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

Dear Minister,

RE: Feedback on the Current Range of Employment Services

On behalf of the Board, the Staff and the young people we work with, congratulations on becoming the Minister of Employment Participation and we wish you well in this important role. We welcome the new Government that sees homelessness, social justice and social inclusion as essential to a healthy society. We thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the current employment services arrangements.

Background Information on JYSS: Joondalup Youth Support Services (JYSS) has been in operation for over 20 years. Our main aim is to support young disadvantaged and young homeless people. JYSS delivers a range of services to at risk young people in the northern metropolitan region of WA. Those services include housing for homeless youth, 'Connections' an alternative education program, drug education programs, mentoring, community youth development, emergency relief and Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET).

Background Information on JPET: JPET was originally funded by the then Labor Government in 1993 until 1994/95. The program was a key initiative developed in response to the findings of the National Inquiry into Youth Homelessness chaired by Brian Burdekin and reported in Our Homeless Children a report released in 1989.

JPET is a program that targets homeless and at risk young people. The program was previously placed under the Department of FACSIA and was then moved by the Howard Government to DEWR. This was done without any consultation. However, we experience problems which are related to the focus of the previously named DEWR which has not allowed the flexibility in operations to meet the needs of the particular target group.

This program was originally designed and first funded by a Labor Government and is an excellent and successful program designed to assist homeless and disadvantaged young people to overcome the social barriers to participation in a range of areas including;

- Establish a stable lifestyle for the participant;
- Address the social barriers to participation in family, community life, education, training and employment.
- Assist the participant to attain life skills;
- Re-establish, or strengthen family links where appropriate;
- Improve the participants participation in education and pre-vocational and vocational training; and

- Prepare participants for, and maintain them in, entry-level training or work opportunities, which are appropriate to their needs.

Some of the social barriers they face include but are not limited to:

- drug, alcohol or other substance abuse
- sexual abuse or violence
- physical or mental abuse
- domestic violence
- dysfunctional family background or serious family and household conflict
- behavioral problems (including diagnosed disorders)
- self harming behaviors
- cultural or religious differences
- physical or intellectual disabilities
- mental or other serious health problems including stress disorders
- history of committing offences or formal engagement with justice authorities
- history of engagement with state care authorities including exiting state care
- lack of employment experience and employability skills
- issues directly related to refugee backgrounds including torture and trauma
- learning disabilities or lack of literacy and numeracy skills

The above list of barriers is not exhaustive, and JPET participants may face other issues.

The JPET programme was evaluated in 2001. This evaluation was commissioned and conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services. The Evaluation described the JPET objective as: “to assist young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or facing similar severe problems, in ways which not only help them with their income and personal support needs, but which also ensure they secure career paths and sustainable futures. The 2001 Evaluation found that:

JPET has very positive outcomes for accommodation, education, training, employment and income support across all client target groups. These positive results are comparable with or better than similar government programmes. The results presented here, therefore, provide strong support for the continuation of JPET.

Since the program has shifted to DEWR, there has been a rapid change in its primary focus and culture. When the program originally changed, department providers were told it was still a pre-employment program with the focus remaining on assisting young people to overcome their social barriers. However, over the past 12 months, a number of KPI's have been developed by DEWR with the primary focus being economic outcomes.

DEWR is currently recommending that JPET move to a single score rating that will become the key measure to judge provider's performance. The current proposed single score ranking is broken down as follows;

Utilization 10%
Engagement 30%
Economic Outcomes 40%
Social Outcomes 20%

As indicated in the background to JPET, the program has been operating for some time as a pre-employment program. The key objective is to assist the young person to achieve stability in their circumstance in order to improve their opportunity for social and economic participation. As also acknowledged in the barriers, listed above, these need to be addressed before a young person can start on a pathway to sustainable economic participation in society.

Social outcomes are the core aspect of the program and these outcomes are critical to establishing the foundation and setting young people on a pathway to economic participation. If social outcomes have

such a low ranking in the performance assessment this will diminish their value of their achievement and will reduce the effectiveness of JPET to meet the non vocational needs of its target group thereby reducing its capacity for sustainable economic outcomes.

The changes have been discussed extensively at the WA JPET state interagency meetings and providers present have many concerns surrounding the change in culture of the program. The primary concern is that the two most heavily weighted KPI's, economic and engagement, have the potential to exclude those young people most at risk from accessing the program. Historically, JPET has assisted young people in SAAP housing and or highly transit young people with multiple issues including mental health, drug abuse, poor education, anti social behaviors, victims of abuse and most important homelessness. Traditionally, workers have focused on assisting young people to overcome these barriers which automatically increases a young person's employability and ability to participate productively in their communities.

Recently at a JPET National working party meeting, JPET providers were informed by DEWR representatives that they will strongly base their evaluation of a good JPET provider as one that achieves economic outcomes and high levels of engagement. In metropolitan areas around the nation, there is no shortage of demand on the JPET services. Therefore if a provider wished to conduct its business on economics and retaining / increasing its business levels, they are now encouraged to be more selective of its potential clientele by taking on clients with fewer barriers and have some stability. Hence, those most in need of assistance and support may miss out. Providers who continue to deliver services to clients with multiple social barriers are less likely to achieve high economic outcomes therefore will not achieve a high single score rating under the new key performance indicators.

Maintaining a focus on social as well as economic outcomes is considered essential to safeguarding the holistic nature of JPET. Without due recognition to the value of social outcomes, the industry is concerned that there will be a growing contribution to service gaps over time. Performance assessment models drive provider behavior and practice, and if not constructed well, an unbalanced or short term focus can result in decreased effectiveness of services to those young people most in need.

Providers also have a number of other concerns including the increase in administration time the DEEWR IT system SSA has generated. This onerous administration and reporting regime is causing a reduction in morale and satisfaction of staff and has led to a reduction in support time for clients. Ultimately this leads to a reduction in service provision and consequently a reduction in quality outcomes. The issues that have been raised by front line staff but are not restricted to include;

- The extra administrative requirements as part of the new emphasis on compliance, activity agreements and PR's
- Staff struggle with the concept of PR's as they feel their primary role is supporting the young person not to act as an agent for Centerlink in breaching non-complying clients. The task of supporting/counseling a young person is in naturally conflict with policing and cutting of income support.
- The systems inability to back date – very inflexible system makes it extremely hard to work outreach with the very transient client group
- The system for recording drop in appointments often takes longer than the actual appointment
- The Activity agreements lodged by Job Network providers cannot be amended even thou the JPET provider becomes the lead agency working with the young person. Ultimately the young person is signing an Activity Agreement with the JPET provider however some actions listed form no part of their agreement with the JPET provider.
- Unable to change contact details for a client which occurs frequently due the transient nature of the client.
- The system does not record the true nature of the young peoples social achievements
- No training was/is available of the proper use of the SSA. This has proven to be a disadvantage for non-Job Network as all KPI's are directly reported via SSA. Job Network Providers have years of experience on the system.

In addition, discussion at the National JPET working party surrounding performance measures was often dictated by the abilities of the SSA system and not what is good practice for the young people. An example would be the quarterly payment model - 20% at the beginning of a quarter, and 5% on completion of the target. If targets are not reached, the shortfall cannot be carried over to the next quarter. Inadvertently if a provider exceeds a quarterly target level, the additional placements are not recognised and cannot be carried over to the next quarter. Therefore, nearing the end of a quarter, if targets are met, providers are asking young people in crisis to wait to receive any service as limited recourses are accounted for and providers risk not reaching the next quarterly target. Ultimately there is a sense the system is dictating service delivery and disempowering the effectiveness of the Youth Workers.

There is also the issue of adequate indexation. Indexation has not been provided in a fair or adequate way since the Howard Government was elected. This has severely hampered improvement, enhancement and quality service delivery. The programme has also been affected by the efficiency dividend being applied to it and again this has resulted in an overall reduction in what the programme can deliver.

The poor funding and lack of adequate indexation has resulted in community agencies being unable to meet the increasing costs of staff wages and subsequently, this results in reduction of hours, loss of positions and higher staff turnover. The ability of employers to be agencies of choice for workers is also limited. Staff morale and satisfaction is suffering in many JPET services, especially those that are not traditional employment services but are community based agencies with a priority target group of young disadvantaged people

Suggestions for JPET

- The working party be reconvened and given the opportunity to meet with the Minister at the earliest convenience to discuss the JPET program. This offers an excellent consultative mechanism from highly experienced persons from a diverse range of providers who are keen to contribute constructively to the future direction of the program.
- Retention of a Youth Focused Service for highly disadvantaged and homeless young people. The JPET working party is strongly committed to the principal that the complex needs of homeless and disadvantaged young people is best addressed by specialist youth focused services that is flexible and appropriate. Therefore the working party reviewing the current KPI's proposed by DEEWR administration to ensure they reflect needs of homeless and disadvantaged young people. This view is supported by the various DEWR reports on the less than satisfactory levels of access to the Job Network by disadvantaged youth.
- Increase the funding to JPET, plan in regular and reasonable indexation annually, quarantine JPET from the impact of any efficiency dividend, reduce the level of onerous administration and reporting, Improve the level of trust between the Department and community providers, allow JPET to be the Programme it was designed for.

I am employed as the CEO of JYSS and was the only WA representative on the recently disbanded National JPET working party. Due to my appointment on the JPET National working party, I chaired the WA interagency meetings and consulted with other WA JPET providers surrounding issues, concerns and good practice. In addition I have been involved in JPET since the pilot stage. Due to my background in JPET I feel confident that I am well informed to provide feedback on its current status. I would really appreciate the opportunity to consult with you on how best to influence program administration to become a better fit with the nature of the target group and providers. I am also very keen to see the JPET national working party reconvened and have a real opportunity to work with DEEWR representatives to develop a program and performance management tools that will have a positive impact on the program and those homeless young people in need.

We wish you the best of luck as you take over this important portfolio and once again we would like to say that we are extremely excited to be working with a government that has homelessness and social inclusion high on their agenda.

Yours faithfully

Louise Giolitto
CEO
5th February 2008