



Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: ParentsNext Program**

On behalf of Training Alliance Group, (TAG), I am responding to your invitation to provide a submission regarding the ParentsNext program.

TAG is a Western Australian owned and operated business providing training and employment services across the State. Recently, TAG expanded its operations into New South Wales.

Our business delivers the Commonwealth Government's Transition to Work, Employability Skills Training, and ParentsNext programs in WA and was recently appointed as a Workforce Australia provider in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder region and Self Employment Assistance. You can find more information about our company on our website - <https://www.trainingalliance.com.au/>

TAG also provides quality training across a variety of sectors delivered through our registered training organisations. Working with organisations, their employees and individuals, we provide on the job and off-site training in the business, civil construction, mining, transport and logistics industries.

TAG is committed to providing pre-employment services for ParentsNext participants to overcome barriers and take steps toward achieving their education and employment goals.

TAG continues to deliver a quality ParentsNext program in the Perth-North Employment Region in WA.

In the recent Performance Period 4 period, TAG achieved seven of seven performance targets with an above national average overall score.

As of 27th October 2022, TAG together with our sub-contractor, Waalitj Foundation, has delivered services to approximately 1095 ParentsNext participants who commenced a program in Perth North.

TAG and Waalitj have many individual 'good news stories' which demonstrate how the ParentsNext program can plan and prepare eligible parents for employment by the time their children go to school. The program has been life changing for many participants.



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The ParentsNext current program's strength areas include:

- Providing different level of service compared to other mainstream employment service programs;
- Pre-employment and education focus;
- Allowing informed participant decision-making;
- Allowing providers to be creative and innovative with service delivery within the guidelines;
- Helping program participants to develop community and personal support networks that strengthen their resilience and community participation;
- Providing supports that improve mental health and wellbeing. This has been particularly important through the recent COVID-19 period;
- Creating opportunities for peer support amongst participants during and following program participation;
- Involving key stakeholder agencies in local regions; a process that has helped strengthen access to a variety of essential health, housing, mental health, training, domestic violence and childcare services; and
- Availability and access to a Participation Fund allowing tailored support plans to meet the goals of participants.

In addition, TAG believes the ParentsNext Program would benefit from the following program adjustments which could lead to improved program participation and effectiveness:

**a) Increase youngest age eligibility criteria to 12mths**

On different occasions it has been difficult to fully engage participants in program activities when their youngest child is 9 months old. It is understandable that many parents are reluctant to put their child at this young age into childcare. The issue has been compounded where access to childcare is limited and there is a waitlist. Participants are often less able to focus their attention on pre-employment activities in these circumstances. TAG believes it would be beneficial to increase the age eligibility



age to 12 months. Increasing the age of the youngest child would remove these barriers improving participant focus on program activities.

**b) Increase the youngest child age threshold for parents with multiple children to 2 years.**

This would allow parents additional time to navigate important early child milestones when more than one child is involved. Some parents with multiple children have difficulties prioritising pre-employment activities as part of their program.

**c) Second phase of ParentsNext Delivery**

The ParentsNext program has been successful assisting many parents to prepare for their return to employment. The next phase of this return-to-work journey could consider a program designed to work with parents where their youngest child is between 6-10yrs of age delivering employment services linked with job seeking and participation requirements. This program could also support parents to access the increased number of available of childcare places recently introduced as part of October 2022 Government budget reforms. The Participant fund could be used to access childcare places.

The ability of the program to support parents would be effectively extended and build on the capacity that has been developed with various local community agencies, education institutions and employers. The focus of the program would transfer from a pre-employment to employment focus while still assisting participants to access essential support services. This transition pathway could be a more supportive and effective transition compared to Participants moving directly to mainstream employment services (Workforce Australia) when the youngest child reaches 6yrs of age.

**d) Frequency of Contact**

We have observed where it has been possible to increase the frequency of contact with program participants this has often led to an increased likelihood of achieving pre-employment/education plan goals. The ParentsNext program could benefit from minimum monthly contacts with participants of the program with an amended provider payment schedule to reflect this increased frequency of contact.

**e) Incorrect Referrals based on declared earnings**

TAG continues to experience incorrect referrals in circumstances where the participant has been working or declaring income in the previous six months. Where the circumstances of declared income relate to employment, the ParentNext provider could offer tailored Post Placement or access to other wrap-around supports. Consideration could be given to legitimise eligibility for these participants on a voluntary basis. The ultimate benefit would be to maximise ongoing placement retention. This in turn could slow the referral rate back to other DEWR employment programs when the placement does not continue. Where Participants are considering or starting self-employment programs, ParentsNext providers could assist by providing further information about the SEA program.

**f) WorkStar**

Participant WorkStar measurement scores on different occasions in different regional areas could be influenced by a range of external factors such as flood/climate, bushfire, periods of increased COVID-19 activity, labour market conditions across different regions, interest rate rises. The timing of these



external events is outside the control of service providers. For this reason, the Workstar KPI measurement should not be included within the Provider KPI measurement framework.

The ParentsNext pre-employment program is meeting a clear and needed gap in the pre-employment preparation market with TAG having 1095 participants in the program (as at 27/10/22) with 90% of our participants commenced and participating on program. TAG is not aware of a similar pre-employment preparation program for Parents/Carers in receipt of the Commonwealth Parents Payment.

The WA State Government currently provides the Jobs Skills Centre, offering access to career counselling, and links to TAFE courses and potential employers. Their program is more suited for individuals who are job-ready rather than pre-employment preparation. ParentsNext provides a holistic case management service and links to key community support, allowing parents to prepare for employment, a service not currently available elsewhere. This improves the participants' capacity and capability to engage long-term in the labour market.

Government programs such as ParentsNext offer parents a plan to prepare for employment, but also a plan that is guided by vital and professional encouragement. This encouragement goes on to assist them in setting active and achievable goals for a long and successful career, beyond the ParentsNext program. The services ParentsNext provide, contribute to that extra level of confidence and encouragement that communities need to begin studying or entering the workforce. This type of specialised assistance not only favours families but improves Australian society and way of life by encouraging all parents to participate in the economy and continue developing their work and study aspirations.

TAG would be prepared and willing to provide further information to the committee as required, in reference to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services, within the scope of services that TAG provides.

Bala Suppiah  
Director

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