

## **Submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Administration and Purchasing of Disability Employment Services in Australia.**

### **About the Australian Network on Disability**

The Australian Network on Disability (AND) is not-for-profit organisation that assists businesses to build their disability confidence and successfully engage with people with disability as employees and customers. We have approximately 120 members with around 50% private sector and 50% public sector. In combination our members employ approximately 10% of the Australian workforce.

### **Introduction**

The Australian Network on Disability has worked with employers for over ten years, and through that work we have learned that the reasons that employers recruit people with disability are because they can do the job and because it's the right thing to do.

Many employers invest substantial time and effort to develop their internal capability to recruit and retain people with disability and they do so in the belief that the government's system supports their efforts. They want Australia to give people with disability a 'fair go'.

Employers are surprised, alarmed, concerned and may become even less interested when they realise that the current performance framework for Government's key program, Disability Employment Services, has no requirement to focus on the quality of the outcome achieved for the person with disability.

With this in mind, AND would like to respond to the part (d) of the terms of reference for the inquiry:

*“whether the DES Performance Framework provides the best means of assessing a provider’s ability to deliver services which meet the stated objectives of the Disability Services Act 1986 such as enabling services that are flexible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities, and encourage innovation in the provision of such services”*

The current performance framework does not reward quality outcomes. In this submission, AND provides the Committee with three case studies to illustrate how the current system does not encourage the best outcome both for individuals, employers and the economy.

### **Case Study One**

holds three degrees from the University of Newcastle: a Bachelor of Economics, a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Mathematics. Throughout these degrees he has maintained a distinction average, been placed on the Dean’s Commendation List twice and awarded a University prize. also lives with depression and social anxiety disorder.

Following the completion of each degree [redacted] has been keen to use his acquired skills and knowledge in employment which is relevant to his expertise. However, since finishing his third degree in 2006, [redacted] has been placed in range of part-time positions through Disability Employment Service providers as a store assistant and cleaner. Whilst working in these positions, [redacted] which saw him significantly underemployed and his skills underutilised, [redacted] experienced frequent periods of poor mental health and hospitalisation.

Research indicates that young men are 40 times more likely to commit suicide once they've been out of work for more than six months<sup>1</sup>. While similar research for underemployment does not exist, it does indicate that detrimental effects on mental well-being are likely for men in a similar situation to [redacted].

In 2011, [redacted] successfully secured an Internship with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs through the Australian Network on Disability Stepping into... program. He gained experience as a program officer, working with datasets and statistics. Following the internship, [redacted] has accepted a full-time position graduate with the department. Since being in a role which aligns with his skills and capabilities, [redacted] mental health and general outlook on life has improved markedly. He is paying back his HECS loan and has purchased a new car.

By placing [redacted] not just in employment, but in employment which matches his interests, skills and aptitudes the benefits for [redacted] and also for the broader economy have been dramatic.

To ensure the government achieves the best outcomes for both individuals and for the economy, any performance framework which seeks to assess a provider's ability to deliver services must include a measure of the quality of the outcome, and not just a measure whether an employment placement is made, the speed with which a placement is made, or the length of that placement.

## Case Study 2

[redacted] commenced with a Disability Employment Service in 2004 having completed the State Disability Transition Program. After finishing school, [redacted] had career aspirations to either work in hairdressing or with animals. She also has an intellectual disability.

[redacted] commenced work with McDonald's in Customer Service and worked there for a total of five months. Her second role was in Customer Service for Coles where she worked for 16 months. Following that [redacted] successfully secured an apprenticeship at a hairdressing salon, and completed her trade qualification over the following four years. To get [redacted] to this stable position in the workforce has required long-term support.

Since successfully building a career in her field of interest, [redacted] has gained a license and purchased a vehicle, she has self-confidence, financial freedom and a sense of belonging in the community. Moreover she will now be a long-term participant in the workforce.

case highlights the rewards of working with clients over the long-term to build their employability skills and capacity to work. However, the current framework provides no incentive for DES providers to engage with clients such as over the long term. The current framework which rewards the speed and number of placements creates a drift toward lower support need clients who can be quickly placed in any job.

By not considering the quality of placements in the framework, the government is not gaining the best value for the funds provided to Disability Employment Services.

### **Case Study Three**

A government agency was restructuring and as a result, a position held by a long term employee who was deaf was to be made redundant.

The employer contacted AND for advice on how assistance could be provided to the employee so that they could apply for another role for which the employee was suitable in the organisation. The employee needed assistance for the application and interview process as selection was to be made using merit selection principles. The government program that could help in this situation is called 'Job in Jeopardy'. However, the Disability Employment Service did not support the employer or the employee as there is no incentive. Under the current framework, because the case doesn't attract the same performance outcomes as placing a new jobseeker into employment the DES chose not assist.

This case study provides an example whereby the current performance framework failed the employer and the employee with disability.

### **Final comments**

AND sincerely hopes that these three examples demonstrate to the Committee that there is further work to be done before government re-invests approximately \$1 billion per annum.

**Suzanne Colbert, AM**  
**CEO**  
**Australian Network on Disability**

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<sup>i</sup> The Hon Kate Ellis MP Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare Address to the National Disability Employment Services Forum 2011.