

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

**Organisation:** Flintwood Disability Services Inc.

**Name:** Ms Jackie Romein

**Position:** CEO

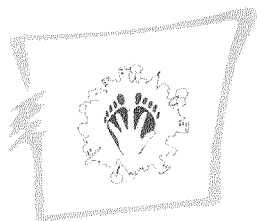
**Telephone:** 9891 2073

**Date Received:** 22/02/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**



# FLINTWOOD

Providing  
PSO/ATLAS, Accommodation, Respite  
and Transport Services.

**Disability Services Inc.**

ABN. 93 916 072 362

Legislative Council  
GENERAL PURPOSE  
STANDING COMMITTEES

22 FEB 2005

RECEIVED

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

The Director,

I am writing to addresses the issues around the ATLAS reform and the current impact on Service Users, their families and us as a Service Provider.

I have listed the areas of concern but it mainly the personal impact on families and people with disabilities, which I wish to emphasise.

At the end of last year one of our parents attempted suicide due to the pressure and concerns around the cuts to funding and the reduced days of service. DADHC was informed about this incident. There has not been any contact from DADHC, this year about the issues and the situation remains the same with Flintwood working with the family about the services we can offer.

Another one of our family's have contacted the Department about their son who they will not be able to care for if his days of service are reduced in April through the ATLAS program. The parents have come to the family decision that he will be given up to the Department for permanent accommodation support.

Flintwood has provided a five-day per week service for most of our PSO/ ATLAS people as we have tried to cater for the professional families and provide as much quality service for the service users as possible. With the reduced hours the families will have to cease their employment to care for their son or daughter.

We will be reducing the hours to 2 ½ days per week for high support need people effectively halving the service they receive today. The ATLAS funding cuts will result in the cut service hours. The staff hours will need to be reduced but the overheads remain the same. So therefore there is only one option, to cut service delivery hours.

I will address the issues with the Reform as we have experienced:

### **Block Funding / Individualised Funding**

Both the PSO and ATLAS programs were individual funding programs for the service user therefore the money was portable and set up just for the individual needs. The new Community Participation program and Transition to Work are based on a Block funding arrangement, which benefits only DADHC administratively, and the Service Providers accounting systems. This change is not in the best interests of the Service Users.

Both Service Users and service provider prefer the individual funding to allow the portability and flexibility to provide programs and services. Block funding was introduced without any consultation with Service Users or their families.

### **Assessments**

Service Users have been assessed prior to leaving school to see what program best suits their needs. Many service users have been either assessed for an incorrect program or they are in need of reassessment due to changing needs. This process has been discussed with DADHC and officially requested for reassessments but to date there has been progress.

### **Funding level for high support needs**

The 1.4 million dollars allocated for the Service Users who have very high support needs has not been released to service providers nor has any assessments or information come forth about how this will be distributed.

Community Participation Service Users have started the program (Feb 2005) without any word of the funding. There is meant to be an assessment /checklist process to allocate the funds but no assessments have been completed or even started as yet.

### **Appeals process**

There has not been throughout the whole process an avenue of addressing the issue that gives people feedback.

Decisions have been made and dictated to the service providers and families. The families have not had a say or have been adequately consulted in the process and there doesn't seem to be any appeals process in place.

### **Set up funding decreasing every year**

PSO was set up with a percentage of the annual funding amount for establishing service to pay for equipment, training etc. needed to support the service user. This was also the case with the first few years of the ATLAS program. The 2003 school leaver did not get the automatic payment anymore and the service provider was responsible for writing a submission to gain any extra funds. The

money received in this year was substantially less. Submissions were refused but with no explanation given.

The Service Users for the Transition to Work and Community Participation have not been given any funding and there has been no correspondence about this either.

### **Poor communication with families**

Only a few letters have been sent out to families and Service Users informing them about the reform and the consequences. This was usually after the service providers had been told therefore they were usually the bearer of bad news.

Letters were vague and did not provide the details the families were requesting.

Many families had written into DADHC have not received a response or they were told it was passed onto someone else who then did not respond.

Information session had questions left unanswered and with no further sessions arranged, issues remain outstanding.

The hotline was not helpful with the families complaining about the lack of answers to their questions.

### **EOI process**

This process was left up to low ranking employees of DADHC. They collected information about the services offered based on unclear guidelines. Budgets were asked for and then if they didn't meet the "benchmark" service providers were requested to resubmit to meet the benchmark. There was pressure on service providers to comply with the hours of service (18) DADHC has initiated.

There after short deadlines and much pressure a decision came from somewhere that we were considered an eligible service provider. We were informed by fax (general one not addressed to the name of the provider) that we were eligible to provide the service.

I question the whole process and the ethics behind the decisions made.

### **Consultation process**

The initial consultation process of the reform was with a few industry groups.

The representative have openly made it clear that the final outcomes were not what they had agreed to and felt misrepresented.

Consultation seems to be a token effort with meetings and avenues for gaining opinions but rarely is there any changes or feedback about the suggestions and why they have not been addressed.

Representative from DADHC have addressed meetings with overheads and information and when asked questions or told of issues they are unable to answer questions and always take the "information back" as an issue. The problem is that they take it back to a huge hole, which nothing comes back out of.

### **Disability Services Act & OHS legislation**

The DSA is clear with the standard of service expected but without the funding and the expectation of providing eighteen hours the service quality will suffer. Under the DSA people with disabilities have the right to access services and be treated with respect and dignity. The Reform decisions are to have their services cut and receive a less than adequate level of funding.

OH&S legislation is very tight and reduced staffing levels are not an option. The increasing demands on service providers to comply are problematic and therefore hard decisions have to be made about what legislation is the worst not to comply with.

### **Vacancy Management System**

This has been instigated by DADHC with accommodation vacancy placement committees. Pilot projects of vacancy management are also being trailed with Respite. This has also been suggested for Community Participation and Transition to Work programs. This has not been established and we have no idea what this will entail under what criteria or guidelines.

The problems with this system is that DADHC gain more power in the placement of people and the Non Government Organisations have less say in who they accept into their services.

It has to be asked what role does DADHC play in service provision? They are the funding body that monitors services. Their role seems to be leaning towards more say in service provision and who gets service and who does not.

Vacancy Management should be a voluntary process and not conflict with the Non-Government Service Providers policies and procedures.

### **Poor communication and timelines with Service Providers**

This is an ongoing issue with short timeframes and lack of information. DADHC regional representative are unsure of what is happening with the reform and decisions from Central Office. Service Providers and Families request information from the regional staff who are either unable or have no knowledge therefore cannot answer basic questions.

Service Providers are left to answer questions and update their families as to the changes and issues.

Service Providers have taken the rap about the reform and how it affects the families and Service Users. They have been made to reduce services to ATLAS service users and therefore seem like the instigator of the bad news. It has been openly said that the reform was due to the failure of the ATLAS program; therefore the service providers have been seen to be the failures.

### **Guidelines for programs**

PSO program was established in 1993 –an announcement by the NSW Government.

In April 1996 the Department introduced revised guidelines to administer the PSO program.

In 1997 Ernest and Young were contracted to undertake an evaluation and review the PSO program. After this the Reform project was developed and ATLAS emerged in 1999. ATLAS continued to operate under the PSO guidelines (1997).

An Interim Operational Guidelines for PSO and ATLAS services was developed and made available to Service Providers in late 2004. At this time the Community Participation / Transition to Work programs had been announced for 4 – 5 months. Therefore the guidelines had been established 5 years after the ATLAS program had started and for a program, which is ceasing in April 2005.

The new Transition to Work and Community Participation programs have been established without any guidelines for Service Providers and have commenced in February 2005.

### **Transfers**

With the PSO and ATLAS programs the funding was individualized, therefore also portable. If service users chose to re-locate or transfer to other service providers who could better meet their needs, they were able to request their funding to be transferred to the new provider. Even though this was a very slow process through the Department it was successful in giving Service Users choice.

With the new Transition to Work & Community Participation programs there has not been set any guidelines for transferring to another service provider. If a service user re-locates to another area there would have to be a vacancy with the new provider. If there was not a vacancy then the Service User is at risk of losing services altogether.

Service Providers will be funded when they have vacancies and not providing services therefore wasting funding.

### **Re-assessments**

Service Users needs change over time and the assessment process is only carried out at the time of application for the ATLAS / Transition to Work / Community Participation programs prior to leaving school. If a service user has been assessed incorrectly in 2004 the Department have no system in place to re-assess these people. The only way to have people placed in the correct program is to make contact with DADHC and get it changed. This process is left up to families and new service providers to assess individuals and the most suitable program rather than through the DADHC system.

As a part of the Reform process Service Providers were asked to submit names of people in the ATLAS program who required re- assessment due to changing needs or incorrect results. Nothing further has happened about this and Service Users remain in unsuitable programs.

**PSO / ATLAS Reform announcement**

The initial announcement was on the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2004 with the reference groups, peak bodies and 2 – 3 select service providers invited to attend the closed meeting. This process was not open and encouraged criticism and conflict between service providers.

We would be more than happy to discuss these issues further with the Committee. An enquiry into the management and outcomes of this Reform is appreciated and well received by Service Users, their support people, Service Providers and the community as a whole. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to people with disabilities within our community.

We would also like to request a copy of the final results and recommendations of the enquiry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Romein', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Jackie Romein

CEO

19<sup>th</sup> February 2005.