

Submission
No 76

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICES PROVIDED OR FUNDED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGEING, DISABILITY AND
HOME CARE**

Organisation: Best Buddies Australia

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Date received: 6/08/2010



*Building friendships
Changing Lives*

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Submission: Inquiry into services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

Best Buddies Australia (BBA) is a not for profit organisation that works with young people and adults who have an intellectual disability or a developmental delay. We match a person who has a disability with an age related peer, supporting a one to one friendship. BBA encourages this Buddy Pair to meet twice a month and contact each other once a week. We provide ongoing training, support, leadership and monitoring to assist with the development of a mutually enriching one to one friendship.

The core goal of this program is the meaningful participation and social inclusion of those who have a disability in the wider community. Other program outcomes include the development of socialisation and adaptive skills, the development of networks and the creation of positive peer relationships. We observe an increase in self esteem and confidence and contribute to greater life outcomes for all our participants.

Best Buddies Australia provides an excellent demonstration of the challenges faced by small not for profits in an increasingly competitive sector. The Best Buddies program is innovative in that it focuses on the development of one to one friendships with a view to the real and meaningful social inclusion of people with an intellectual disability.

Existing and future proposed funding models in NSW (ADHC) have a significant negative effect with regard to the development of innovative practice. This submission will detail some of those challenges and seek to provide some solutions.

Summary:

- Best Buddies Australia is a well established NFP, however continues to endure funding issues due to its youth and innovative niche program design.
- Larger NFP's have established systems that limit creative and innovative practice.
- Smaller NFP's are effectively locked out of disability sector funding.

Best Buddies: History

BBA has operated in Australia for the past 6 years and currently is active in 9 High Schools across Sydney with approximately 100 Buddy Pairs (developing friendships between students with and without intellectual disability). BBA also operates a highly successful Citizen's (Adult Program) in Victoria with 30 active Buddy Pairs. This



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program has operated for 6 years. The focus on friendship sets the service apart from almost every other disability service provider in NSW.

At this time, Best Buddies Australia does not have any form of recurrent funding. The majority of funding BBA has received is derived from ADHC, and a very small number of grants and donations.

Demand for services from Best Buddies

There is strong evidence¹ indicating that social inclusion is a vital component in the provision of services to people with an intellectual disability and this is something that governments, and service providers alike are finding challenging.

BBA receives regular requests from parents, teachers and individuals seeking access to both the High Schools and the Citizen's Program. Current demand for our Citizen's Program in Victoria is very strong and provides a good indication of the perceived need in NSW.

Every disability service provider BBA has engaged with has indicated that isolation and loneliness is a major issue for the vast majority of their clients. There is a clear need for the unique services provided by Best Buddies to both school students and to adults with intellectual disability.

What is innovative about Best Buddies?

Most service providers shy away from actively assisting with the development of friendships for people with an intellectual disability. Reasons include professional beliefs relating to boundaries, a lack of understanding as to how friendships are formed and supported, concerns regarding job descriptions and potential risks to the service provider.

Best Buddies Australia fills this gap in service delivery. We provide a program that removes these issues for most service providers. When service providers refer a client to Best Buddies, they are released from challenges relating to professional boundaries and they can access a service that has a growing expertise. They can effectively 'buy in' (at no costs) a service model that assists with the development of person centred planning all the while divorcing themselves from the associate challenges of providing a service for which they have little or no expertise.

Best Buddies contends that the vast majority of Disability Services Providers are constrained by organisational factors that limit their ability to develop and provide unique and essential programs like Best Buddies.

¹ 'Community Inclusion – Enhancing Friendship Networks among People with a Cognitive Impairment' (Department of Human Services Victoria: July 2005). The report outlines the desire of the Victorian Government to enhance the social inclusion of those with an intellectual disability and the challenges that this presents including the disability worker's lack of confidence to facilitate inclusion.



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In itself, this does not present an insurmountable problem as there is potential for smaller, innovative and more specialised NFP's to fill the gap however accessing funding to develop these programs is at best, challenging and at worse, impossible.

This challenge speaks directly to the funding arrangements provided by ADHC and the broader community.

How are small NFP's funded?

"Although non-government community service organisations rely upon a mixture of revenue sources, the surveys finding suggest high reliance on government funding. In this survey, 73% of the total revenue of respondents came from governments" ²

Best Buddies has been very fortunate to have had dedicated and well connected advocates, however additional streams of funding have proved elusive. Had Best Buddies not had some direct relationships with the NSW Government, it is highly probable that the program would not have emerged nor survived for the past 6 years.

The experiences of BBA, as a small NFP, illustrate the challenges faced in obtaining funding and provide insight into why locating funding is difficult. These experiences are particularly relevant to accessing funding outside of the Government,

- **Lack of a dedicated grant writer** – Grant/Foundation writing is a highly skilled and time consuming occupation. To write a grant or foundation application that is competitive can take in excess of 40 hours. In a small NFP, the primary grant writer is the Executive Director/CEO who has many other responsibilities. It may be difficult to justify this time allocation, if there is a slim chance of a positive outcome.
- **Lack of proven outcome data** – Collecting reliable and valid data on program outcomes requires considerable resources and expenditure which may be beyond the current capacity of an organisation providing small innovative programs. Most grants and applications require clear evidence as to the outcomes and the associated measures. While intended to mitigate risk, this requirement often limits the success rate of grant applications for small organisations with limited resources.
- **Limitations to brand management** – The ability to describe the depth of program outcomes in a succinct manner can be challenging for a new program. BBA invested a substantial amount of time developing our program language so it would hold some market appeal. Larger organisations have the

² Hilferty, F., Cortis, N., Eastman, C. and Katz, I. (2010). *Profiling non-government community services organisations in NSW: A summary report*. SPRC Report 08/10, prepared for Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services. University of New South Wales. Published July 2010.



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capital to invest in marketing language and have a head start on any new programs.

- **Funding is program focused** – almost all grants/foundations and funding agreements are program/outcome focused. While appropriate to fund outcomes, this framework provides limited opportunity for untied funds. As a small NFP, BBA has no additional funds to supplement a marketing, grant writing or donation relationship team.
- **Disability is not sexy** – As BBA is working in a niche market, it is reliant not on popular appeal (Children's Charities has major success in this area) but rather on personal relationships. With a saturated market, BBA struggles to engage supporters.
- **Building the Board** – BBA has struggled to access well connected and active Board Members. Investing in this process takes time, commitment and inevitably good connections. For a new NFP, this is not easily achieved.

Best Buddies Australia is not unique in experiencing these issues. However BBA is unique in having provided an innovative program for 6 years, without locating recurrent or stable funding.

To resolve the some of the challenges relating to funding, BBA would propose the following:

- *An innovation fund be established to support new program initiatives.*
- *Grants be awarded to newly established NFP's (perhaps existing for 2 years or more) to allow further development of their programs.*
- *Funding be awarded for a 3 year period to allow for forward planning and security in the short-term.*
- *Funding packages should include a component for collection of data to establish outcome measures to be carried out by an external agency (a University for example).*
- *Funding should include introduction and support for governance (beyond existing NDS support) to allow Board development.*
- *Provision should be made to continue financial support if appropriate and required.*

Prepared by:

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