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Senators Boyce, Furner and Siewert
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senators

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

Thank you for the opportunity to present at the Senate References Committee hearing on 8 November 2010. We were most grateful to be able to put forward a number of our thoughts with regard to this most important topic. I have prepared the following statement in response to issues taken on notice and/or discussed during our involvement in the hearing process.

Ensuring the integrity of service delivery – Potential conflicts if one provider offered both service provision and a planning function

During the course of the hearing, I indicated that a strong, robust, open and transparent governance and accountability regime, including some form of independent and rigorous audit, should minimise the fear that a conflict of interest might exist with regard to the respective roles of “planner” and “provider”.

As part of that process, one would assume that the funding body (relevant Government agency) should be able to assess if referrals were being directed to other providers or if there was an abnormal skew towards any one organisation due to the provider and planner being the same agency. We would make the point that there may well be sound reasons why a particular service receives additional referrals – a given service may well be the most appropriate, relevant or best quality option; the critical issue is that the client has and is able to exercise informed choice.

Such a process would not directly implicate the users in any way, which may well address the concern expressed by Senator Boyce (Page CA39) re a “culture of fear amongst parents and carers” if they were to lodge a complaint.

One would hope that some form of survey might also be undertaken to supplement data and information gleaned from the above; as well, as I mentioned at the hearing, the appropriate use of sanctions and contractual obligations should reinforce expectations about the need for appropriate and transparent referral to providers by those agencies with a planning role.

I also recall making a point that increased management/control of funding by clients could well lead to improved options and services, as people with disability could move between providers if they were dissatisfied with services offered by a particular provider.

Feedback on Quality of Life Issues

As reflected in my comments at the hearing, it is important that a range of mechanisms are considered when seeking feedback re the experiences of a person with disability regarding the above. From a service provider perspective, and taking into account various comments made by people with disability and/or their carers/families with whom we have interacted, I would offer the following observations.

During the hearing, I did refer to compliance and accountability strategies which may assist in some way including the role of a third party in establishing the effectiveness and level of satisfaction with service delivery and planning of services – I do not believe it necessary to elaborate on same, as I understand the Committee noted the points being made. I would also reiterate the comment above regarding the potential for self managed funding to enable clients to move between providers should they not be satisfied with a given service.

There is a strong view expressed by some that the development of personal networks and circles of friends is a most useful strategy to address concerns over safety, complaints and like matters. This is an approach which would have merit for a number of people, as the more expansive and diverse the relationships and supports that a person with disability has, the more likely he/she is to be part of community life and able to realise their goals.

As well, such a framework helps facilitate planning from a whole of life or lifelong perspective, a principle that we have promoted in our submission. We encourage the development of a range of networks to help facilitate the achievement of one's goals and share experiences and information.

Centre for Excellence

As outlined in our submission and on 8th November, we believe there is merit in consolidating the various arrangements surrounding disability, through some form of overarching body.

Similarly, we would see value in a Centre of Excellence that acted as both a repository and a focal point for successful, innovative, or different models of service delivery and planning, as well as research into such topics.

All too often, it is difficult for stakeholders - whether they be people with disability, families/carers, service providers or Government - to locate and access research findings, information and examples of what has been tried, what has worked out well and not so well. In the environment of scarce resources in which the disability/community sector often operates, a Centre for Excellence would prove a most valuable resource.

At Bedford, we pride ourselves on having relevant and effective planning tools which address both individual needs and service delivery considerations. Our people take an active role in the development and review of their individual plans, which may have both short term and longer term perspectives. We would welcome the opportunity to share our experiences and learnings.

Bedford has also embarked on a number of innovative programmes to provide opportunities for people with disability, well illustrated by our accredited training initiative "Abilities for All". The initial concept of this programme was initiated in 2000 in partnership with the State Government (per DFEST) and TAFE SA; it was designed to meet the needs of people with disability working in Bedford's supported employment (ADE) workforce. In 2006/07 the initiative was expanded to allow the participation of workers with disability from other ADEs in the State. Such an initiative would fit well within the framework of a Centre for Excellence.

I trust you find these qualifying comments of use in your deliberations.

Should you wish to clarify any matter in my response, please do not hesitate to contact me. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

PHIL FARROW
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