

Proposed GETT Centre Response to Minister O'Connor's Letter

The GippsTAFE Employment and Transitional Training Centre (GETT Centre) has been in existence since 1981. Over the years it has had several name changes, reflecting its growth and changing direction. It has always been a disability service; the principal focus is to provide participants with vocational education opportunities to facilitate a transition to open employment.

Our response specifically addresses the key points raised in your letter.

- *Early interventions minimise the number of long-term welfare dependent Australians of working age (including a review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument)*

A timed overlap approach from Personal Support Program (PSP) or Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) linked with Disability Employment Networks (DEN) would assist those potential job seekers who would benefit from using DEN services in a supportive environment. Presently these people need to be exited from PSP and VRS services before accessing DEN services. If they had from two to six months being on both programs, it would assist the more vulnerable clients transition and engage with DEN providers more smoothly, and enable them to switch between programs as the need arises.

The Job Seeker Classification Instrument has its uses as a tool, but is limited in application and is not always an accurate measure of actual needs.

- *Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker*

DEN employment services are tailored to the individual's needs in accordance with the Commonwealth Disability Service Standards and adopt a whole of life approach to the participant. The fast turnaround in employment outcomes required to gain and maintain good star ratings discourages investing time in working on what can be perceived as non-employment related problems and personal barriers in their life and education. These issues often affect a person's self esteem and confidence, which directly affects employability. Many DEN participants can take considerable time to develop trust and engage with employment consultants.

Having a good relationship with both the participant and the employer is vital to sustainable employment. There is often the need for solving complex problems with productivity, career advancement, job structural changes and the impact of personal or financial problems on work. This is where DENs are in the position to advocate for their participants and support the employer to achieve a win/win for all concerned. Business service participants wishing to move into open employment are currently unable to access DEN services unless they leave their current employment. It would be advantageous for those wishing to move to open employment to access a DEN while they maintain their current position at a business service.

- *Job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance.*

As a DEN all our participants receive intensive assistance. Each participant has an employment consultant assigned to them and works beyond the traditional job network range. Each participant has an individualised employment assistance plan designed around their needs and career/employment interests and also includes recreational and community interests to increase their opportunity for social inclusion.

- *Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers (including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs)*

It has been demonstrated to us many times in the past, that by placing people with disabilities in longer term certificate courses not only increases their skill base and therefore makes people more employable, but when well supported, has increased their self esteem and confidence by demonstrating to the participant they are able to learn new and valued skills. It also gives people with a disability an opportunity for social inclusion and potentially increases their social network and acceptance in the wider community.

A participant undertaking a pre-apprenticeship course at a TAFE in their chosen career is an invaluable tool in more than ways than one. Firstly it can give the student a taste of the trade they have chosen and decide whether they wish to pursue a career in it and if well supported by DEN staff, can identify possible future areas which may need extra support once an apprenticeship is achieved.

Currently the focus is on short courses to gain a specific licence or certificate required for employment.

If training was a recognised performance indicator this would allow more meaningful training to be undertaken and supported by a DEN member. The current level of funding for people on employment assistance and needing classroom support severely limits the capacity to provide what may be necessary.

- *Performance management principles (including star ratings and business reallocation) that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery*

Thirteen and twenty-six week employment outcomes weigh heavily on star ratings. These can be manipulated by providing two, thirteen week placements, (eight hour per week work placements), supported with a wage subsidy.

In the maintenance phase, if a worker who initially starts employment on a casual contract achieves permanent on-going work and consequently has a lower hourly rate as a result of this, it impacts negatively on the star ratings.

If a DEN is approached with a full time job vacancy to fill and puts two or more participants in the position part time to fill this vacancy, it achieves an outcome for each worker. This improves the star ratings but does not necessarily achieve an opportunity for one person to move away from welfare dependency and have the opportunity to achieve financial independence.

Before the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) system was in place, the GETT Centre was at 100% capacity, most often with a waiting list, now we are seldom at capacity and suitable referrals are slow to come in. Our former natural pathways that were well established are now seldom used, especially when the potential participants are made

aware that the JCA process will trigger a full review of Disability Support Pension (DSP) eligibility. They are either not prepared to “risk” their DSP on the possibility of employment, or not prepared to go through the maze of paperwork required to do this. A concern is that without access to the most appropriate service for them, they are left to go it alone and face the possibility of exploitation.

Performance should be monitored and measurable as DEN is funded by public money; however the current model does not appear in the best interests of people with a disability.

All DEN providers have a stretch capacity which can only be used in very limited circumstances; if this was made available to providers with a waiting list it would enable more people to access DEN services quickly.

- *The minimisation of time and money spent on administration.*

It has been estimated the administrative tasks required by DEEWR (formerly DEWR) compared to when funding was administered by FACS has increased by around 40%. This has increased the time spent in the office and lessened the time available to get out and find jobs, meet with clients, support participants in the workforce and arrange extra support with other agencies when required.

Compliance is important when spending public money, however it seems to have reached a point where it is at the cost of doing what we are funded to do, find suitable employment for people with disabilities.