

## **Productivity Commission Inquiry into the increased application of competition, contestability and informed user choice to human services**

I have worked in the Community Sector since my last year at University in 1989, from Detention Centres, Juvenile Justice (Teacher and Youth Worker), Disability group homes, Youth Refuges, Child Protection and then Early Intervention Services since 1993. I have worked for on Early Intervention Placement Prevention service for the last 23 years and have seen the accountability grow, professional standards increase, demand from families with complex needs increase and no real growth in terms of funding. After years of working effectively in an innovative best practice model I can confidently claim from a sound evidence base that every dollar spent on early intervention saves cost at least ten fold in social and economic costs to our community particularly for our tax payers.

I work with mainstream young people aged 12 to 25 years of age and many who go through dire times of vulnerability and disadvantage. I see their resilience first hand and know that a good case worker can change a young life's course in aiding life skill development, engagement, participation in community and achieve real outcomes to getting to a better life. Changing a projectory at a pivotal moment saves lives, families and resources. Early intervention and education has to be the way forward combined with more progressive policy to assist people out of the poverty trap.

Social and community services should not be open to private providers to tender for government funding. Great community service occurs with great partners and real community collaboration. Quality services are built on good practice and relationships with agencies, staff and young people and families. Private providers start from a point of running a profitable business whilst community services run a business starting from a point of social justice first and any surplus money can then be poured back in to the key mission of the agency.

Not-for profits are better placed to deliver community services. Not for profits usually grow out of the needs of a local community, they are needs based and relational based ethical businesses™ with unusually extensive networks and creative with resource sources often beyond the dollar. For profit services must run on a different agenda and will cost more to the community, just look at the job network providers to find a mountain of evidence on bad for profit practice!

The uncertainty that constant tendering and competition between providers creates instability for us in our work and impacts the people we are here to support. There has never been a more competitive time in the community sector for the dollar and even for fundraising help. Weeks are spent on each tender taking away massive periods on front line management and staff time and always the bigger church based charities come out on top. I recently went to tender on a program we ran with extraordinary good outcomes for homeless young people over eight years. A large church group that did not provide housing nor casework in our region won the bid to provide these services, I can only assume (as our tender ranked HIGH) that they had a better writer, legal and financial section to assist their tender process, months later they are still not providing a service. They are definitely not a better service provider and I know they take a large administration cut from those funds. Young people lose out on those years of that program, partnerships, great staff they know and rely upon and masses of resources that are held locally – tendering has proven to not bring efficiency or quality!

As a direct result of loss of funding to our NFP service (first time those state government funds were ever tendered) we just cut two full time jobs from first year out Social Science graduates who were amazing skilled youth case workers. One had to move out of the region away from family. Further, as a service built on collaboration we can not share our depth of knowledge and networks with the new providers- as it seems they are not even providing services and still do not even have a service model!

The impact of more competition in the sector on myself and colleagues is continual stress, more grey hair & performance burnout, plus shorter contracts of employment- with less permanent jobs. Our region has over 25% unemployment!

The saddest impacts are on the young people we support as their workers leave the area, often change positions and the welfare 'churn' continues. A stable and skilled workforce is the only way forward- increased competition destroys the social justice foundations and health of our community sector industry this hurts the people we are here for.