



Friday 7 January 2011

Department of the Senate
PO Box 1600
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

by email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into Planning Options and Services for People Ageing with a Disability

The purpose of this submission by Self Help Workplace is to focus on the issues relating to the ageing of those people with a disability working in supported employment and their carer support network.

Self Help Workplace employs 55 people with a disability at its site in Youngtown (northern Tasmania). Established in 1962, Self Help Workplace has grown to be Launceston's largest Australian Disability Enterprise. A brief description of Self Help Workplace is set out in Appendix 1.

Like many Australian Disability Enterprises, Self Help Workplace must respond to the confluence of three significant issues:

- an ageing disabled workforce;
- a large cohort of employees who have worked at Self Help Workplace for most of their working life; and
- an ageing carer support network

Each of these issues by themselves would create significant challenges, but together, they represent a potential threat to the health and wellbeing of our disabled workforce and the viability of the enterprise.

Three actions by Government that would assist to address these issues include:

1. increasing the number of places in day support programs and activities and respite;
2. providing support for carers about what to expect and how to manage the issues related to their own aging and their ageing dependents
3. removing the limit on the number of supported employment places at ADEs (abolition of capped case based funding).

Action 1 would assist by:

- providing supported employees with experience of and contact with others in the community that would decrease their reliance on work as their primary source of friends and activity. This in turn would reduce their fear of retirement (and reluctance to take holidays);
- providing supported employees with activities to transition into part time or full time retirement;
- providing supported employees with age appropriate activities that accommodate their health related issues (forgetfulness, need for sleep, incontinence and so on);
- providing carers with other contacts in the community who can provide support and understanding;

Action 2 would assist by:

- empowering carers to identify and respond to their own ageing and that of their dependents;
- reducing the burden on employers to provide support and assistance to carers (eg. such as completing Government forms);
- providing carers with an independent source of information and advice. At present, many ADEs attempt to support their employees and their carers. However, in some instances, the needs of both groups do not coincide and ADE's first concern is that of their adult employees.

Action 3 would assist by:

- allowing employers to encourage employees to work part time and ease their transition into retirement ;
- recognising that many aging employees do not have the desire or capacity to work full time;
- allowing employers to develop and maintain a workforce that has the capacity to meet the demands of running a viable and sustainable commercial enterprise, including training new employees.

Case Study – ageing workforce and carers

The difficulties identified above are illustrated by the following case study which draws in the stories we hear at Self Help Workplace. The names have been changed to protect the privacy of employees and their families.

Albert is 52 years old and has been working in the same disability enterprise for 25 years. He lives at home with his mother. His mother is 82 years of age. At present Albert and his mother live in an independent living unit in a retirement village close to where he works. Albert does not drive and walks to work. Albert's mother's health is deteriorating and she has already been hospitalised on several occasions and was recently hospitalised for 10 days. Fortunately, Albert's neighbours in the retirement village keep an eye out for him and make sure he is eating properly. Albert's mother has made arrangements that should she die before Albert that the home will be sold and smaller accommodation will be bought for Albert. It is not known where this new home will be.

The following issues arise out of this common example:

- Albert has accumulated more than 6 weeks of long service leave which he doesn't plan to take because he is not sure how to spend the time away from work. He has limited contacts outside of work and relies heavily on his mother for social contact;
- Albert was very distressed during his mother's most recent illness and needed counselling and support;
- Albert has limited independent living skills and would need assistance to complete daily tasks such as clothes washing and grocery shopping.
- Albert and his mother need assistance to plan for his retirement from work and the life changes that will take place in the coming years (including the death of his mother and her friends)
- Albert may need assistance and supporting in continuing to work when he moves to his new home when his mother dies.

Responding to the Challenge – The Pathways Program

Self Help Workplace has initiated the Pathways Project to address the immediate and long term challenges of an ageing supported workforce. Managing this issue is a key part of the organisation's 2010-2013 Strategic Plan. The Pathways Project aims to improve enhance the quality of life of supported employees by providing them with realistic and desirable alternatives to work and a workforce plan to



guide Self Help Workplace's planning and management of its supported workforce. The project is formulated on the principles of a person centred and evidence-based approaches to planning and program delivery.

Stage 1: Preliminary Research

The first stage of this project involves initial research to identify the key needs and expectations of employees of Self Help Workplace and their carers about:

- how to plan for and enjoy holidays; and
- preparing for an active and healthy retirement

This stage of the project has been funded by the Jessica and Wallace Hore Foundation, managed by Perpetual. A grant of \$5,000 has allowed Self Help Workplace to retain the expertise of 3P Consulting to undertake interviews with 22 employees who are older than 45 years and/or have accumulated significant annual leave and/or long service leave.

The deliverable for this stage will be a workforce plan and individual plans for employees including activity programs.

This stage will be completed by 17th February 2011.

Stage 2: Pilot Program

Stage 2 will involve a pilot with a target sub-group of 6 people from the above group. Over 3 months, Self Help Workplace will implement the individual plans that have been prepared in Stage 1. This will involve recruiting supporters and partners (such as the Launceston Aquatic Centre and other program and venue providers) and walking along side employees and their carers as the program is implemented. For example, some employees will require support to get accustomed to new transport routes, carers will need re-assurance that their children are not distressed but are happy with the new activities and venues and providers (such as craft teachers) may need support to adjust their programs to meet the needs of our disabled employees. The program will be evaluated at every stage with a final report setting out the issues and recommendations for the Pathways full scale implementation.

Self Help Workplace has sought funding of \$14,556 under the Tasmanian Government's Community Capacity Building Grant Program. The outcome of this grant application is expected to be known shortly.

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Self Help Workplace must respond to many challenges in the coming years in order to fulfil its vision to sustain and grow a vibrant innovative disability enterprise which provides access to meaningful employment for anyone with a disability who wants to work and enables people with a disability to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives. Our mission is to provide a supportive workplace where we empower people with disabilities to take pride in their work, celebrate their achievements and produce quality products and service.



Key amongst these challenges is responding to the issues arising from ageing disabled workforce and ageing carer support network. Self Help Workplace has always made and will continue to make decisions that are guided by the principle of “what is in the best interests of our supported employees”. Self Help Workplace seeks (and expects) the support and commitment of Government to ensure that this can occur.

Self Help Workplace endorses the submission by National Disability Services in response to this enquiry.

Any questions about this submission may be directed to myself.

Yours faithfully,

(...)

Donna Bain

General Manager

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Appendix 1: The role of Self Help Workplace

Self Help Workshop Inc (trading as Self Help Workplace and Encore Clothing) is an incorporated not for profit association. The Australian Taxation Office has granted Self Help Workshop an exemption from income tax and has also granted deductible gift recipient status (as a Public Benevolent Institution).

Self Help Workplace has been providing supported employment for people with a disability since 1962. There are now 55 employees¹ with a disability and 9 staff working at Self Help.

Self Help Workplace funds its operations through revenue generated from the sales of goods and services (50%), case based funding from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (40%), donations, membership subscriptions and grants (10%).²

Commercial activities at Self Help include:

- Production
- Business Services
- Training Room/Catering
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Production:

The production area currently is supported by 2 staff and approximately 13 employees. The production area is responsible for manufacturing a wide range of wood products including:

- Pallets
- Garden stakes
- Survey pegs
- Produce boxes
- Customised wood packaging
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Business Services:

The services area currently engages 3 staff and approximately 29 employees who are involved in a range of activities requiring hand finishing. This includes:

- Mail outs
- Print finishing
- Washing and ironing clothes for sale in the second hand clothing outlet – Encore Clothing
- Recycling unsuitable clothing for use as rags, fabric off-cuts for craft and on-selling
- Hand assembly

Conferences/Catering/Life Skills:

This division of Self Help is responsible for:

- Managing the staff canteen that provides healthy meals to employees and staff;
- Providing commercial catering for events
- Servicing the conference/training room; and
- Implementing the Life Skills Program.

Building Life Skills

¹ All references in this submission to “employees” refers to people with a disability employed by Self Help Workplace

² Audited Financial Statements 2009-2010, Self Help Workshop Annual Report



Self Help Workplace is more than just a place of work and a thriving business. One of our goals is also to improve the health and wellbeing of our employees. We worked to achieve this goal through the Life Skills Program that incorporates the following elements:

- A full time Life Skills Co-ordinator to provide life skills training to Self Help employees;
- A life skills program for employees that includes training in:
 - Food preparation
 - Personal hygiene
 - Work hygiene
 - Building and maintaining a kitchen garden (new program)
 - Healthy choices - making healthy choices at home and away (new program)
- Maintaining a canteen that:
 - Provides healthy meal choices for employees; and
 - Provide catering for visitors to the Workplace and other groups using the conference/training room
 - provides corporate catering for businesses and organisations throughout Launceston (new service)
- Maintain a kitchen garden that:
 - teaches employees about growing healthy food; and
 - supplies produce for use in the kitchen
- Operate a corporate catering services that:
 - extends the cooking experience of our employees; and
 - allows our employees to promote their skills to the community.