

**Submission  
No 117**

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

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**Date Received:** 04/03/2005

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**Subject:**

**Summary**

**GPSC2 GPSC2 - Inquiry into changes to Post School Programs for Young Adults with a Disability**

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**From:** "The Leisure Company" <leisurecom@optusnet.com.au>  
**To:** <gpscno2@parliament.nsw.gov.au>  
**Date:** 4/03/2005 3:08 PM  
**Subject:** Inquiry into changes to Post School Programs for Young Adults with a Disability

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To Whom It May Concern:

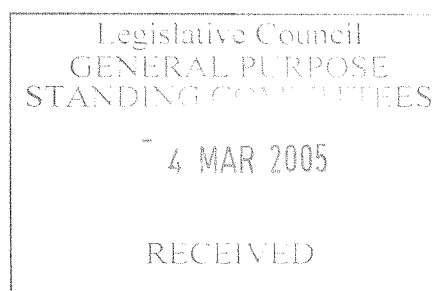
Please find attached The Leisure Company's submission for the Inquiry.

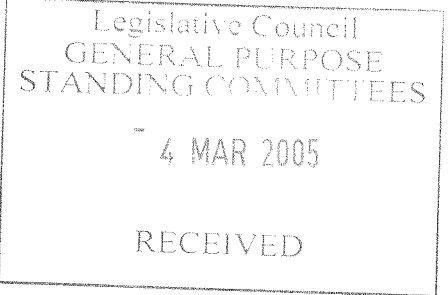
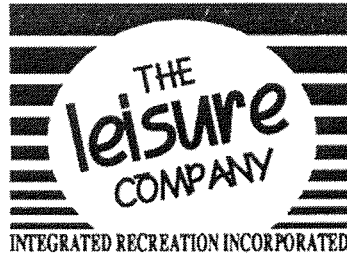
For more information, please contact the undersigned at The Leisure Company on (02) 6921 2330.

Regards,

Elizabeth Clohessy  
Service Manager – The Leisure Company

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## **Submission for the enquiry into Changes to Post School Programs for Young Adults with a Disability**

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## Summary

The Leisure Company has concerns regarding the changes to the Post School Programs for Young Adults with a disability. The organisation has successfully been coordinating Post School Programs, since 1996 and has strong objections to the changes that are currently occurring. Our main concerns are the Policy principles as outlined in Policy Frame Work July 2004 are unrealistic according to the following:

- The policy framework had very little concrete information regarding the requirements of the 2 new programs. The content was quite broad and could be interpreted in many ways, as there are no specific policies relating to the two new programs.
- The proposed funding reduction will see a decrease in the types of flexible, highly individualised programs and activities The Leisure Company will be able to offer. The level of funding offered for Community Participation programs are inadequate and inconsistent with the objectives and outcomes of the proposed project.
- The program is focused on the individual however; the assessment tool does not cater for individual need or circumstances and is open to personal interpretation.
- It will be difficult for service providers to provide programs that are meaningful and facilitate full access and participation in the community.
- Within the Policy Framework document, there is no reference to the complaints and appeals mechanism for either service users or service providers.

- After the two years within the TTW program, if the service user is assessed as work ready and there are no/limited work opportunities, the service users program is ceased and the person becomes a Centerlink responsibility.
- In some cases it will be hard to respond to service users life circumstances if the support needs of a person changes dramatically.

**Point 1. The Program structure and policy framework, including eligibility for the new Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs**

The policy framework that was made available in July 04 had very little concrete information regarding the requirements of the 2 new programs. The content was quite broad and could be interpreted in many ways, as there are no specific policies relating to the two new programs. The following are points which we feel are important aspects which have been overlooked when implementing the TTW and CP programs:

- As stated in Policy Framework: Policy Principles (p.8), *“recognition that people with disabilities have the right to exercise Choice and a commitment to ensuring this principle is maintained in all aspects of an individual’s service”*. The service user is required to identify two service preferences, yet the funding body has the final say as to which service will be providing their program. The final decision is taken away from the service user? What has happened to the above principle?
- The Policy in Operation states that the Community Participation Program will provide meaningful learning opportunities that meet the individual goals, interests and needs of the service user (p.8). How can this be achieved on the amount of funding that is being provided especially if the service user has very high and complex needs? Our service has been looking at the options available to meet the individual needs of the service users with higher support needs and found that there is a need to recruit volunteers to assist in supporting the service users to be able to provide a meaningful program.

- The objectives for the two new programs are identical focussing on the post school pathways, maintaining the implementation of individualized person centred planning and supporting life transitions of service users. If the objectives for both programs are indistinguishable why is that the funding differentiates by \$2199.00?
- Community participation is a key phrase used throughout the Policy Framework document. However, for our service it is almost impossible to successfully partake in community activities when we have five service users who are totally dependent on constant support from workers. The funding for these service users has been reduced by 30 percent which financially reduces the income the organization receives. This results in a reduction in staffing levels and a decrease in the hours the service users can access the programs. Consequently, this reduction results in less opportunity for Community Participation access and an unrealistic expectation for our service to provide a quality program.
- Person Centred Planning which allows flexibility is a major point in the Framework Policy. This extremely difficult for our service to achieve on the level of funding being offered under the new programs. If the service does not have the dollars to be flexible for the person centred planning, it is evident that you set the service user up to fail and the organisation is not meeting Standard 2: Individual Needs.
- Are there any reassessment mechanisms in place after a person has been assessed as work ready? What if the person loses their skills in the period after their TTW program ceases and whilst looking for work



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

The Leisure Company has a high commitment to the people who access our day programs. For the amount of funding each person receives under Post School Options and ATLAS we are able to provide a flexible program comprising of one to one sessions as well as group sessions for all participants. Whilst the levels of ATLAS funding aren't comparable to the PSO funding levels we were able to provide excellent opportunities for our services users.

The Individual Program Plan reflects the participants desired outcomes of their program allowing them to:

1. Make informed choices regarding their program (Standard 3)
2. Ensure their individual needs are being met which is prepared in consultation with their parents and/or carers (Standard 1 & 9)
3. Integrate and participate in the local community (Standard 5)
4. Allow the person the opportunity to develop skills and participate in activities that makes the individual feel good about themselves (Standard 6)

The proposed funding reduction will see a decrease in the types of flexible, highly individualised programs and activities The Leisure Company will be able to offer. The level of funding offered for Community Participation programs are inadequate and inconsistent with the objectives and outcomes of the proposed project.

The tender package clearly states that “the development of this program model is a response to the need to assist people with a disability to access the range of life opportunities had by all members of the community” (pg 4 DADHC Tender Information package: Community Participation). This will be difficult to achieve as the current staff ratio will be decreased to reflect the amount of funding received.

The funding levels have had a significant reduction, yet the support needs of the service users haven’t dramatically changed to reflect this. The funding reductions have not taken into account the deterioration of health related issues of people with disabilities and the increase of support required when this occurs. Therefore, the funding levels are inconsistent with the life transitions of service users.

The Leisure Company has a strong community partnership with a range of organisations; however, this has been achieved by having the appropriate staff ratios to support these partnerships. For example; we currently provide support to 18 service users and 5 of the service users are in wheel chairs that require a staff ratio of 1:1. The reduction of staff will mean fewer opportunities to access the community and limit service users to centre based activities which will not reflect the outcomes and objectives of the proposed Community Participation program.

The lack of funds will have a major impact on the primary carers of our service users. For the 18 people that access our service, all but 2 service user lives at home with their families. These families are now faced with the fact that their son/daughter’s day service

is going to be reduced severely which will then create more financial stress on the families, and their networks. Is there going to be other funding avenues for these people to access?

The Leisure Company is a small organisation and after looking at our current financial liabilities such as rent, insurances and other administration expenses these proposed changes will have a major impact on our financial viability. The cost of running a program is not going to decrease due to our funding being reduced by 30%.

**Point 5. The appropriateness of the assessment methodology used to identify school leavers support needs to stream school leavers into the new programs.**

The assessment tool used to decide the path way for current school leavers is a HACC Screening Tool which focuses on daily living functional skills. This tool does not provide enough significant questions required to assess if a person with a disability is able to be trained to undertake employment. This tool is usually used to ascertain whether a person is able to receive services through the HACC Program.

This assessment has no disability focal point at all but is being used to make life long decisions relating to people with a disability. The HACC Screening Tool is open for interpretation by the person completing the form.

The assessment tool does not reflect the objectives for the program in the Policy Framework document, and does not address the following:

- Support access to the full range of post school pathways for young people with disabilities including further education and training, employment and Community Participation
- Maintain the implementation of an individualised and person-centred planning approach for service users that acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and communities, cultural and religious considerations, age, gender, support needs and personal aspirations
- Support the life transitions of service users through access to a diverse range of flexible pathways including school-to-work, school to further education and/or training, education and/or training to work and work to retirement.

- The assessment tool does not allow for people who have degenerative conditions. For instance, as a person's condition deteriorates the support they require increases and the current funding does not cater for this and therefore we cannot meet their individual needs.

**Point 6. The adequacy of complaints and appeals mechanism established in relation to the implantation of the new programs, and particularly with respect to assessment decisions.**

Within the Policy Framework document, there is no reference to the complaints and appeals mechanism for either service users or service providers. However, one of our service users was inappropriately assessed and as there was no formal procedure a call was made to our Regional Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care office where the concern was brought to their attention and the problem was mutually rectified. If The Leisure Company had not built up a strong working relationship with the Regional Coordinator, this situation may not have had such a favourable outcome and consequently had a detrimental effect on the service user involved.

Since the introduction of the two new programs, we have had numerous families raise concerns about the program. Some of these issues have been:

- The assessment that their son/daughter received,
- The availability of services,
- The process of accessing the program, and
- Receiving additional information regarding the steps involved before the commencement of the program.

As the Policy Framework does not detail the process for complaints or where additional information can be found, families have been seeking answers from the service. We have found difficulty in assisting families with their concerns as we also do not know the process.

Existing service users and families have had conflicting information regarding the changes to their ATLAS funding and again, as mentioned above they are unaware of the processes regarding the conclusion of ATLAS and the introduction of TTW and/or CP. Correspondence from the department to service users and families has been minimal. Although the information that has been provided included phone numbers for further queries, when families have called the number staff have been unable to answer their concerns.

These issues indicate that the complaints mechanism is non-existent which is frustrating families.

**Point 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**

To provide a quality program with the goal of becoming work ready within two years, a person requires intensive training to develop both their skills and experience. Because service users in the TTW program are limited to two years to become work ready, it places them at a disadvantage in the general community. Within the mainstream community, people can undergo training for a longer period to gain the skills needed to enter the workforce. These changes do not encourage work as a viable outcome in such a restricted timeframe.

After the two years within the TTW program, if the service user is assessed as work ready and there are no/limited work opportunities, the service users program is ceased and the person becomes a Centerlink responsibility. What are the options available to the service user once their funding ceases and they are work ready? Our concerns are:

- The short timeframe of the program
- The service users skill level will decrease without the constant support mechanisms which have been in place
- The motivation to work is lost as a result of not having reached their goal to work
- There is a higher chance of less social interaction/participation within the community
- The person becoming a burden on society and on other services



## **Recommendations**

Our service believes that the new changes are detrimental to the individual needs of each service users. The expectations on service providers to provide a quality service are too high on the amount of funding made available through the two new programs.

We recommend the following:

- A more in depth policy framework with clear guidelines available to all stakeholders
- An increase to the current level of funding for both programs as to provide a flexible quality service which meets individual needs
- A more appropriate assessment tool that focuses on young people with a disability caters for changes in circumstances and includes the involvement of relevant stakeholders. The assessment tool needs to cover more aspects that are relevant to the programs (e.g. provocation and education skills, communication skills and social skills). This will assist in the appropriate funding allocation for people with high and complex needs.
- There needs to be a clear defined process which outlines the procedures for the making of complaint and appeals for both service users and service providers
- The two year timeframe for the TTW program needs to be extended as well as have the facility for further extension