



Friday 29 April 2011

Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

by email: disability-support@pc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into Disability Care and Support

Attached is the submission by Self Help Workplace in response to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Disability Care and Support.

Self Help Workplace supports the inclusion of Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) within the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), if the following outcomes are achieved:

1. it increases the opportunities for people with disabilities to secure productive meaningful employment;
2. it is predicted on the continued existence of ADEs as a business/service model to provide people with disabilities with supported employment;
3. it is not diminish the authority of ADEs to run their enterprises; and
4. it improves the opportunities for people with disabilities moving out of ADEs to participate in the community so that they can continue to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives.

Questions remain about the administration of specialist employment services within the NDIS including:

- Who will administer the funding?
- How will it be administered?
- How will potential employees be referred to ADEs?
- What accountability mechanisms will be in place? At present, ADEs are subject to a rigorous quality control system – Disability Service Standards which are independently audited once a year.

Any questions about Self Help Workplace's submission may be directed to the General Manager.

Yours faithfully,


Donna Bain
General Manager

Executive Summary

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- it is predicted on the continued existence of ADEs as a business/service model to provide people with disabilities with supported employment;
- it is not diminish the authority of ADEs to run their enterprises; and
- it improves the opportunities for people with disabilities moving out of ADEs to participate in the community so that they can continue to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives.

Questions remain about the administration of specialist employment services within the NDIS including:

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- How will it be administered?
- How will potential employees be referred to ADEs?
- What accountability mechanisms will be in place? At present, ADEs are subject to a rigorous quality control system – Disability Service Standards which are independently audited once a year.

Outcome 1 - Increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to secure productive meaningful employment

There are limited opportunities for real and productive employment for people with disabilities. Although Tasmania has the highest rates of disability in the country (22.3%)¹, the state only has 12 ADEs which together employ approximately 600 people.

Increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities could be achieved by:

- uncapping places in ADEs;
- making it easier for people with disabilities to move between ADEs and other employment (including services offered specialised disability employment services); and
- making it easier for people with disabilities to move between ADEs and other activities, including community access programs and education and training.

Uncapping funding would realise a number of benefits including:

- allowing more people to be employed by ADEs
- allowing for flexible work structures such a off site work teams
- facilitating succession planning, including
 - transitioning employees to part time before retirement

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009 Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey

- allowing new employees to work along side more experienced employees to learn the skills (this is particularly an issue where employees have been with the same ADE for more than 20 years and have a wealth of knowledge and experience that will take time to share with new arrivals);
- allowing for temporary and casual medium and short term placements to accommodate peak flow work periods.

If funding is linked with a particular individual this might allow (subject to the comments below about ADE's responsibilities as an employer) to offer support employees with higher needs. At the moment the funding ranges from:

- Level 1 = \$325 per month
- Level 2 = \$553
- Level 3 = \$828
- Level 4 - \$1,101

This level of funding limits the capacity of ADEs to support employees with more challenging behaviours that require regular intervention, intensive (often daily) training, and intensive supervision.

Employees with higher needs also include supporting those employees who because of their disability will experience premature ageing. For example, there is research that indicates that people with Down Syndrome start ageing as early as their 30s. Others with an intellectual disability may acquire dementia relatively early in life, at age around 50.² This may mean that employees have more frequent absences from work (due to illness and/or medical appointments), others will need additional workplace support such as times for rest, diet supervision and assistive technologies (jigs, changes in seating and so on). All of this requires a considerable investment in resources, time and staff capacity and skill.

In places such as Launceston where there is a significant shortage of alternatives to work, sites such as Self Help Workplace have become "de facto" community access/day support programs. Self Help Workplace recognises this and will uphold its commitment that employees can stay for as long as they want to and it is safe for them to continue being on site (although they may have very limited productivity). This will take place although in some instances it would be in the interests of the employee to be involved in other activities on a full time or part time basis if suitable places were available.

Additional funding might also support work experience placements (for school leavers, those returning to work after an injury, those wishes to change jobs/careers and transition to work programs for school leavers and others. Like all employees and others wishing to enter the workforce, people with disabilities should have the flexibility to change places of work, try part time options and other forms of work. However, the hard boundaries around funded programs make this difficult for supported employees who must abandon one option to choose another.

One of the consequences of the shortage of appropriate community access programs and supported employment is that many students leaving school who have a disability have to endure long gaps between the time they leave school and secure a place in another program. During this time, there is

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability and Ageing – Australian Population Patterns and implications*, 2000 at page 39.

a significant risk that the students will lose valuable skills and potentially the motivation to remain interested in activities and employment. The gap also exacerbates the strain their families.

Outcome 2 - The NDIS needs to be predicated on the continued existence of and investment in ADEs as a business/service model to provide people with disabilities with supported employment.

(a) ADEs are an employer of choice

ADEs are a valid model to provide people with disabilities as employment. ADE's succeed as a place of work and business because:

- An ADE's business is organised around our people
- ADEs are able to supply customers with reliable and high quality goods and services at competitive prices;
- because doing business with an ADE makes good business sense;
- doing business with an ADE is an investment in the social and economic fabric of the community. This is particularly important in a regional community such as Launceston where there are limited employment opportunities.

It is often claimed that ADEs are only a staging post for people to move into "open employment". While this occurs in some instances, for many people with disabilities, ADEs are and will continue to be an employment destination. This is evidenced by the long term service that employees enjoy with many working in the same ADE for 20 or 30 or more years. Employees stay with ADEs for a number of reasons including:

- a strong sense they are valued, respected, understood and safe;
- their carers know and appreciate that ADEs act in our employees' best interests;
- employees and carers trust Self Help Workplace;
- the health and wellbeing of our employees is a priority and the pivot point around which all decisions about the enterprise are made;
- ADEs are not about exclusion. ADEs are about inclusion.

ADEs should continue to be a feature of the disability services landscape under the NDIS scheme.

(b) Access to funding for capital investments

Self Help Workplace has plant and equipment valued at over \$170,000. It includes machinery and tools critical for the continued operation of the business including:

- radial saws
- nail guns
- compressor
- dust extractor
- washing machines and dryers
- fridges and freezers
- 2 forklifts, truck , bus and car

The enterprise's assets have a use by date. However, there are limited sources of funding to purchase upgrades. Self Help Workplace must rely on grants from a range of government and philanthropic sources to upgrade/replace equipment. This requires a substantial investment in resources to write, administer and acquit the grants. The uncertainty adversely impacts on planning.

Under the NDIS scheme, provision will need to be made to allow organisations to access appropriate levels of funding to support capital works programs that allow ADEs to sustain strong and viable enterprises.

(c) The not for profit sector provides value for money

Self Help Workplace is a community based not for profit charity.

Each year, Self Help Workplace receives significant financial and in kind donations and contributions from the Tasmanian community. This demonstrates the high level of trust and confidence that the local community (government grant programs, businesses, service clubs and individuals) have in the capacity of Self Help Workplace to deliver on its promise to “sustain and grow a vibrant innovative disability enterprise with provides access to meaningful employment for anyone with a disability who wants to work and enables people with a disability to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives” (the vision of Self Help Workplace).

Self Help Workplace considers itself to be a community asset (and investment) and decisions that are made at Self Help Workplace are made within this paradigm. As noted earlier in this submission, all of the decisions made by Self Help Workplace are made in the interests of our supported employees. This ensures that resources (including any modest surplus) are reinvested in the enterprise and committed to enhancing the welfare of our workforce. Self Help Workplace would be concerned if one of the unintended consequences of the NDIS and the reliance on market forces results in the exploitation of supported workers for financial gain by businesses that must also satisfy the expectations of shareholders and are governed by remote boards with little knowledge or commitment to sustaining a local operation.

Self Help Workplace submits that the NDIS should result in an environment that supports and encourages the **not for profit sector** to continue to provide services to people with disabilities.

(d) Quality Assurance

Like all ADEs, Self Help Workplace is certified to provide its services under the Disability Services Standards. These standards ensure that at all times, people with a disability are the focus of the service and their human rights are upheld. As people with disabilities are amongst some of the most vulnerable people in our community, it is important that under the NDIS, that service providers, including ADEs are subject to a rigorous and independent quality assurance system.

Self Help Workplace submits that service providers under the NDIS must be subject to a rigorous and independent quality assurance system.

Outcome 3. The NDIS must does not diminish the authority of ADEs to run their enterprises

Every decision at an ADE is made by answering the question - what is the best interest of our employees. This philosophy is reflected in our business structures, the products/services ADEs provide and the other support services that are offered to employees. One of the consequences of decision making framework is that **not** everybody who wants to work at an ADE will be offered a position.

An open ended arrangement that required an ADE to offer work to anybody who wanted it:

- has serious resource implications for the enterprise ;
- may have an adverse impact on productivity; and/or
- may weaken the commercial viability and sustainability of the enterprise.

For example, Self Help Workplace has a supported workforce of 54 supported employees and 9 staff. This employee to staff ratio ensures that we can maintain a safe workplace with the appropriate levels of supervision and support. At times, Self Help Workplace must employ casual staff to ensure that our supported employees receive the appropriate level of supervision to ensure their safety (and maintain productivity). Increasing employee numbers without a concomitant increase in staff raises occupational health and safety issues.

Australian Disability Enterprises must retain the authority to make decisions about who works in their enterprise.

Outcome 4 - The NDIS has the potential to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities moving out of ADEs to participate in the community so that they can continue to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives.

The confluence of an ageing supported workforce in ADEs, an ageing carer population and rationed support services presents significant challenges for the ADE community. The NDIS presents an opportunity to address these issues in a way that will be bring about a sustainable improvement in the quality of the lives of people with disabilities and their carers. These issues are explored below.

(a) Managing an ageing workforce

Below is a snapshot of Self Help Workplace's current workforce:

	All	Male	Female
Number	54	27	27
Average Age	40	39	41
Oldest		53	63
Years of Service	14	14	13
Longest		33	40

Over half of the workforce of Self Help Workplace is over the age of 45 and/or have accumulated excessive amounts of annual and long service leave. This occurs because Self Help Workplace

employees stay for a very long time. Self Help Workplace’s longest serving employee has been with the enterprise for 40 years.

Self Help Workplace is concerned about our employee’s welfare and the impact of this demographic profile on the viability of the enterprise. As a result, the workplace has recently undertaken detailed research with this cohort of employees. This stage of the project has been funded by the Jessica and Wallace Hore Foundation, managed by Perpetual. A grant of \$5,000 allowed Self Help Workplace to retain the expertise of 3P Consulting to undertake interviews with 22 employees who are older than 45 years and/or have accumulated significant annual leave and/or long service leave.

The researchers found that “the age and health status of many of the long standing employees will be having a detrimental impact on Self Help Workplace’s productivity. At least ten of the employees who were interviewed indicated that they regularly felt tired or suffered from aches and pains to such an extent they are forced to ‘go slow’ during the afternoon or at time need to rest or have a lie down during working hours.”

- Reasons identified for not taking leave or retirement included:
- transport
- lack of structured activity
- dependence on carer/family
- lack of group/activities
- boredom

The data gathered in this research forms part of Stage 1 of a two stage initiative called the Pathways Program. Stage 2 will involve a pilot with a target sub-group of 6 people from the above group. Over 3 months, Self Help Workplace will implement the individual plans that have been prepared in Stage 1. This will involve recruiting supporters and partners (such as the Launceston Aquatic Centre and other program and venue providers) and walking along side employees and their carers as the program is implemented. For example, some employees will require support to get accustomed to new transport routes, carers will need re-assurance that their children are not distressed but are happy with the new activities and venues and providers (such as craft teachers) may need support to adjust their programs to meet the needs of our disabled employees. The program will be evaluated at every stage with a final report setting out the issues and recommendations for the Pathways full scale implementation.

Self Help Workplace has received funding of \$14,556 under the Tasmanian Government’s Community Capacity Building Grant Program to administer Stage 2.

(b) Ageing Carers

An analysis of trends in de-institutionalisation among people with a disability has found that the increase in community living is due to potential new service users remaining in community-based

living arrangements, mainly with their relatives³. However, there is evidence to suggest that “improved health care means that people with disabilities are increasingly outliving their carers”.⁴

Research undertaken in the United States of America published in 2002 found that, “[o]f the 17,897 people with Down’s syndrome, median age at death increased from 25 years in 1983 to 49 years in 1997, an average increase of 1 – 7 years per year studied.” The authors go on to say in the article published in *Lancet* that, “[f]actors that could have contributed to this improvement in survival include: de-institutionalisation and initial placement of affected infants with their families; better treatments for frequent causes of death; and changes in medical practice, including provision of cardiac surgery for children with Down’s syndrome in circumstances in which it would not have been offered previously.”⁵

The incapacity and death of a parent can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of an employee in ADE. In addition to the immediate distress that comes with the loss and resultant settling of an estate, an employee may also have to cope with a change in living arrangements (this may include accessing respite for the first time, independent living or group homes) and different relationships with a surviving parent and their siblings.

Self Help Workplace has also noticed that several of our employees have now become carers, with an expectation that they will take time off work to assist their parents cope with their deteriorating health. This may involve taking their parent to the hospital, doctor’s appointment and the local chemist. Self Help Workplace is concerned about the stress this places on our employees. This issue is compounded by the generally poor health and wellbeing of carers. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that “people who have been caring for a family member with a disability for 25 or 30 years experience special anxieties as they age. The recipients of their care are often those with an early onset disability, particularly intellectual disability. The aging carers often find that the caring role is becoming more difficult and wish to see alternative arrangements put in place for the future care of the person involved.”⁶

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability and Ageing – Australian Population Patterns and implications*, 2000 at page xxii

⁴ Professor Colleen Cartwright (remark found at www.workingcarers.org.au/options/871-futures-planning-for-older-carers?tmpl in the context of the release of the report by the ASLaRC “Futures Planning for Older Carers of Adults with Disabilities”, February 2000 and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability and Ageing – Australian Population Patterns and implications*, 2000 at page 29, 39 and 40.

⁵ Mortality associated with Down's syndrome in the USA from 1983 to 1997: a population-based study
Dr Quanhe Yang PhD, Sonja A Rasmussen MD, JM Friedman MD *The Lancet* - 23 March 2002 (Vol. 359, Issue 9311, Pages 1019-1025) DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(02)08092-3 (this article is attached)

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability and Ageing – Australian Population Patterns and implications*, 2000 at page 25.

Under the NDIS scheme:

- people with disabilities who are working in ADEs must be able to access support and services to assist them to cope with their own ageing and that of their carers, such as home support, communication, guidance (for example, managing the household budget), health care, accommodation and transport.⁷
- carers of people with disabilities must be able to access support and services to assist them to manage transition arrangements in response to their own ageing

(c) Access to information and support to access services/programs

The application processes and participation in decision making assume a level of functional literacy. Unfortunately, Tasmania's population is not well equipped for this challenge with some of the lowest levels of literacy and post school qualifications in the country.⁸ Tasmania's Social Inclusion Commissioner remarked in a report in 2009, that "Tasmania's ageing population and high numbers of lower income households contribute to the State's poor literacy results".⁹ This data confirms the need for organisations to provide people with disabilities and their carers to access information and advice.

Under the NDIS Scheme, people with disabilities and their carers must be able to access independent sources of information and advice to assist them to negotiate and secure the appropriate services.

Further, those organisations providing this type of support will need to receive appropriate funding to invest in the development of resources and material, including converting material to forms that people with disabilities can understand (for example, Easy English, audio and so on) and providing training and 1:1 support where needed.

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability and Ageing – Australian Population Patterns and implications*, 2000 (see comments at page 187 about the needs of people with a disability)

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1307.6 - Tasmanian State and Regional Indicators*, June 2008 (at www.abs.gov.au) and Social Inclusion Commissioner, *The Evidence for Social Inclusion in Tasmania*, 2009 at Page A1.49

⁹ Social Inclusion Commissioner, *The Evidence for Social Inclusion in Tasmania*, 2009 at Page A1.46

About Self Help Workplace

Self Help Workplace is an Australian Disability Enterprise providing supported employment for 54 people with disabilities. Established in 1962, Self Help Workplace has grown to become Launceston's largest disability enterprise. The vision of Self Help Workplace is to sustain and grow a vibrant, innovative disability enterprise which provides access to meaningful employment for anyone with a disability who wants to work and enables people with a disability to enjoy independent and fulfilling lives. The organisation's commercial activities fall within the following areas:

- Production – manufacture of a range of wood products including pallets, survey pegs, garden stakes, packing crates and produce boxes
- Business Services – mail outs, print finishing, hand assembly, sewing and rag sales
- Encore Clothing – second hand clothing outlet
- Catering/Conferences – staff canteen and training/conference facility (including corporate catering)

Self Help Workplace's funded comes from three primary sources:

- Commercial revenues (50%)
- Government case based funding from the Commonwealth Government via The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (40%)
- Fundraising – grant/donations (10%)

One of the key features at Self Help Workplace is the Life Skills Program. The program has the following elements:

1. A Life Skills Co-ordinator to design and manage the life skills program
2. A canteen to provide a healthy choice menu for employees and staff
3. A cooking program in which employees:
 - a. learn the value and benefits of making healthy meal and lifestyle choices
 - b. learn basic cooking skills, including food preparation and presentation
4. Employees learn personal and work hygiene skills
5. Employees learn kitchen garden skills
6. Book Club – a program to enhance the literacy skills of employees

The Life Skills Co-ordinator assists employees to understand the concept of independent living which enables and supports them to transition from supported living. This issue has become even more important in recent years as our ageing workforce loses parents and other carers and our employees must increasingly become self reliant.

In 2009-2010, the team at Self Help Workplace:

- manufactured more than 15,000 pallets and 70 tonnes of garden stakes
- recycled almost 50,000 kilograms of clothing
- assembled and packaged more than half a million items such as battery terminals, show bags and boxes

The team at Self Help Workplace also had time to build and maintain a kitchen garden, participate in a book club to improve their literacy skills and raise over \$750 for other charity organisations.