



STARTTS

NSW SERVICE FOR THE TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION
OF TORTURE AND TRAUMA SURVIVORS

CARRAMAR

152-168 Horsley Drive
Carramar NSW 2163

PO Box 203
Fairfield NSW 2165

T: +61 2 9794 1900

F: +61 2 9794 1910

E: startts@swsahs.nsw.gov.au

www.startts.org

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Employment Participation
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

5 February 2008

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on the effectiveness of the current government employment services.

The New South Wales Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) is a specialist provider of the Personal Support Programme (PSP) to a caseload of 213 whose lives have been affected by torture and other issues in the context of the refugee experience. All of our PSP clients are referred with barriers associated with Torture and Trauma and/or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in addition to a range of other barriers.

The single barrier of Torture and Trauma refers to multiple difficulties and symptoms that include settlement difficulties for self and family, continuing trauma due to war or violence in country of origin, physical problems resulting from torture, psychological problems resulting from torture and trauma such as anxiety, hyper arousal, sleep disturbances, intrusive memories and social isolation. Alongside these, STARTTS PSP clients are referred with many additional barriers most commonly including depression, anxiety conditions, social isolation, physical health problems, low levels of English, problems with confidence and self esteem and family problems. Most of our clients are over 40 (many over 50) and almost all have no experience of paid work in Australia. More than ninety percent of our clients do not speak English and require interpreting for all PSP participation.

Achieving sustainable employment is an important recovery goal for our clients and STARTTS provides a range of services to assist our clients towards that goal. In addition to the PSP core services of assessment, counselling, practical support and advocacy, STARTTS provides specialist services to PSP clients. These include psychological counselling, physiotherapy, group social activities, skills training such as English and Computer classes, vocational training (such as interpreter training), a psychiatric clinic and the availability of professional interpreting for all meetings with PSP counsellors.

Our PSP has a very high retention rate and our combination of services has been successful in assisting almost all our PSP clients to achieve Social Outcomes during their two years in the program as well as assisting a much

BRANCH OFFICES:

AUBURN

Level 1,
44-50 Auburn Rd
Auburn NSW 2144

PO Box 258
Auburn NSW 2144

T: +61 2 9646 6666
F: +61 2 9646 6610

LIVERPOOL

3rd Floor,
157-161 George St
Liverpool NSW 2170

PO Box 203
Fairfield NSW 2165

T: +61 2 8778 2000
F: +61 2 8778 2020

smaller number to Economic Outcomes during the same timeframe. Achieving such Social Outcomes over two years is extremely valuable for the individual participants in our PSP and will help them to build pathways towards sustainable employment in the future.

Since the Welfare to Work legislation was introduced, changes to the social security system and performance management of employment services have presented some difficulties in providing PSP services for the highly disadvantaged jobseekers referred to our specialist PSP program.

Currently, issues that interfere with the effectiveness of PSP for our client group include:

- The move of PSP from FACS to DEWR and changes introduced under Welfare to Work resulted in a shift in emphasis in PSP from Social Outcomes to Economic Outcomes. In the current servicing model Economic Outcomes have a higher weighting as a performance indicator and payments for Economic Outcomes are higher. Reports from other specialist providers in NSW indicate that there is a very low rate of Economic Outcomes amongst exclusive specialist providers (between 1% and 4%). Due to the severity and complexity of their barriers, only a small percentage of STARTTS PSP clients achieve Economic Outcomes within two years. The current weighting does not recognize the importance of social inclusion and Social Outcomes in fostering the ability of individual refugees who are particularly disadvantaged, to find a pathway to sustainable employment
- Changes to eligibility requirements for Disability Support Payment have had a dramatic affect on the nature of referrals being made to our PSP. There have been an ever increasing number of clients being referred to our PSP with extremely high numbers of complex barriers and with remote prospects of being job-ready within two years. This has included an increase in the number of referrals of people with physical illnesses that severely limit their mobility and of participants with severe psychiatric illness in addition to all the symptoms of refugee trauma that they may also be experiencing. This high level of illness means that the clients are not able to take full advantage of the kinds of support that PSP has been designed to provide thus limiting their PSP related results particularly in the area of Economic Outcomes.
- Changes to eligibility requirements for Parenting Payment have led to increased numbers of women referred to our services who have never been required to carry out paid employment. Entering paid employment in Australia is an important longer-term goal for such PSP clients. However, their experience and expectations of work combined with their other barriers linked to refugee trauma, and the need to support their families in establishing lives in Australia, present enormous additional cultural and practical barriers to paid employment. These are not likely to be overcome within two years. This further reduces the capacity that STARTTS has to achieve Economic Outcomes within the two year period, and places an unnecessary stress on participants to enter employment before they and their families are ready for them to do so.
- Changes in performance management of PSP, in particular the shift in emphasis in PSP from Social Outcomes to Economic Outcomes and the accompanying introduction of a single score that is weighted in favour of

Economic Outcomes unfairly disadvantages our service as a specialist PSP for participants that have consistently more complex and severe barriers than those referred to generalist providers.

- The introduction of the PSP single score as a comparative measure of provider performance, alongside the increase in weighting for Economic Outcomes, has had a negative impact on our ability to maintain HPIF scores at the high level we achieved prior to the introduction of the current system. The single score system does not adequately recognize the particular demands and limitations of working with the highly disadvantaged participants in our specialist provider caseload.
- Since Welfare to Work changes were introduced an increasing number of people are referred to our PSP because they are awaiting a decision re an application for Disability Support Pension. As is common, when such participants are awarded DSP and become voluntary, in most cases they choose to exit PSP. This has a negative affect on our HPIF scores. In addition, while such participants are in PSP they take the place of other potential participants who have more need and interest in using the program to overcome barriers to employment.
- The introduction of Welfare to Work changes and shifts in emphasis in the HPIF, coinciding with the introduction of EA3000 to PSP and new accompanying systems for payment claims and for client case management, has led to a significant increase in the amount of time and money spent on administration. An example of this is the great amount of time spent following up inadequate or inappropriate referrals from JCAs or the length of time required to complete an initial Intervention Plan that has an excessive number of barriers listed. The effect of the changes has not only been to make it more difficult to provide an efficient service but also has the potential to damage staff morale. It has made the provision of the additional specialist services that we have provided to our clients since we began our PSP, such as a variety of social and vocational groups, more difficult to achieve as there is less time for developing and providing such services when more time must be spent on the administration of the program.

Job seekers referred to our PSP have extremely high levels of disadvantage and therefore need more intensive assistance and training following completion of PSP if they are to be successful eventually in finding pathways to successful employment. While it is widely accepted that employment brings psychological, social and economic benefits to individuals who experience barriers of PTSD and Torture and Trauma, the effects of these barriers compound all other barriers experienced by such clients in PSP and significantly extend the length of time that it can be reasonably expected a person will need in order to become job-ready. Nevertheless, PSP remains a constructive and effective longer term strategy to enable this group to achieve economic as well as Social Outcomes.

Although Intensive Support and Customised Assistance is available to our clients through job networks, it has been the experience of this service that our clients have a very low take-up rate of ISCA. Many of our clients who are referred ISCA while in PSP return to PSP before finding employment. This usually occurs because the job network does not provide the level of customised support that the client needs to be able to take the step into

employment or because the job network considers the participant unsuitable for ISCA because they are not completely job-ready. Nevertheless, refugee participants have a lot to gain from formal engagement with job networks as part of a process to become job-ready.

Changes to the current system that would help jobseekers from refugee backgrounds enter sustainable employment include:

- A higher level of customised assistance routinely available to refugee participants referred to ISCA including more flexible access to jobseeker training accounts, higher levels of personal support from caseworkers, information and training about Australian work systems
- Job network providers with specialist expertise to assist jobseekers with barriers of Torture and Trauma and PTSD

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on these important questions. We would be happy to contribute to further discussion or to provide you with detailed case studies to illustrate the issues that we have raised.

Yours sincerely

Jorge Aroche
Executive Director
STARTTS