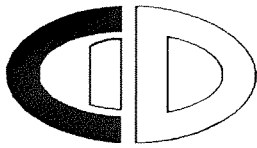


INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

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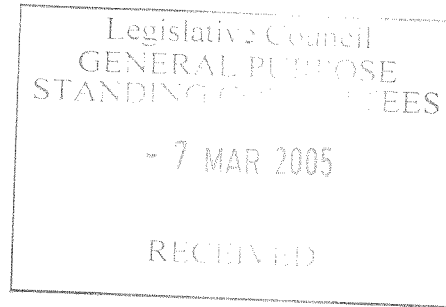
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Summary



The New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability

4 March 2005



Mr Stephen Reynolds
Committee Director
General Purpose Standing Committee #2
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Mr Reynolds

Inquiry into Post-school Disability Programs

Please find enclosed the response to the above inquiry from the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID). For your information NSW CID is the peak body in NSW representing the rights and interests of people with intellectual disability. Some of the roles that Council takes on as a peak body include providing policy advice, systemic advocacy, community education and information provision and dissemination.

A copy of this submission was emailed to the Committee on Friday 4 March 2005.

Should you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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Executive Officer

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INQUIRY INTO POST-SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Response from the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID)

About NSW CID

NSW CID is the peak body in NSW representing the rights and interests of people with intellectual disability in NSW. Some of the roles that Council takes on as a peak body include providing policy advice, systemic advocacy, community education and information provision and dissemination.

Introductory Comments

This response will provide some brief comments in relation to each of the inquiry terms of reference and also outline what we believe needs to happen for people with disability to have some real post-school options that will lead to increased community involvement and vocational opportunities.

There is general consensus in the disability sector NSW CID that reform of the PSO/ATLAS programs was necessary and NSW CID concurs with that view. As we pointed out in a position paper in August 2004ⁱ, in the past many people in both of the programs had been placed in non-vocational congregate day programs that their PSO/ATLAS funding 'purchased' for them leading to very few vocational opportunities and limited community participation. There was clearly a need for reform.

However any change process needs to be managed in a way that is aligned with its vision and principles and is undertaken in a way that consistent and supportive of those affected by the change. The roll out of these programs was fraught with uncertainty and misinformation on the part of some DADHC officers. Additionally NSW CID is most concerned that these reforms are not based on evidentiary findings. The government proceeded with the program development before the evaluation of pilot programs were completed, and contrary to the advice from experts in the various working groups established as part of the reform process. The Department also contracted the University of Wollongong to undertake research into accurate costings for the ATLAS program, which would have given them relevant data on which to base the program development.

NSW CID believes that it is not too late to salvage something from this process and that with further staff training, service development and capacity building the two new programs could lead to more person-centred supports for people with disability.

Terms of Reference

1. The program structure and policy framework

NSW CID believes that it is not necessary to create a two tiered program; within the policy framework it should be possible to develop a true person-centred approach that provides an infrastructure of support for adults to achieve personal goals. However now that the two programs Community Participation (CP) and Transition to Work (TTW) are in place the focus must be on providing more flexibility of support for people with disability.

Essentially the vision, objectives and principles of the policy framework are clear and positive. However without realistic funding the policy objectives cannot be achieved. Additionally, it is unclear how DADHC will uphold some of the principles, e.g. access and equity (when there is very poor service uptake from people of CALD backgrounds), choice (when people will become locked into the CP program with no prospect of vocational options) and lifelong learning (when the only service type that can be provided with the funding levels will be a more congregate setting than current day programs).

2 Adequacy and appropriateness of funding arrangements

Disability service providers have indicated from the outset that they will not be able to provide the same levels of support as they did previously without reducing the number of support hours. In her press release on 2 August 2004 the then Minister for Disability Services, the Hon Carmel Tebbutt indicated that it was not the government's intention to cut people's support hours. However, according to service providers this will inevitably be the consequence. People's support needs will not have changed; there is an unreasonable expectation that service providers can provide more innovative services with what is in reality less funding per individual than under the PSO/ATLAS programs.

The savings anticipated by government will not be realized due to cost-shifting to accommodation and respite services. When people's hours are reduced inevitably they will have to get support from somewhere else; this will lead to either increased

pressure on other services and/or families with whom the person with intellectual disability lives.

Other issues of expenditure relate not specifically to funding but the cost of the reform process itself. The cost of the reform process; e.g. working groups, research, pilot programs etc was a waste of precious resources if DADHC was not going to take into account the findings of the research, evaluations from the pilot projects and the opinions of the experts of the working groups. It is extremely frustrating for advocates and families when there are funding cuts to the post-school program and at the same time huge amounts are spent on consultation and research while the advice and findings are not taken into account in the program development. These types of inefficiencies are common across all DADHC programs and only cause further mistrust of the Department.

Additionally, NSW CID is concerned about the return to block funding, which seems a regressive move; other more contemporary programs are moving to individualized funding (e.g. the Commonwealth funded disability employment support called Case Based Funding).

3. The role of advocates in the consultation process

NSW CID was not involved in the working groups but we understand that the advocacy groups who were provided very sound advice to government. This advice (along with other contributions by the experts on the working groups) was not taken up and certainly not reflected in the two programs that were announced yet the government indicated that service providers and advocates had been involved in the reform process. There will be reluctance to participate in reform processes in the future if people are seen to be associated with an outcome that has major flaws such as this one.

4. Exclusion of students enrolled in post secondary or higher education

This is of concern because many students are not eligible for other financial assistance schemes and this funding would assist (if it were individualized) to cover other expenses. For people with intellectual disability it would be useful to have this funding to support them to undertake TAFE and other tertiary courses.

5. Appropriate of assessment methodology

NSW CID has received many calls from our members who indicate that the results of these assessments are not consistent with previous assessments. This has led to fears that people will be pushed into a program for which they are not prepared and the cynical view here is that people will be moved on to Commonwealth programs and therefore no longer the responsibility of the State government. Or, they could be locked into a CP program with no flexibility to move on vocational programs. The assessment should be a functional assessment of the support needed in order to participate in a valued adult role in the community.

6. Complaints and appeals mechanisms

There appears to be no consistent complaints and appeals process across DADCH central office and the regions. There has only very recently some progress on the implementation of the long awaited Integrated Monitoring System. Recently the DADHC released a draft of their complaints policyⁱⁱ and it is likely that this will have no retrospective relevance to people affected by these reforms.

7. Outcomes as a result of the changes

On August 12 the then Minister for Disability Services, the Hon Carmel Tebbutt made an announcement to withdraw PSO people from the reform process. While some people were happy with this outcome it is an indication of the lack of planning and inability of DADHC to implement this process. Also, within a few weeks PSO people were being assessed as to whether they were 'work-ready'. This means that people who left school in different years receive different levels of funding but have similar support needs. It is likely that the funding for the people on PSO funding will be used to cross-subsidise the service for people block funded for Community Participation. This is a very inconsistent process that does not lead to *Access and Equity* in service delivery – as promoted in the DADHC policy. There are so many inconsistencies with this process that any hope of real reform seems impossible.

Service providers indicated that the only way that they will be able to maintain support hours will be through larger group activities leading to congregate models which is contrary to the spirit and intent of the Disability Service Act (DSA) 1993. It is clear that the level of one to one support will be reduced as will overall service quality. While these programs may lead to a level of certainty for some people; certainty at the expense of quality is unacceptable.

For many people with intellectual disability 2 years is not sufficient time to develop employment skills but they would develop these skills over a long time. Additionally, the TTW program which appears to provide training and then attempt to place people in employment would work better if it were over a longer period and 'on the job' training and support was provided.

The current process does not appear to have developed workable linkages between State and Commonwealth programs, which will lead to fewer pathways for people to develop life skills and limited real choice about their future.

What needs to happen

NSW CID believes that a single post school program that is centred on individual's support needs, talents and interests could be developed if the reform process focused further on service development and capacity building, workforce training for service providers including both government and non-government and the funding and evaluation of innovative demonstration projects.

The following points summarise the necessary components of an effective service delivery model that would support school leavers with disability to reach their potential:

- Access to ongoing development learning opportunities for people with disability, not a time limited program.
- Support is available 5 days a week, like work and school.
- Adequate funding (not less than current levels) that is flexible and portable, targeted at the individual, based on a functional assessment of the person's support needs in order to participate in a valued adult role in the community and ensures an adequate level of core funding for service providers.
- Focuses on individual's changing needs and goals.
- The work experience focus would be 'on the job' training and linked to Commonwealth employment support.
- Work experience would involve the corporate, government and community sectors.
- Supports are provided through access to mainstream service providers as well as specialist disability service providers.
- People of CALD and Aboriginal background are supported and encouraged to utilize the services

- An integrate monitoring and review system that is reflective of the spirit and intent of the DSA 1993.

Conclusion

It is not too late for DADHC to review this reform process and implement programs that reflect the sound vision, principles and objectives outlined in their policy document. NSW CID is aware of many individuals in the government and non-government disability who want better outcomes for people with disability but whose efforts are thwarted by inconsistent decisions around policy implementation. With an increased focus on service and staff development and capacity building this could be turned around.

For further information contact

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ⁱ NSW CID PSO/ATLAS *Reform, Certainty – but at what cost?*

ⁱⁱ DADHC *Feedback and Complaints Handling – Principles and Guidelines – Draft*