

INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Organisation: Deaf Society of NSW

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Submission to the Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

Deaf Society of New South Wales

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Deaf Society of NSW Employment Service is currently providing services to around 161 deaf job seekers. Of these, a significant proportion (about 30%) have other needs in addition to their deafness. 27.3% have transitioned from school directly to our service.

Our service is a Disability Employment Service, funded by the Commonwealth through DEEWR, and does not relate directly to supports provided by the NSW Government. However, our clients all access or have accessed support provided by the NSW Government and we hope the committee will find our submission helpful in illuminating the points of contact between state and Commonwealth funded supports.

Matters of concern to us are:

- That school education does not adequately prepare students for the transition to work
- That employers are unwilling to recruit deaf people with additional disabilities
- That little information is provided to Disability Employment Service providers by schools
- That in some cases funding provisions are not adequate

BACKGROUND

The Deaf Society of NSW was established in 1913 and is a company limited by guarantee. We are a not-for-profit, bi-lingual, bi-cultural, community-centred organisation which exists to achieve equity for deaf people. Our services include employment services, Auslan interpreting, education and training, independent living skills and community services.

The Deaf Society of NSW Employment Service is a specialist service for deaf and hard of hearing job seekers offering assistance with job search, training opportunities and vocational opportunities. We support job seekers, employees who are at risk of losing employment due to disability, and employers of deaf people.

The Deaf Society of NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families. The comments below are offered from the point of view of our expertise in employment service provision to deaf and hard of hearing people. We are not a consumer representative body, but work closely with Deaf Australia – NSW, the consumer representative body for the Deaf Community in NSW.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

NSW Government provision of education and disability support occurs in a context which includes Commonwealth-funded disability employment services, such as the Deaf Society of NSW Employment Service. Although not all of our concerns fall within the purview of the NSW Government, we have outlined all the key concerns in relation to the success of deaf school-leavers transitioning to work in order to provide a full picture of the challenges facing deaf people with additional needs as they seek to transition from school to work or further training with the assistance of Disability Employment Service providers. Our concerns are: the job-readiness of school leavers, the attitudes of employers, the information about school leavers' needs, and the adequacy of funding support.

JOB-READINESS OF SCHOOL LEAVERS

In our experience, students with additional and complex needs come to our service with very little knowledge of possible areas of work, and few of the generic skills that they will need to thrive in a workplace. They have not been thoroughly prepared for "life in the big wide world" and may have unrealistic expectations or a tendency to rely on others for support or to expect that others will take all the initiative in arranging their lives for them.

For example, deaf school leavers have not usually had access to qualified interpreters in school, and are shocked to find that interpreters are not provided in workplace training to take initiative on their behalf,

but to facilitate communication. Students leaving school have minimal understanding of how to use interpreters in the workplace and in vocational training, which negatively affects their ability to integrate into the workplace.

School is, rightly, a somewhat sheltered environment. However, it seems to us that more could be done to ensure that students have adequate career counselling and job readiness training while in school. It is also clear that becoming used to professional interpreters in a school context would improve the ability of deaf students to use interpreters in further training and in the workplace.

ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS

It is still very difficult to place deaf people with additional needs in employment due to employers' perceptions. From the employer's perspective, "deaf is difficult enough" without the additional needs. The NSW Government can have an influence in supporting state-level initiatives which raise the profile of people with disability living and working in NSW and to promote positive community attitudes.

In our experience, a lack of knowledge about technologies available contributes to the reluctance of employers to employ deaf people. For example, concerns about OHS prevent employers from hiring deaf people as they assume that deaf people will not be able to respond to alarms when operating machinery. When they find that visual alarms and vibrating pager systems are available, they are willing to employ deaf people.

INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL LEAVERS' NEEDS

Transition from school into our service does not require a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) conducted by Centrelink. Although this reduces red tape it also means that school leavers arrive in our service without much background information being provided to us. This increases the burden of assessment for our employment service and leaves school leavers open to the risk of needs going unidentified and unmet. Better information provided to employment service providers by schools, with the student's permission, would assist in making the transition smoother.

ADEQUACY OF FUNDING SUPPORT

There is good support available for deaf job seekers and employees through the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) which provides workplace modifications, Auslan interpreting, and Disability Awareness Training. However, for deaf people in roles requiring frequent interpreting services, EAF allocations for interpreting (\$6,000 per person per year) are expended within a few months. This presents a barrier to the employment of deaf people as employers are unwilling to risk the added expense of unfunded interpreting services.

Another area of concern is that the amount available for supports is the same whether a person has one or several disabilities. Better tailored provision of funding would be more appropriate in some cases so that the expenses for each person could be adequately covered depending on their level of need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the NSW Department of Education work towards improving the job-readiness of school-leavers with disability. This will include multiple initiatives, but some may be:
 - a. Targeted career counseling and work experience for students with additional needs
 - b. Processes for assisting school leavers to transition smoothly to disability employment service providers
 - c. Providing qualified interpreters in schools
2. That the NSW Government consider further support for initiatives to recognise the achievements of people with disability in NSW and to encourage employers to be more proactive in hiring people with additional or complex needs.