

**Submission
No 124**

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation: Far North Coast Disability Interagency for Education, Training and Employment

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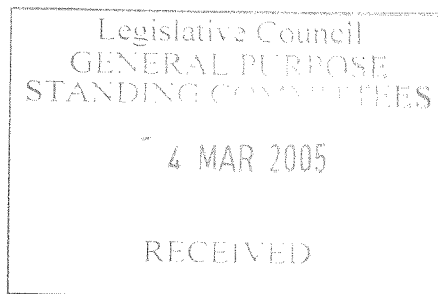
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Subject:

Summary

Far North Coast Disability Interagency for Education, Training and Employment

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

This document sent via email: gpscno2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

4 March 2005

Dear Director

Re: INQUIRY INTO CHANGES TO POST SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH A DISABILITY

The Far North Coast Disability Interagency for Education Training and Employment (which represents around twenty (20) service providers) request that the General Purpose Standing Committee No 2 take into consideration the following issues in relation to the appropriateness of changes to post school programs for young adults with a disability and in particular:

1. ***The program structure and policy framework, including eligibility criteria, for the new Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs.***
 - The policy framework of ***Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs*** appears to directly contravene both Commonwealth Disability Service Act (1986) and Disability Services Act NSW (1993). It does so by undermining both the spirit and letter of these complimentary pieces of legislations which were intended to enshrine in law the right of people with disabilities to:
 - exercise self-determination in making decisions about how they would become active and valued participants in the community and work place
 - receive services in a manner which least restricts their rights and opportunities

Likely impacts of the ATLAS reform, with its distinction between short-term TTW funding and long term CPP funding, will be:

- a return to congregate, segregated day programs reminiscent of Activity Therapy Centres because program funding is too low to enable individualized programs
 - some individuals being prevented from accessing TTW funding, even though wishing normalized work opportunities, because of the bias of the evaluation process and its fallacious assumption that a higher support level and employability are unviable
 - some individuals who are capable of employment seeking CPP funding because of its secure and long-term basis
- Timeframe for planning for service providers was too short - everything has been done in a rush and seems ad hoc. The Minister announced on 8th July the reform but there was no follow up information/advice/support for a significant time. This left service providers hanging not knowing the effect this would have for them, for service users and families. The usual ATLAS Expo to support new school leavers make a choice of service provider had to be postponed and when it was held service providers did not have adequate information to help people make informed choices, e.g. hours of service that could be provided each week.
 - Information to service providers was provided by ACROD via emails not from DADHC.
 - Sixteen applicants who were wanting TTW were given CPP - they had to protest/advocate directly to DADHC to have this changed. Some were eventually successful but there is no understanding around how these people were reassessed - what criteria was used for the change.
 - Assessment tool is inadequate as it is based on ageing.
 - **One Service Provider's story.** As a provider of opportunities for people with disabilities in Supported & Open employment settings for over twenty years our organization was bitterly disappointed not to have been successful in obtaining TTW programs.

We regarded our submission as having a legitimate chance of securing the program. We have worked with a number of ATLAS, PSO providers & DADHC officers over a number of years & in fact at one stage had 10% of the entire NSW ATLAS population who had obtained employment outcomes in that year, in long term durable employment within our organization.

Many of the successful TTW providers do not have a record of employment OUTCOMES. We are not advocating that those organizations shouldn't have been successful but understandably are disillusioned with the assessment process & feel that we have been discriminated against.

Further to this our appeal fell on deaf ears & was rejected by DADHC department officers. One would have thought that the process of appeal would be considered by an independent body rather than the department's employees who by default would have a conflict of interest clearly supporting their colleagues.

2. *The adequacy and appropriateness of funding arrangements for the new programs.*

- Funding is inadequate - it does not cater for different levels of functioning or need. Funding is particularly inadequate for service users with high support needs. For instance, this group need to continue with 1:1 support and hours are reduced to work within the new funding, i.e. they cannot work in a group.
- Therefore, outcomes for clients are restricted due to excessive group sizes and reduced hours.
- Quality of service provision is compromised as the opportunity to meet individual planning outcomes is reduced. It is suggested that the new system, especially the CPP, pushes people back into the old institutional system which does not meet individual goals and creates a centre-base not a community base.
- Lack of consultation with service providers - the level of funding was not discussed with service providers. ACROD were consulted however service providers in our area were not consulted regarding service user support and relevant hours to meet their support needs.
- Service providers - have to offer less hours to service users for the less funding. This means that service users will be working in larger groups to spread the dollar further and give service users more hours. Some service users with complex issues and high support needs need to continue with 1:1 support therefore hours are cut to cater for the service provider's duty of care and especially Occupational Health & Safety compliance.

- Service providers have been advised that DADHC will no longer fund vehicles for service user use. In the area around the far north coast many service users have issues with isolation and distance from services. Often school buses are unavailable especially in school holidays and can be construed as inappropriate means of transport.
- Some service providers, two that we know, have ceased providing transport services for service users because of the reduced funding.
- In addition to reduced funding service providers have to manage increased costs of workers compensation insurance, SACS Award changes and OH&S increases.
- Costs are higher in isolated areas e.g. Tabulam which is more than 50 kms from the nearest service provider. If service users can access a service a lot of their funding has to be used in transport costs because the majority of services are regionally based and service users are reliant on assistance with transportation to cover the distances. Mobility Allowance is inadequate to cover transport costs.
- DADHC have not offered non-recurrent funds for set-up costs for new TTW providers.
- To date there has been no correspondence from DADHC to clarify actual terms and conditions for the service provider. There are no new contracts issued by DADHC and in addition there are no new policies and guidelines for the two new programs.
- The funding arrangements are once again behind. Service Providers were advised that they were to start new service users on 7th February which they have however as at 18 February service providers had not received their funding.
- **One Service Provider's story** - Some months after the Minister's reform announcement we did our homework and announced the service's closure as it would not be able to continue on the level of funding suggested. In the course of following through on this decision DADHC were advised along with three staff who were to be made redundant.

The Minister then changed her mind and the funding increased from \$9,000 to \$13,500 for everyone, as did the starting time for the new programs - the service was, at a pinch, able to stay open which it announced to DADHC. The three staff who were made

redundant, but invited to join the organisation's casual pool are now taking the organisation through the Industrial Relations Commission for unfair dismissal. The reform has cost this organisation dollars and credibility in its community.

3. *The role of advocates both individual and peak groups in the consultation process.*

- Service providers were completely in the dark in relation to any consultation process - the Minister's announcement regarding the reforms on 8th July came as a complete surprise.
- What DADHC called a consultation process amounted to a series of information sessions advising people of the reforms after the fact.
- Advocacy fell back to agencies like Family Advocacy who were overburdened - there is only one Family Advocacy representative on the far north coast.
- ACROD are the strongest lobby group but they are not an independent voice.

4. *The impact of the exclusion of students enrolled or proposing to enroll in post secondary and higher education from eligibility for assistance under the new programs.*

- TAFE was unable to plan adequately because of lack of information and a high degree of speculation around the future. TAFE, in the past has successfully tailored courses to meet individual needs and skills required in the workplace and is the only educational institution equipped to support people with disabilities.
- TAFE receive no direct link to DADHC news although it affects potential students with disability. They have to be advised of the intricacies of the new programs funding arrangements by service providers or others - fortunately we have forged excellent links and networks on the far north coast.
- Service users, due to the reforms, won't have sufficient funds to support the cost of TAFE courses.

5. *The appropriateness of the assessment methodology used to identify school leaver support needs and to stream school leavers in the new programs.*

- The assessment tool used is totally inadequate as it is based on the HACC model for ageing. The assessment tool, which should provide an avenue for choice, was not adjusted along with the reforms.

6. *The adequacy of complaints and appeals mechanisms established in relation to the implementation of the new programs and particularly with respect to assessment decisions.*

- Service Providers have been told that there is no appeals process - this is a major issue. DADHC also do not have an official complaints mechanism. This breaches the Standards in Action. Is this department audited?
- Some families sent letters of appeal however the appeals process for families was difficult and not user friendly. Families were told to ring DADHC Coffs Harbour direct. Some rang the stated 1800 number which was answered by the Sydney office who told the caller to ring DADHC in their region. In other words families "got the run around". Applicants and their families received different responses according to whom they spoke, which resulted in service providers referring them onto advocacy services.
- There should be one line of information to service providers - four different versions of the one question to four different DADHC people is not appropriate

7. *Whether appropriate and sustainable further education and vocational training and employment outcomes for people with a disability are likely to be achieved as a result of these changes.*

- The usual transition process for applicants, which is often undertaken by service providers the year before they enter a program, was halted due to lack of adequate information and assurance of a program. This has meant that typical enrolments in further education were not affected.
- Service users who live in isolated situations and who would choose further education will be affected as less funding means less

access to appropriate transport or other suitable arrangements to enable enrolment in further education.

- Individuals on TTW will get priority for vocational training. Individuals on CPP are less likely to be able to access vocational education because employment is not prioritized as an attainable goal.

END