

## Submission to the Senate

### The Senate Inquiry on the administration and purchasing of Disability Employment Services in Australia

My name is Emily Cox and I have worked at Break Thru People Solutions in the Disability Employment Services for two years. During this time I have observed first-hand the quality of work that Break Thru does with clients with disabilities and the benefits client receive from their assistance.

Clients with disabilities form good long-term relationships with their consultants and other staff at Break Thru. Due to the nature of their barriers and often due to the difficulties they have had in the past with inclusion in society, clients need time to establish trust and rapport with their Break Thru consultants. However once they do, clients have the confidence and support to try new things, such as participating in work experience, participating in education and training, applying for jobs and successfully becoming employed. With the support of DES staff, I have seen clients who lacked confidence and purpose gain these things through the holistic approach Disability Employment Services are able to offer.

Assessing the performance of Disability Employment Services based on the star ratings model is not appropriate. Nor is the current method of tendering for contracts. I firmly believe in the objectives of the Disability Services Act of 1986, in promoting social inclusion of people with disabilities. Disability Employment Services need to be flexible and innovative as every client is different and has different support needs. Putting emphasis on the number of outcomes achieved in a given period puts pressure on services to focus on getting as many clients into employment as possible. This may mean that clients who have high support needs may not receive as great a quality of service as those who at the time may be more employable. The current model of tendering and star ratings also means that time and energy is taken away from providing quality, long-term service to clients as DES providers have to focus on getting ready for tendering process. This does not support the Federal Budget 2011's aims in helping the many people in Australia with disabilities.

The tendering process also means that there is instability for clients and for people working in the Disability Employment sector. Clients with barriers need a sense of security and dependability. To them, the requirements of Centrelink, Employment Services etc. are a bewildering maze for which they require time and support to get used to. They receive security from seeing familiar faces and going through familiar routines. If services are constantly changing every few years due to the re-tendering process, this can easily discourage them from endeavouring to be active in society. Staff members working in DES also need job security and the retendering process does not promote this- it promotes stress. Staff in this sector receive a lot of training and knowledge and also require personal qualities that don't come easily. Staff need to feel that it is worthwhile to invest their time, commitment and energy into their jobs, their organisations and their clients.

Disability Employment Services which are 3 stars and over should not have to retender for continuing to provide services. It takes away from the vital work that they are doing and I believe that there must be more efficient ways of quality management. Clients are the ones who are mainly

disadvantaged by this process and I believe that they must be the focus of any decisions made by the government.

Thank you for your time,

Emily Cox.