



CANBERRA & REGION INC

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

22 January, 2007

Dear Mr O'Connor

Re: Submission on Employment Services, prepared by Relationships Australia Canberra and Region (RACR)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this review of the current range of employment services. RACR is a not-for-profit, community based organisation that has been providing professional relationship support services to the ACT and Central Murrumbidgee regions of NSW for the past 44 years. RACR operates the Personal Support Program (PSP) from our Wagga office. I have asked our staff there to comment on your review points, and compiled the following notes.

The concerns we would like to draw to your attention include:

- ⌘ the decreased emphasis on the social outcomes component of the PSP;
- ⌘ the increased administrative requirement in the PSP detracts from our work with clients;
and
- ⌘ the accessibility of work skills vouchers to younger clients.

The Direction of the PSP

Previously, under FACSIA, the emphasis of the PSP was to achieve a balance of economic and social outcomes for clients. PSP appears to be now focusing more heavily on achieving economic outcomes and devaluing social outcomes – almost to an 80:20 balance (economic:social). PSP was originally developed to assist clients with significant barriers such as, A&OD, mental health, homelessness and accommodation, numeracy and literacy problems, depression, isolation and many more. These are outlined in the PSP guide that is provided to all PSP clients.

Many of the clients we see in PSP may not, or will not gain an economic outcome during their two years in PSP. However they may have:

- ⌘ stabilised their accommodation, or
- ⌘ reduced their drug or alcohol use, or
- ⌘ attended rehabilitation programs, or
- ⌘ been referred to specialist services that they had not previously accessed, or

⌘ accessed medical assistance for depression or the many other medical and mental health issues that restrict PSP clients from gaining employment or training.

These are extremely important outcomes for people who are looking to re-enter mainstream society, and to re-gain employment. These social problems are stopping our clients re-entering the workforce, and their efforts to achieve these outcomes should not be invisible.

Recommendation: The focus of the program return to a 50:50 emphasis on economic : social outcomes.

There has been discussion about reducing the PSP to 6 months or 12 months from its current two year funding base. Although this has not been confirmed in any material we have read, we have a concern that economic outcomes are again overshadowing the positive social outcomes that have and are continuing to occur. Any reduction in the program length would have a significant impact on the ability of clients to achieve and sustain any positive lifestyle changes. Long-term unemployment is often a result of a client having significant personal and social barriers. To assist clients effectively, the 2 years spent in PSP is a perfect opportunity to support clients during this re-establishment period of their lives.

Administration

The increase in client reporting and ongoing management of a client to meet the new administrative EA3000 requirements has significantly reduced the opportunity to spend face-to-face time with clients. This has also reduced the time a worker has to continue networking and community development – vital if we are to link clients with the right assistance. The recent changes have seen the administration load increase from 15-20% of a service provider's time, to 40-50% of service provider time, and for some complex cases even higher.

Recommendation: Administrative requirements reduce to 20% of service provider time.

Work Skills Vouchers

This system of providing \$3000 worth of training credits in a range of areas to unskilled clients has been very worthwhile and resulted in improved employment outcomes for clients. The training is appropriate to areas that are recognised as being areas in which employment can be gained, such as transport and hospitality, and not in areas that satisfy the client's obligation to the Centrelink or Job Network system.

Recommendation: The minimum age to receive this voucher should be reduced from 25 years to 20 years of age. This would assist to fill an identified need for more service to the younger age range.

Yours Sincerely

Mary Pekin
CEO, RACR