

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Employment Participation
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

7 February 2008

Dear Minister,

I am writing in response to your request for feedback from employment service providers and other stakeholders around the current employment services model. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback which will contribute to the ongoing planning and improvement of employment services.

Northcott Disability Services provides support to job seekers with disabilities through the Disability Employment Network (DEN) program. The JOBMATCH service currently has 98 capped DEN places, and operates within the Inner West, Canterbury/Bankstown, Fairfield/Liverpool, Outer West, Central West and North Shore employment service areas.

Following is Northcott's feedback regarding achieving the objectives identified in the Government's Social Inclusion and Skills policies;

- **Early intervention minimise the number of long-term welfare dependent Australians of working age** – Although early intervention is an effective strategy for supporting job seekers, they also must be 'job ready'. Northcott receives a number of unsuitable referrals for people who do not have the capacity to job seek at that time. Additional support preparing people to be 'job ready', would be beneficial in utilising an early intervention approach.

In regard to the capped places, Northcott continually receives referrals for suitable people who are unable to be accepted onto the program due to the restrictions of the capped places. These people are placed on a waiting list, and are required to wait for support. This process is inconsistent with the early intervention approach.

- **Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker** – In order to adequately support job seekers, it is important for employment services to have an understanding of their needs. For example, JOBMATCH is a DEN provider and has extensive experience in supporting people with disabilities in all aspects of their lives. Therefore they have the information, skills and resources required to provide a comprehensive service to the target group.

These same principles apply to job seekers with a range of specific needs (including drug and alcohol dependency or cultural diversity), who should have access to a service which can adequately meet their needs. In some instances, such as when supporting people from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, this may involve seeking additional resources to adequately meet these clients communication needs through the provision of translated information and interpreter support. Currently the resources available do not adequately meet the needs of the clients.

- ***Job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance*** – In order for people with high levels of disadvantage to receive intensive assistance, there needs to be clear criteria regarding eligibility for this support. For example, within the current system, many people with disabilities are currently incorrectly assessed as being eligible for Newstart, which leads to them losing their Disability Support Pension and a number of benefits associated with this pension. The incorrect assessments are based on an inadequate Disability Pre-employment Instrument (DPI), which does not have the capacity to assess the complex support needs of people with a range of disabilities. Therefore, this type of assessment needs to be reviewed in order to target people with higher levels of disadvantage and complex needs.

An example of this is for people who have a hearing or vision impairment. Neither of these disabilities are adequately reflected in the DPI, therefore this leads to a low DPI result, and in turn, a client is not funded for the amount of support they actually require. A way of rectifying this issue would be to review the DPI in consultation with the community and employment services, to ensure the complex needs of clients are adequately represented.

The assessment process is key to ensuring that clients receive adequate support to achieve their employment outcomes. Failure to address this will contribute to an inability of people to secure and maintain employment, and services will be unable to use an early intervention approach.

- ***Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers (including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs)*** – Northcott supports the concept of providing incentives for training, including guaranteed employment at the completion of training. This process will assist the DEN clients to develop skills and improve employability.
- ***Job seekers receive appropriate training*** – As identified above, Northcott supports incentives related to training, as training is a crucial aspect of the development of skills, confidence, overcoming barriers, and ultimately securing and maintaining employment. Clients will greatly benefit from further government funded training in areas such as customer service and acceptable behaviour in the work place. Courses such as these, will enhance a clients ability to secure and maintain a position in the open employment market, and will also increase their confidence in their own abilities.

- **Performance management principles (including star ratings and business reallocation) that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery and** – Northcott recognises that performance management is essential in regulating and improving the quality of service provision. There are issues however with the current model. Currently there is no correlation between the star rating system and accreditation requirements. Northcott feels these performance management systems should be more closely related, and client focussed. The star rating system is based solely on the employment outcomes for clients, without taking into account the quality of the program and factors influencing employment outcomes. For example, a DEN provider may have passed their benchmark audit to a very high standard, but because they have not achieved as high outcomes as other service providers, they receive a lower star rating. This star rating does not reflect the quality of the service, however clients are required to choose a service based on this rating.
- **The minimisation spent on time and money spent on administration** – Northcott strongly supports initiatives to reduce time, money and effort spent on administration. Currently there is duplication and overlap around reporting requirements of the program, which contributes to the administrative burden.

For example, the required Activity Agreements do not address areas such as a client's health needs, therefore the service provider must develop strategies to capture this information separately. In addition, Northcott is currently required to collect data through GEMMA and EA3000. Both of these processes involve duplication in terms of data collection and entry.

Northcott has had a number of positive experiences working with DEEWR over the past year and a half, including improved communication and the allocation of an additional 5 capped places. Northcott looks forward to further developing and enhancing this positive relationship with the new government, in turn leading to enhanced employment outcomes for job seekers.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Tomlinson

MANAGER

Jobmatch – DEN & TTW Programs