

Dear Mr. O'Connor,

How employment services can be improved

We refer to your recent letter and wish to thank you for inviting our views on how employment services can be improved. As a DEN member providing employment services to job seekers with disabilities in the A.C.T & Queanbeyan region for over 10 years, we offer our views/suggestions in the following areas for your consideration;

Job seekers with intellectual disability accessing training to improve the employability through Work Skills Vouchers

Last year, the government introduced Work Skills Vouchers each worth up to \$3000 to help those eligible complete vocational cert II courses, literacy & numeracy courses or Year 12. While people with disability are encouraged to apply, many job seekers with intellectual disability are not eligible by virtue of possessing a Year 12 certificate. The above scheme failed to recognize that most job seekers with intellectual disability completing their Year 12 certificate at special schools or schools with special units or classes with assisted learning do not attain basic literacy and numeracy skills.

We ask for the Work Skills Vouchers training scheme eligibility criteria to include people with intellectual disability notwithstanding of their attainment of Year 12 certificate. This will eliminate the unintended discrimination against job seekers with intellectual disability who represents about 40% (the largest single group) of job seekers with disability nationally and thus improve their employability.

Making employment services relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker under the category of Employment-in-Jeopardy (EIJ)

Current DEN programme procedures permit a service provider only to help EIJ job seekers in retaining their present employment. Should their circumstances/needs change (e.g. dismissal from the job or resignation because relationship with co-workers/bosses has soured) the job seekers have to exit from the service provider, undergo a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) before they can be referred to an 'appropriate' employment service provider to have access to job search support.

The above is totally unresponsive to the needs of EIJ job seekers. The time & frustration these job seekers with disability face having to 'jump through hoops' (getting an appointment for a JCA, gathering all medical history records for the JCA, undergoing the JCA itself, waiting to be referred to an appropriate service provider, attending appointment with the service provider; signing up paperwork required by the service

provider) before receiving any job search support do little to encourage them to return to employment especially DSP recipients who are not required by law to work.

EIJ job seekers could not understand why we have to exit them when they require our assistance with job search after their employment was terminated. After all, we had worked with them closely, got to know them and understood their needs and are thus, well placed to help them immediately with their job search instead of their having to start all over with whichever service provider they are referred to after a JCA.

We propose that the DEN Programme be amended to permit EIJ job seekers access to job search assistance from their immediate service provider whenever the need arises to reap the following benefits:

- making the service relevant to the circumstances/needs of EIJ job seekers
- creating a more seamless support service
- reducing cost and time associated to Job Capacity Assessments
- enhancing workforce participation (as period between employment is minimized)
- savings in unemployment/DSP benefits pay outs

Minimization of time and money spent on administration

The compliance requirements in DEN serving model have generated substantial administrative work causing case workers who joined the industry with community service sentiments ending up tackling administrative paper work and coping with changes instead of assisting people with disability. This is demoralizing, making it even more difficult to retain or recruit employees in this industry particularly in the ACT region. As you are aware, the quality & availability of employees have a direct bearing on the quality of services job seekers receive in this industry. The government should consider more the measuring of actual outcomes and less the dictating of the process. Quality meanwhile, can still be safeguarded through imposing strict penalty on offenders without applying increasing 'red tape' which only serve to penalize the whole industry causing it to lose its efficiency and as well as its feasibility over time.

We thank you again for allowing us to participate in the above review and would wish to mention that the above proposals if deemed feasible, can be implemented immediately without waiting for the new contract period to take effect in July 2009.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Lee
Chief Executive Officer