

**Submission
No 86**

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

Organisation: Disability Advocacy Network Inc.

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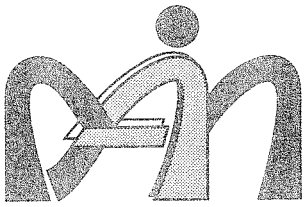
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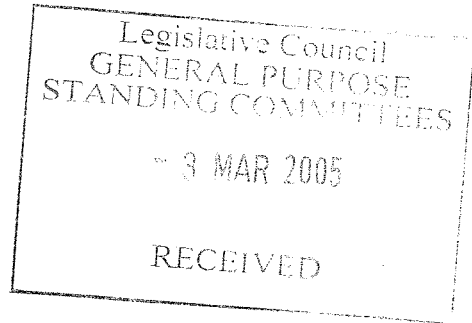
Summary



Disability Advocacy Network Inc.

'Equality, Independence & Integration.'

Mr Steven Reynolds
Director of GPSC2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000



Submission to the Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing
Committee No 2

Dear Mr Reynolds,

Please find enclosed a copy of the submission by the Disability Advocacy Network regarding the *Inquiry into changes to Post School Options for young adults with a disability.*

Yours sincerely

Andrea Gray
Team Leader
2/3/2005

Legislative Council
GENERAL PURPOSE
STANDING COMMITTEES

- 3 MAR 2005

RECEIVED

Legislative Council

General Purpose Standing Committee No 2

**Inquiry into changes to post school programs for
young adults with a disability**

This submission has been authorized

by

Andrea Gray

(Team Leader – Disability Advocacy Network Inc)

March 2005

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CONTENTS LIST

- Summary3
- The program structure and policy framework, including eligibility criteria, for the new Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs.....5
- The adequacy and appropriateness of funding arrangements for the new programs.....6
- The role of advocates both individual and peak groups in the consultation process.....9
- 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 programs10
- The appropriateness of the assessment methodology used to identify school leaver support needs and to stream school leavers into the new programs.....10
- The adequacy of complaints and appeals mechanisms established in relation to the implementation of the new programs, and particularly with respect to assessment decisions.....11
- 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.....11
- Bibliography13

SUMMARY

I believe the changes to Post School Options for young people with a disability will only serve to reduce service provision, placing increased pressure on families and carers, ultimately affecting the quality of life of many young people who have a disability.

Funding cuts will mean that people with a disability will return to a standard of service delivery that is not only disempowering, but one that will cost the community in the long term by having to financially support people with a disability, rather than giving them the life skills to enable them to support themselves.

One of the main goals within the disability field has been to empower people who have a disability and enforce that they receive the same rights and quality of life enjoyed by the wider community.

If the Government goes ahead with the:

- funding cuts
- the return to block funding

- registering young people with a disability as Centrelink clients and not offering them further programs if they are unemployed
- not including higher education for young people in the programs

they will actually be robbing people young people with a disability of some of the gains that have been made within the disability sector.

There is no argument that reform was necessary. However, I believe what the Government is proposing is not a positive reform and will not improve opportunities for young people with a disability, but will actually be disempowering and will disenfranchise an already vulnerable group.

1. The program structure and policy framework, including eligibility criteria, for the new Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs.

- I believe the Policy Framework document does not have enough detail for people with a disability, their families and carers or service providers to make informed decisions regarding how they will be affected by the policy or how services will work within the policy. The Policy Framework document has four and a half pages talking about the background, legislative framework, context, scope, vision, objectives and policy principles and the equivalent of only one page discussing the policy in operation.
- There is no mention of the complaints or appeals mechanisms in the Policy Framework document.
- Eligibility criteria for the programs are determined by an assessment tool that is not suitable to be used for this purpose. (see point 5. The appropriateness of the assessment methodology used to identify school leaver support needs and to stream school leavers into the new programs).

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

I believe the State Governments proposed cuts to Post School Options (PSO) and Adult Training, Learning and Support (ATLAS) funding is regressive, with the new funding levels being inadequate to maintain service levels and if allowed to go ahead unchanged will cause great hardship to many people with a disability.

I am working with consumers who were in receipt of funding at a level of \$19 500 annually on average and who, under the current reforms, will receive only \$13 500 annually on average.

The funding cuts will have a negative impact not only on the amount of service a consumer receives, but the quality of service provision;

- Adequate funding has meant that people were able to access services on a 1:1 or small group basis, the proposed changes means that this will no longer be able to occur.
- To stay viable services will have to revert to large group centre based activities. The dynamics of which means that people will not be able to

be given the necessary attention to develop their skills to their fullest potential and may even lose skills.

- If people lose skills they will need an increase in their level of long term support and funding. Also, the disability field has worked very hard to make sure that people with a disability access the community with dignity and valued status. All the gains made for services to provide community access on an inclusive, individual or small group basis will be eroded by the cut in funds. These changes go against the policy set down by DADHC which states the Departments “commitment to providing programs and services that facilitate full access and participation in the community.”¹
- If day programs cut hours to people who live in supported accommodation, accommodation service providers will have to increase their level of staffing and thus their costs.
- Some parents/carers may have to give up work to care for the person with a disability, placing further stresses on families.
- If this leads to the need for crisis care due to a family breakdown caused by the pressures of having to care for an adult child with a disability in the home, this will increase costs to the Government, as crisis care is always more expensive than good long term management and planning.

- This will also place further strain on already severely limited respite services.

In response to the appropriateness of funding arrangements

I believe the return to block funding is extremely regressive.

A major shift in the dynamics of power occurred when individuals gained the right to control their own funding, broker services that were appropriate to their individual situation and take funding with them if they chose to move between service providers.

In reverting to block funding to service providers:

- Power will be returned to the service providers, which in turn strips the individual of power, control and freedom of choice.
- Funding will no longer be portable. If a family needs to move to take up other opportunities, or for a siblings education, (which often happens in rural Australia), they will not be able to take the funding with them. This means that a person with a disability will only be able to change services if a position is available, at that funding level,

in the new service. I believe the lack of choice of service providers contravenes the NSW Disability Services Act, 1993.

- Currently a person with a disability is able to broker services that best suit their needs. This means that they can attend more than one service at a time. i.e. 8 hrs/ week with one service, 4 hrs/week with another service. If funding reverts to block funding to the service provider it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for this to occur. Which I believe also contravenes the NSW Disability Services Act, 1993.

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

- As an advocate in a rural area I attended the ATLAS Reform Information Session for Service Providers in Wagga.
- I believe large Sydney based advocacy agencies were involved in the consultation process but through the agency I work for I was not involved in the consultation process.

- I was kept informed of any changes the Minister made, by the peak body ACROD, but did not feel that I was fully informed or involved in the consultation process and when consumers came to me with questions I had to find any relevant information myself.

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

- By excluding this group from the assistance program, I believe it denies the purported ethos of the “policy embrac(ing) the principles of life-long learning, full participation in economic and community contexts and an individualised person-centered planning approach to service.”² set down by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

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

- The assessment tool currently in use was developed to assess the elderly and their needs. The use of this tool to assess young people with a

disability is inherently flawed as the two groups are vastly disparate.

Young people learning skills is at a completely different end of the spectrum from older people whose skills are generally fading.

- The tool is also too broad and does not take into account the differing needs and vastly different skills of individual young people.

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.

- People are still trying to find out just what is happening with the actual policy and I believe not enough information has been given regarding the complaints and appeals mechanisms.

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.

- If young people are ineligible for assistance to access higher education under this funding, positive outcomes for this group will not be achieved.

- Limiting Transition to Work funding to two years with a possible extension of six months is too short a timeframe. It may take a young person with a disability, 3-4 or more years to become work ready. Therefore, many young people will be denied the opportunity to gain the skills to enter the workforce.
- There is no evidence that the Transition to Work Program will achieve employment. Even if a young person is deemed 'work-ready' there are not always employment opportunities available to people with a disability.
- After the Transition to Work period has ended and a person is deemed 'work-ready' but does not gain or maintain employment, they then become Centrelink clients. People with a disability often need support to maintain skill levels which they will not receive if they are Centrelink clients. Therefore they may not only lose learnt skills, but may end up despondent, as they believed they were promised employment.
- I am currently seeing young consumers, who are not in employment or other programs, displaying antisocial behaviours and becoming in trouble with the police. If 'work-ready' consumers are unemployed and therefore a Centrelink client and do not receive any other program to fill in their day, I believe that more and more young people with a disability will become involved with the police.

Bibliography

1. Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. (7/2004) Policy Framework Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs.
DADHC. Pg 7.
2. Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. (7/2004) Policy Framework Transition to Work and Community Participation Programs.
DADHC. Pg 7.