2000

Dear Committee Chair

Re: Inquiry into changes to Post School Programs

The Spastic Centre of NSW welcomes the opportunity to submit our comments on the Inquiry into Changes to Post School Programs. As an organisation supporting 170 adults with disability and very high support needs, the announcement made by the Department of Disability, Ageing & Home Care (DADHC) on July 8 2004 had a significant impact on our services and the clients and families who relied on these.

Although it difficult to assess the long term impact of these changes at this stage due to the changes only coming into affect in the first few months of this year, there are a number of key points we wish to highlight inline with the outlined terms of reference of the committee.

Point 1. *Program structure & policy framework for the new Transition to Work (TTW) and Community Participation (CP) Program*

- ☐ In essence, The Spastic Centre supports this new policy framework as it provides due recognition to young school leavers with a disability that a number of pathways are needed. The previous post school program - ATLAS program - was a 'catch all' program and did not recognise that some young adults with vocational aspirations needed different support than adults who due their high supports would be unable to pursue employment as a future. The separation of the Transition To Work Program and the Community Participation programs has provided better pathways for adults leaving school.
- ☐ Unfortunately, as a result of the timing of the announcement (July 2004) there was not sufficient time to have in place appropriate systems that would clearly identify school leavers and their eligibility for programs. In fact, the delay and high level of community anxiety about the announced funding changes to these programs delayed this process even further and consequently both providers and families found themselves in a position of making decisions in the last weeks of 2004 -a highly stressful time for everyone.

*The Spastic Centre strongly supports an earlier intervention and identification process within the schools to assess eligibility for the program. This should ideally start at the year 10 when students are making decisions about curriculum choice for their senior years. Subsequent assessment for eligibility should also be made no later than the first term of the final year so that students and their families feel they have adequate time to assess their options and make choices about their future.*

Point 2. *Adequacy and appropriateness of funding arrangements of the new programs*

- ❑ The methodology used in setting the funding levels for both programs is still unclear to many in the sector. It is also disappointing to see that the work conducted by an independent researcher (University of Wollongong) in attempting to assess funding benchmarks through its Cost Classification Study has never come to light.
- ❑ The base funding level of \$13,500 p.a for the Community Participation program is certainly not adequate to support young adults with their needs. In most cases, our clients with very high physical needs require one on one support with their personal care including, feeding and toileting, transport and mobility. In some instances it may take up to 60 minutes to provide mealtime assistance to one client while others require specialised care due to PEG feeding protocols. Staffing is the highest cost in delivering these types of programs and based on our budgets we know that it costs on average \$29,000 per year to support our clients for a five-day program. This table below compares NSW funding with other state funding levels.

Victoria's Futures for Young Adults Program	❑ Up to \$24,360 per annum
South Australia's Moving On Program	❑ \$20,500 per annum
Western Australian PSO Program	❑ Up to \$19,000 per annum
New south Wales' Community Participation program	❑ \$13,500 per annum

- ❑ The unfortunate immediate consequence of the reduced funding level is a reduction in the level of service in terms of days, access to activities and meaningful community participation for the very people that the program aims to support. The long-term consequence is a scenario where there will be a significant shift of the cost of care back to families and/or respite /accommodation services. This is a scenario that will not be sustainable.

*The Spastic Centre looks forward to DADHC resolving the process for the allocation of the supplementary funding (\$1.4 million) for those clients with very high support needs and sees this as a necessary program to assist services provide an appropriate level of care to young adults with very high support needs.*

*In addition, The Spastic Centre believes any funding arrangements should incorporate a degree of flexibility and contingency that makes provision for clients with episodic and or deteriorating conditions.*

Point 4. *Exclusion of students enrolled or proposing to enrol in higher education*

- ❑ An opportunity to gain tertiary qualifications can play a major role in the future direction of a young adult's career and employment options.
- ❑ Currently the eligibility criteria for both TTW and CP, excludes young adults enrolling in higher education from these options despite this being a valid post school option for many. Young adults whose intellectual capacity allows them to pursue a higher education are being marginalised from ongoing support due to lack of funding programs at the state level to support their high personal care and case management needs.
- ❑ In addition to this DADHC automatically excluded from the selection process for 2004, any student with a UAI score whether or not they were planning to pursue higher education or not.
- ❑ Although regarded as federal responsibility, these students are not receiving the support required to pursue a tertiary education and eventual active participation in the workforce on graduation.

*The Spastic Centre seeks a reconsideration of the eligibility criteria for the Community Participation Program to include this group, as it is a program that has certainty of funding for more than 2 years. This would allow students to gain a qualification within the normal 4 years of university and then exit the program to pursue a career. Any concern that these clients would become 'professional students' is highly unlikely and could easily be managed within a service/funding agreement with each participant. Those students with very high physical needs motivated enough to pursue a tertiary qualification are also the very same students highly motivated to gain employment. The challenges they face during their studies are such that any desire other than employment as an outcome is not considered.*

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. We would be happy to be involved in any working parties that may be established in the future in this area and look forward to hearing the results of your inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



**Rob White**

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