

**Submission to Senate Enquiry Employment and Workplace Relations
Amendment (Welfare to Work and other Measures) Bill 2005
Albury NSW 17 November 2005**

BACKGROUND:

Personnel Employment Albury Wodonga Inc operating for 19 years.
The General Manager Christine Sanger worked in the disability specialist employment industry for 18 years,
Albury Wodonga (Hume and Kiewa ESA) 240 clients,
and 78 in the rural region surrounding Deniliquin and Griffith (Sturt ESA).

**Summary of the issues for jobseekers with a disability in
Personnel Employment Albury/ Wodonga, Griffith and Deniliquin.**

ISSUE 1# : The provision of two different streams of accessing our service will impede the ongoing success for those individuals who are our primary group. The splitting of our primary group into two sectors (DSP and NS/YA Enhanced) does not address the needs of this group properly.

The success of DOE's, is based on the premise that participation in our services is voluntary. Approximately 50% are on DSP and the other 50% on Newstart or other income supports. For jobseekers on DSP participation is voluntary. Many young people take up Newstart/Youth Allowance instead of DSP, because of their wish for their disability not to be a stigma. This arises out of the years since the DSA and the subsequent encouragement for people to be regular contributing members of the community. We have seen this eroded over the past 10 years with the need to have their disability quantified as significant to be eligible for a DOE service, i.e. encouraging them to concentrate on their incapacity.

RECOMMENDATION: The uncapping all places for DOE's and the amalgamation of the newly tendered uncapped places into our usual business would provide these clients with a more appropriate service.

ISSUE 2#: The new 'enhanced Newstart' will more likely be a deterrent, to seeking employment for people with a disability.

The reduction in income will make people feel more anxious, and confuse those who have limited learning capacity.

They lack confidence in their ability to secure employment, so will withdraw rather than confidently work in the system

The compliance process will confuse many, and they will be caught out by the system with no understanding of why, creating anxiety and concerns. If they are with a DOE, they will be assisted, however if not they will experience extreme difficulties with the system.

Mutual obligations requirements to look for a particular number of jobs a week, is in direct conflict with the individual job matching to secure the right long term employment placement. A person with a disability in our experience rarely has the confidence to contact employers directly, and would be face far more rejection than most. For people with depression or schizophrenia, it is likely to hinder recovery that could be achieved with a positive employment experience.

The proposed **Rapid Reconnect** (in the first instance of linking the unemployed to a service to look for work, and then secondarily looking at income supplement), will place unnecessary burdens on our clients. Clients will be inappropriately referred to a Job Network agency, and not back to a DOE. Historically, people with a disability have not been high income earners, and require an easy, prompt avenue to be available to them for income support.

RECOMMENDATION: There is not a need for the 'enhanced Newstart' to encourage jobseekers with a disability to look for work. At the very least remove the compliance requirements, and increase Rapid Reconnect provision to DOE's for people with a disability

ISSUE 3# : The new Assessment Process will be based on a medical assessment.

Disability capacity is often not indicative of employment capacity We consistently experience the lack of knowledge by medical professionals of the requirements and needs of the labour market when assessing or referring jobseekers with a disability.

Assessors will need to have a detailed understanding of the difference between support services such as DOE's and Job Network's.

The changing demands of the labour market, significantly impacts on our ability to secure employment for clients that are restricted in their employment choices.

In the main our jobseekers are low skilled or unskilled, and cannot meet workplace demands for multiskilling, IT knowledge, or various certificates of competencies.

Where other jobseekers have the capacity for learning, and physical abilities, many people with a disability, have learning restrictions and physical restrictions. We welcome increased opportunities for learning for jobseekers with a disability, but there is a need to recognise that this will not necessarily provide them the skills needed to succeed in the current and emerging labour market.

This is where a specialist agency may be able to work with an employer to negotiate to tailor a job to that jobseeker.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local labour market conditions need to be taken into consideration for the Work Capacity Assessments. Employment opportunities will be very dependant on type of employment availability, and the limitations of people's disability. In regional and rural areas this is an even more urgent consideration.

ISSUE 4#: Potential for wrong assessment

Most of our jobseekers have mild intellectual, learning disability, or psychiatric disability. Our experience is that they can quite skillfully present competently, because they wish to look competent for employment. Their naive confidence in their capacity and their non understanding of labour market demands could conceivably see them assessed as eligible to meet the 'enhanced Newstart' work capacity criteria. They may well then be referred to an inappropriate service where their needs will not be adequately addressed, resulting in them experiencing continual short term employment.

Some of our clients can sustain employment for a period of time with minimal support, however over the longer term many have maintained their employment because the (DOE) has been able to provide assistance, when there is a threat of job loss. This can be well beyond the two year period, of support indicated in 'enhanced Newstart' It would only be the minority of our clients whom have not required long term ongoing support.

RECOMMENDATION:The new Assessment System will need to have adequate safe guards to ensure people with a disability are not inappropriately assessed and referred, with options for re assessment readily and easily accessible.

For example: A DSP client with a mental health condition has been registered with our service since 1995 – during that time she has experienced periods of wellness and illness resulting in hospitalisation. During this time the client has been assisted by the agency to source 7 employment positions, which ranged in longevity from 1 day to 7 months.

ISSUE 5#: Mobility Allowance In regional and rural areas the cost of attending work can be high because limited or no public transport options.

The increase in the mobility allowance is well received, but the tightening of eligibility for this mobility allowance to a minimum of 15 hours work or job search, and the removal of its use for volunteer work negates its benefits to many of our clients. Accessing the mobility allowance has been very difficult in practice, and will be further so when the proposed changes are implemented.

RECOMMENDATION:

Access should be maintained as per current criteria, with the increased value.