

SUBMISSION ON EMPLOYMENT SERVICES  
TO THE  
MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPATION  
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Disability Employment Network Provider  
**North West Personnel**  
*A division of Ability Options*

## UNCAPPED DEN PROGRAM

### **What are the benefits of the Welfare to Work DEN Uncapped Program?**

- Job seekers with a disability are back in the work force instead of being on Disability Support Pension or Newstart Allowance, hence improving their standard of living and reducing the pressure on the public purse. Individualised and intensive support is definitely needed to overcome disability and other barriers preventing job seekers from being fully capable of contributing to society. The DEN model is a highly successful program with a great capability to meet both the short term training needs, employment needs and support needs of job seekers right through to independence within 2 years. The DEN model of service delivery although expensive compared to Job Network, will deliver independent workers in the uncapped program. It has been NWP experience that once workers in the uncapped program achieve independence statistics are showing that this independence is maintained.
- Very few job seekers in DEN services are capable of getting their own job. The DEN model provides the funding for a joint effort, and in most cases, for DEN to find the job that best suits each individual, at the same time as keeping the job seeker engaged in their program.
- DEN clients generally have more self image and other psychological problems; yet job searching combined with informal or formal psychological support over time has, and will continue to, deliver good participation and good outcomes.
- Average age of job seeker in DEN uncapped is 47 years old; our Fairfield site has 90% NESB clients, so we employ multilingual consultants and this works because cultural issues can be immediately addressed and interpreters are not required.
- Resistant job seekers are counselled by Centrelink and therefore participation rates in the program continue to be high. It is our view that this has played a large part in the success of the DEN uncapped program at North West Personnel (NWP). Definitely job seekers are participating and attitudes and motivation levels are steadily lifting. The combination of DEN uncapped program support and linkages with Centrelink for Participating Reporting and counseling is a significant benefit to all parties; it makes a difference to job seekers when everyone is working together. I have had Employment Consultants tell me '*... that support from Centrelink and lodging PR's ... it really works!*'
- Centrelink and DEN provider systems complement each other keeping job seekers linked, engaged and motivated.
- Prior to the DEN Uncapped Program commencing, job seekers with a disability could only get services from Job Network providers that had neither the resources nor the expertise required for positive outcomes to occur. The DEN uncapped program has broken the vicious circle of frustration and low self esteem for most of these people who just needed a job to lift their self-esteem and be perceived as being like everybody else.
- At NWP we have been doing training with our Employment Consultants on '*improving the way we can use a job seeker's Activity Agreement to increase*

*participation'*. We are finding that these strategies have improved participation and often prevent the lodging of a Participation Report. Not only is this a better outcome for the job seeker, it is more efficient for both DEN and for Centrelink. An additional benefit is that our Employment Consultants have begun to feel more empowered as they see the changes in job seekers' attitudes and motivation levels.

- Since the beginning of September we have employed a full time Registered Psychologist (Organisational Psychologist) to work with our Employment Consultants and with job seekers. This has been an exciting step and is delivering good outcomes all-round in the uncapped program.

#### **What have been the results so far?**

- From the beginning of this program to date, we have had not one serious complaint and only a small handful of NWP job seekers have had any penalty applied by Centrelink.
- A total of 143 employment outcomes in Fairfield site have been achieved since the contract commenced in 1 July 2006. The total number of clients currently in the uncapped program for this site is 240 (DEN Health Check 31 December 2007).
- Across all 4 uncapped sites a total of 369 employment outcomes have been achieved out of a current total of 625 clients.
- During the first year of a two year program a total of 32 workers have already achieved independence in the 4 sites operated by NWP.
- We expect the outcomes to accelerate substantially as we move from the establishment phase to our current fully operational mode.

#### **What can be improved?**

- We need to increase and improve access to jobs for people with a disability in government departments. There needs to be more leeway from these employers to create positions at entry level for job seekers who need to build their skills. More flexibility in these institutions will allow DEN to negotiate and create positions to suit job seekers. Small to medium employers are doing their share in providing employment opportunities for job seekers in the capped and uncapped program. Government and statutory bodies are often inflexible, recruitment is too competitive, difficult, cumbersome and often unfair towards those who have more disadvantages than others. Opportunities for traineeships and apprenticeships should be offered to people with disabilities and mature aged, NESB, and for Aboriginal Australians etc. These large institutions should be in a position to support, train and mentor these workers along with their DEN. A greater sense of social responsibility and *'leading the way'* is required from government departments both state and federal and a policy that requires a commitment to delivering real jobs with real targets would be beneficial to everyone. However, this requires a national campaign driven by government from the top down to facilitate real jobs and to achieve real targets.

The program operated by Disability Works Australia and funded by DEEWR is geared to getting jobs from large corporate employers and Government institutions. It has been the experience of NWP that using a third and middle party in the negotiations just leads to complications, time delays and inefficiencies. Direct negotiations between DEN and large employers allows for a good model to be negotiated and established and for DEN to get repeat business. The model established by Unilever which includes the recruitment of up to 6 trainees annually from disadvantaged backgrounds, and offers training and skilling up on the job, mentoring and support from DEN is best set up by DEN in direct negotiation with key people within these organisations.

- The Wage Subsidy scheme available to DEN giving subsidies to employers at end of 12 weeks employment is great and employers like it, so keep it going! The amount of money is not in itself a deciding factor in securing an employer; however, it is rewarding and a good incentive to keep working with DEN and their new employee. It can have the effect of making our job easier. A recommendation could be to increase the amount of subsidy for employers who have more than one new employee. Repeat business with an employer has many benefits, it has the advantage of capitalizing on good employers who have been educated by DEN and value adds to all of the work we do. The wage subsidy scheme is doing the job well for DEN.
- Training is definitely needed for staff in (Disability Pre-Employment Instrument) DPI's. Currently NWP runs in service training, however, professional training would eliminate those errors that can so easily creep in with repetition, staff turnover and the accelerated growth experienced by NWP in the uncapped program. Training requirements for staff in all areas of DEN (capped and uncapped programs) are high and are directly linked to quality service delivery and contract compliance. Suggestion could be to involve peak body in discussions on training for the industry. This would have the benefit of ensuring that high standards are maintained within a good service delivery model for people with disabilities and functional limitations.
- Prior to clients exiting from PSP some assessment process could improve the appropriateness of the referral to a DEN. For example, people with severe conditions such as ongoing unremitting Drug and Alcohol issues, anti-social or severe/uncontrolled anger, severe and unstable psychological conditions can often be unsafe in the workplace impacting on the client, co-workers and employers. On the other hand, a flow through of clients is really important from PSP to DEN and everyone does deserve a chance, so again more assessment, linkage and working together will improve the system and the service.
- A communication method is needed for the DEN service to provide feedback to a JCA when a reassessment is required. If the provider requests a new JCA it is because there can often be serious problems that affect the client's ability to seek and maintain employment which was not evidenced in the earlier JCA report. The ability to give this feedback is essential.
- When a Job Capacity Assessment is not adequate and new issues are evident or underestimated (such as behavioural problems, productivity, etc. in the workplace) DEN need an avenue to change the client from uncapped to capped to provide more appropriate assistance to that individual.

- More available codes for Activity Agreements are required by DEN providers. We need to continuously build on our own internal template to ensure both compulsory items are included and relevant support is listed in voluntary section. If DEN codes could be linked to DPI domains then this would also speed up work considerably. Can six month review dates for Activity Agreements be reported in DEEWR IT system for DEN for both uncapped and capped programs rather than waiting for a report to show them as already outstanding?
- More literature and advertising from the government to continuously educate employers about their social responsibility to the community in employing people with disabilities and disadvantages.
- Note: This latest comment has been added on 11 April 2008. Another benefit of the DEN uncapped program has been the increase in referrals of Aboriginal job seekers in two sites. The Penrith site (outer west Sydney) now has 19 Aboriginal clients and we have employed one Aboriginal Employment Consultant and are currently advertising in the Koori Mail for a second Employment Consultant. The Campbelltown site is also currently assisting 3 Aboriginal clients. This has been achieved without advertising other than through connections with Centrelink and Job Capacity Assessors. Good outcomes are expected as steadily grow as we work together with these job seekers, their community and employers.

#### **CAPPED DEN PROGRAM**

- If the **Supported Wage System** is used for specific eligible workers, this should be included as a part of KPI's and Star Ratings in the capped program. Many workers are steadily increasing their productivity in there jobs and good DEN's work hard to achieve this end to the benefit of both the worker and the employer. As well DEEWR is funding these workers in maintenance phase and outcomes specifically for these workers need to measured.
- Pathways for job seekers in Business Services to seek open employment need to be improved. There is no encouragement under the existing system. If within a period of two years being with a DEN, these job seekers can become independent workers then this is a more viable option than the individual remaining in a funded position in a Business Service.
- Eligibility of job seekers for capped program is often not well known by Job Capacity Assessors and Centrelink. Providers often spend time educating this process yet invariably there are not vacancies (at least in NWP capped programs) for these job seekers. In NWP sites we are constantly advising people and JCA's that our capped program is at full capacity. Outlet capacity in the capped program averages 98.5% full all of the time. There is demand for more capped places being made available to job seekers and to good DEN providers.
- Sometimes capped places are taken up by job seekers with 30 hour plus work capacity as assessed by a Job Capacity Assessment. These job seekers meet all other eligibility criteria for the uncapped program apart from 30 hours plus capacity to work, yet this eligibility alone streams them into the capped program, which is limited by the number of places available. The current default if capacity in capped is full then is referral to a Job Network. It is recommended that this eligibility criteria be reviewed. This could then have the benefit of not only

making more places available in capped program, but as well, it would guarantee these job seekers a place in the DEN uncapped program.

- Independent workers in the capped program allow for better flow through and usage of limited capped places. DEN capped generally keep clients in maintenance and do not exit; a flow through of clients is fairer and creates vacancies for others to access the service. More weighting in KPI's for capped program 'left maintenance as independent'; if DEN are doing their job well then independence is possible for a lot more workers than are currently being made independent by DEN.

### **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

- The relationship between a DEN and their DEEWR Contract Manager should be measured and communicated to providers. NWP works very hard to meet high standards of accountability and communication with DEEWR Contract Managers. Accountability issues are critical to the DEN contract. Similarly monitoring, auditing, communication and follow up of programs is expected by Contract Managers. DEN should be measured and scored on all of the above, in addition to KPI's and star ratings. To ensure accountability for public money, and to ensure that all KPI measurement data is *accurate* and *beyond any question*, then a further measure of quality must surely be developed and monitored by DEEWR for all DEN. NWP would welcome any additional level of public monitoring.
- It is known within the industry that some Sydney based DEN are resistant to change and monitoring. In past years, it has been our experience in the capped program that job seekers have definitely been disadvantaged. Limited and strictly applied entry criteria, avoidance of Centrelink referrals, unnecessary exit or transfer rates, and, in some cases, poor accountability of outcomes has occurred. However, new DEEWR contracts for both capped and uncapped programs and the introduction of KPI's and Star Ratings has assisted to some extent in improving actual service delivery to clients, as well as better accountability to DEEWR. It is hoped that these improvements will be upgraded and maintained so that job seekers have access to only the best employment services to assist them to get a job.

DEN capped and uncapped programs are ensuring people participate in the workforce according to their work capacity. This is a highly effective program and the results to date are impressive. A good DEN can achieve excellent social, personal and community benefits for everyone, especially for those people with permanent disabilities who previously were just waiting to get the Disability Support Pension. For those people with higher support needs who are already on the DSP, then capped DEN allows them also to participate in the workforce like everyone else.

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