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Inquiry into mental health and workforce participation 2011

Submission by Sally Bailey

National Disability Coordination Officer Program Region 14

Hosted by SkillsPlus Ltd.

SkillsPlus Ltd. is a not-for-profit community based organisation providing open employment support to people with disabilities, support services for disadvantaged clients and specialist support services to disengaged and at risk youth in the Mornington Peninsula, Frankston, Upper Ferntree Gully, Dandenong and Moorabbin areas of Melbourne.

SkillsPlus Ltd. hosts the National Disability Coordination Officer program (NDCO) Program which is funded by the Department of Education Employment and Workplace relations (DEEWR). The NDCO Program aims to improve the transition of people with a disability aged 15 to 64 into further education, training and employment. The NDCO program provides information, coordination and referral activities for educational and employment services and people with a disability.

The Managing Mental Health Project was delivered under National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program Strategic Projects funds from June 2010 to January 2011. The projects aim was to deliver seven professional development workshops to service managers from compulsory education through to further education, training and employment to facilitate the development of holistic service provision to individuals with mental health issues.

The workshop asked service managers to look at their service and see what they can do to assist cultural change including reviewing relevant policies and procedures in light of the knowledge gained from the workshops. The workshops and the handbook are a guide to developing polices and procedures and address the importance of social inclusion and service continuity, networks and partnerships as a reflection of what has been identified as the positive direction for service users in the 4th National Mental Health strategy. The workshops created a context in which most participants agreed is the basis for the development of better practices to support their services users with mental health conditions.

The Managing Mental Health project was a catalyst for changing practice in many Disability Employment Services in Victoria and has provided useful information about some issues that need to be addressed to continue improving services and outcomes for people with mental health conditions. In particular this project has provided insight into the need for mental health services to take a more active approach in engaging with employment services who are at the coal face of

everyday barriers to participation of people with mental health conditions and who need support and training to be effective in their role.

There were approximately 98 participants involved in the workshops with more than 80% being Disability Employment Services (DES) Managers and the rest being a combination of Mental Health Service Managers and Educational representatives. There were four methods of evaluation used for this project; pre and post self assessments, a workshop assessment, an online survey and interviews with participants several months after the workshops. From these evaluations we are able to provide the following recommendations to this enquiry.

Barriers

- 1. The recognition of the need for a formalised staff mental health training policy within Disability Employment Services.** Mental health is a heightened concern for people with employment barriers and in particular those with serious mental health conditions. There is a lack of consistency in staff training and knowledge of how to best support a client with a mental health conditions. All DES Managers raised the cost of 'Mental Health First Aid' training and 'Disclosing Mental Health in the Workplace' training as a significant barrier. The high turn over of staff means that training new staff is an ongoing cost for DES.

Recommendations

- 1.1. DES need to be placing a priority on the skills needed to support clients with mental health conditions by making appropriate staff training a part of their organisational policy.*
- 1.2. DEEWR should subsidise or fund the cost of minimum training required for their staff supporting clients with mental health conditions.*

- 2. There is a lack of knowledge in DES about how to access resources and information about mental health particularly in relation to appropriately accessing mental health services for clients.** There was a consistent theme through each of the workshops, discussions and evaluations about how to support a client with a serious mental health condition. DES are experiences a high level of confusion about how to access the most appropriate service for their clients. This was particularly evident during discussions about suicidal clients or those making violent threats. Managers were deeply concerned about the legality of these situations and their duty of care to staff who are there to find people employment and do not have a skills set in this area. Solutions ranged from calling the police to calling an ambulance to speaking with the CAT team and being frustrated about the lack of assistance. There were many examples of a lack of consistency of information about how to best work through these situations.

Recommendations

- 2.1 Mental Health Services need to actively communicate a consistent message to DES and training services on how to best support a client in these situations. Mental Health Services need a community educator dedicated to educating regional services about Mental Health Services and supports and how to appropriately access them.*

2.2 Information and resources about Mental Health Services need to be regionally based easily accessible and in a language that is accessible to those outside of the industry.

3. **Networking with other services to develop partnerships in service provision.** When there is no relationship between services and no opportunity to network it creates a barrier in providing consistent and supportive services to people with mental health conditions. The workshops demonstrated an overwhelming interest in understanding how DES, Mental Health and Training services could work together. Participants commented that there are few opportunities to have conversations that develop these partnerships. Although there are Mental Health Services that have agreements with a DES they are often providing this service in an exclusive way and are not seeing the need to work with other DES in their area.

Recommendations

- 3.1 DEEWR funded employment programs need to develop initiatives with State funded Mental Health Services to provide common outcomes that benefit a range of client needs.*
- 3.2 Initiatives need to facilitate clients with mental health conditions seeking education, training and employment on a long term consistent basis to consider the periodic nature of some mental health conditions.*
- 3.3 There is a need to have more formal protocols between Mental Health Services and Disability Employment Services. There are brokerage and coordinating programs such as the NDCO program that could be used to facilitate the development of regional partnerships.*
- 3.4 DES need more guidance to develop policies and procedures such as samples and guidelines for memorandums of understanding.*

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