

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

**Organisation:** National Independent Special Schools Association (NISSA)  
**Date received:** 9/09/2011

---

## Submission

Inquiry into transition for students with additional or complex needs and their families

## Response

National independent Special schools Association (NISSA)

Level 4, 99 York St,

Sydney 2001

---

NISSA represents special schools in the independent sector across Australia. Within the NISSA membership there are a range of schools catering for students with intellectual, physical disabilities as well as autism, sight and hearing impairment, language and behavioral difficulties.

Transitions are points in time where there is heightened stress and concern for both the person with additional needs as well as their family. Fear and uncertainty, feelings of being left to sort out the next step dominate as the support system is under resourced with no clear pathways to access services and information.

Schools within NISSA support students to transition to and from school as well as within and between school settings. Schools in this sector also work across home and school as well as other service providers to establish clear processes and pathways for students with additional and complex needs. Planning is the key to

successful transitions for students and their families however there are a number of barriers that need to be considered in light of this inquiry.

## Barriers

1. A system for people with additional and complex needs based on a model of crisis intervention resulting in lack of access to services.
2. Bureaucratic barriers to successful transitions. For example in provision of post school services in NSW artificial geographical barriers to employment, community participation and accommodation services.
3. Lack of trained personnel who understand person centered decision making processes and do not have sufficient information to support families to make informed decisions.
4. Staff capacity within the areas of disability services. For example staff retention rates across all sectors are poor and appropriate remuneration structures. Training and development opportunities are not a priority in the area.
5. Difficulties for families in accessing services such as case management to support in the process of developing and implementing transition plans; this is often only available when there is a crisis.
6. Successful transitions require a sustained collaborative effort with a range of personnel designing and implementing plans. This is often a low priority for services that are investing the bulk of resources in day to day operations as the system is under-funded given need and often relying on a system of charitable donations to meet the core expenses in NGO operations.
7. Often transitions are to services that may not be the best fit for the individual and family resulting in a level of dissatisfaction, the model of

person centered and planning in decision making is yet to be adopted in NSW.

8. Families have difficulty finding their way to information and then not understanding what that may mean for their family member. The process and information is fragmented in relation to selection criteria/ accessing resources.

As a general observation the points of transition that are significant are high stress times for families and the young person. A few parent comments reported how difficult transitions were,

1. Having to re-live and re-tell the story and history again and not once but to a whole range of new people; it felt like starting all over again when her son moved from school into adult services.
2. The lack of continuity and consistency in approach for a young man with significant support requirements due to staff turnover and retention from both services. The parents felt he regressed and had become more anxious and difficult with a significant effect on the family.
3. A young parent with a newly diagnosed child who was unable to find information even though much was publicly available on the websites however she was in such a fragile state with a new diagnosis that she could not make sense of the material,
4. Lack of a case manager to support through transition from home into supported accommodation.

NISSA would be happy to provide or be involved in any further consultations regarding transition processes for students across the years of schooling as there is significant expertise within the membership who could provide insight. As all NISSA schools are independent there are examples of innovative practice within this area.

Kerrie Nelson

Deputy Chairperson

NISSA

Level 4

99 York St

Sydney 2001