**Western Australian Disability Services Commission**

**Attachment 1**

**Submission to the**

**National Disability Employment Framework consultation**

**Introduction**

People with disability have a life-long capacity for learning, development and contribution through working. Secure, meaningful employment is a key factor in ensuring economic participation and maximising opportunities for them to live well and feel valued in their community. Sustained effort is required to ensure truly inclusive approaches that recognise the intrinsic value of every person who wants to work.

**Western Australia**

Employment is a priority area in the National Disability Strategy 2012-2020 and in Count Me In, Western Australia’s strategy for inclusion of people with disability.

Under the Disability Services Act 1993, Western Australian (WA) public authorities are required to develop Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) and report on them annually. A 2013 amendment added the requirement to report on ‘Outcome 7’: strategies to improve employment opportunities for people with disability. All DAIPs are required to include strategies to address Outcome 7, due July 2015.

Currently, around 112,000 West Australians with disability are in the workforce, with around 8,000 seeking work. Of the 112,000 West Australians with disability in the workforce 11,000 are people with profound or severe core activity limitation[[1]](#footnote-1). For a variety of complex reasons, people with disability are under-represented in the State’s workforce, with a participation rate of 56.5 per cent compared to 85 per cent of the population without disability. In Western Australia, women with disability are particularly affected, with a participation rate of 50 per cent, well below the 65 per cent participation rate of males with disability and the 78 per cent participation rate of females without disability[[2]](#footnote-2).

WA’s Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy, introduced in 2011, emphasises genuine partnerships between public sector authorities and the community sector. It prioritises the empowerment of service users in the planning, design and delivery of community services. This policy has embedded flexibility, innovation and responsiveness in WA government funding and contracting processes that will facilitate individualised employment service provision.

**Disability Services Commission feedback**

**Purpose of the Framework**

People with disability have the same rights and responsibilities as other people to participate in and contribute to their communities. Employment should be meaningful and productive, and also create positive effects in a person’s life by fostering social and economic participation.

People with disability make a valuable contribution to the workforce and the community through employment. Most people with disability can, and do, want to work. This supports the shift towards an aspirational approach to planning and goal setting, including the role of work in an individual’s life.

**Language**

In order to reinforce an enabling, strengths-based approach, it would be useful to revise some of the current terminology. Examples of terminology that could be changed include: ‘unable to work’, ‘life-course’ and ‘Jobs in Jeopardy’. Using positive language is important for people with disability in all stages of the continuum of current employment and services.

More broadly, work needs to be undertaken to remove the negative connotations and perceptions associated with people with disability in the workforce. Successful case studies and stories should be promoted and communicated to all stakeholders.

**National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**

In Western Australia, the comparative trials of the National Disability Insurance Agency NDIS model and the WA NDIS My Way model are informing the operational planning for the future of the NDIS in WA. The framework principles align well with the NDIS principles, which include choice and control, flexibility, individualised services, planning and capacity building and coordination across, and between, services.

WA NDIS My Way focuses on planning for current and future needs. People with disability, families and carers may choose to be supported by their My Way Coordinator to explore new strategies and create a plan which is tailored to their unique needs and goals, or they may wish to develop their own plans. This highly personalised approach includes building a relationship with each person. Where an individual’s plan includes employment goals, an effort is made to identify other areas of the individual’s life that require further development or targeted support to improve the chance of a positive employment outcome, such as daily living and independence, social skills and behaviour support. People with disability are in the best position to determine their own needs and goals, and to plan for their future.

WA NDIS My Way is unique in its relationship-based approach, which supports a holistic method of individualised planning and services that are integrated into the person’s existing natural supports and local community. Individualised funding aims to improve outcomes by enabling genuine choice and control, which are achieved through person-centred planning and self-directed services and support. It is recommended that the framework places a similarly strong emphasis on individualised planning, integration with community networks and a coordinated approach to services.

**Principles for Changes to Disability Employment Services**

The Commission recommends the addition of the following overarching principle:

* People with disability make a valuable contribution to the workforce and the community through engagement in employment.

The Commission recommends the following amendments to the principles:

**Individual funding based on needs and aspirations**

This principle and description of the benefits should be further developed to reflect an aspirational and strengths-based approach, within an enabling, human rights framework.

**Long-term career planning and capacity building**

This principle should include a holistic dimension to reflect the nature of the support required, ie. long-term holistic career planning.

**Person supported through their life-course**

The term ‘life-course’ is out-dated. It is suggested to simply use ‘support through the person’s life’ or ‘whole-of-life’ or to reflect ongoing support and mentoring. While it is acknowledged that the principles do not reflect prioritisation, positioning this principle first would better reflect the foundational nature of the principle itself.

**Understanding employer needs**

This principle should include a greater focus from the perspective of employers. This includes examining and profiling what employers are looking for in employees and enhanced end-to-end support services.

**Market-based service provision**

The Commission is supportive of a shift to market-based service provision and views this as a key strategy to increase choice and control for people with disability and foster innovation in service provision. This needs to be done in a way that ensures the sustainability of niche or specialist services particularly for small disability sector organisations. This is particularly relevant in regional and remote markets.

**Whole-of-government coordination and use of technology**

Whole-of-government coordination will require intentional collaboration both across the Commonwealth agencies and between Commonwealth, State and Local Governments.

The use of information and communications technology to create a digital marketplace and online environment for employment support will reduce regulations and streamline bureaucratic requirements. There is concern that this approach could compromise the capacity to provide personalised and holistic supports, embedded in a local context. Accessible technology will be integral to the effectiveness of this proposal. There is a need to ensure people with disability can engage and participate effectively in an online environment, particularly those with intellectual disability and / or high support needs.

**People with intellectual disability and high support needs**

It is imperative that people with intellectual disability or high support needs are supported throughout their engagement with employment services, as well as within the workplace. People with intellectual disability or high support needs are often categorised as ‘unable to work’ and / or ‘able to work in specialised supported environment’ categories, as defined by the Issues Paper. The capacity of these individuals to navigate the system, especially in a digital marketplace and online environment, requires further consideration to ensure appropriate engagement, support and outcomes for all parties.

An individualised and holistic approach ensures understanding of the needs, interests, goals and support requirements of the job seeker. Effective approaches include building trust and developing an ongoing relationship with the job seeker. It is also important to engage with employers to ascertain their needs and maintain an open dialogue so issues can be addressed in a timely manner.

The framework must be careful to not just support those people with disability that are perceived to be more easily employable and risk neglecting to provide reasonable and necessary supports to individuals with more complex need.

As mentioned above, the Commission is concerned about the use of the language and categorisation of some people with disability as ‘unable to work’. It is essential to raise the expectations of people with disability, employers and the broader community about the potential value and contribution people with disability can make in the workplace. For example, the microboard structure overseeing CAM-CAN (case study attached at Attachment A) illustrates how social enterprise initiatives can assist people with disability to achieve sustainable employment outcomes.

It is vital to ensure people with intellectual disability or high support needs:

* are supported to navigate and interact in a digital market place
* can navigate an employment market if funding is attached to individual planning
* gain meaningful employment if funding is attached to individual planning
* are provided with adequate on-the-job support in the open marketplace and
* are supported to make decisions as required.

**Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs)**

PHaMs provide practical assistance to people whose lives are severely affected by mental illness. PHaMs may be appropriate for people with psychosocial disability but will not always be appropriate for people with other types of disability. Ongoing support in and around job placement is needed for some people with disability but is more appropriately provided through a disability support program, rather than PHaMs.

Where people have a dual diagnosis of disability and mental illness, the focus should be on retaining sustainable and rewarding employment, rather than just finding a job. It is important that workplaces are aware, adaptable and responsive to peoples’ mental health needs. This includes flexible approaches to working hours and leave, as well as basic mental health first aid and wellness training.

**Job readiness**

Research shows that Australian young people with disability are not successfully transitioning from school into further training or employment; a factor that is an indicator of long term, and often life- long disadvantage[[3]](#footnote-3). The impact of young people with disability making a successful transition from school to work and or further study is critical. A positive experience and transition can greatly improve a young person’s their long-term economic future, wellbeing and inclusion in society.

The 2009 KPMG report ‘The Contemporary Disability Service System’ acknowledged that the critical transition points are: beginning school; leaving school and entering employment; beginning work; and retiring and ageing. A particular focus on the transition from school to work is recommended through increasing participation for people with disability in employment[[4]](#footnote-4).

Michelle Wakeford and Fiona Waugh, authors of the report titled ‘Transition to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative’ found that five key elements comprise a good transition. These are: ‘career development and workplace preparation’, ‘work experience’, vocational training’ ‘Australian School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship’ (ASbAT) and ‘part-time work’. These are the options generally made available to mainstream students / young people in Australia. Considerable research attests to the value and importance of all of these elements for a successful post-school transition, particularly for young people with disability[[5]](#footnote-5).

Improving outcomes for people with disability is a societal imperative as well as an economic one and involves greater attention to the following features and issues:

* Changing a pervasive culture of low expectations for Australian students with disability, particularly in relation to genuine sustainable employment. This culture affects the young people themselves, their parents, employers, educators and government.
* Engaging early with young people to improve their long term career options through joint planning. There should be clear pathways from school to employment or further training, and to employment providers.
* Providing skill development activities and work-based learning experiences is essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to facilitate informed choices about careers. Research suggests that, for people with disability, the transition-focused education and work-based experiences should: begin at age 14 and be the fundamental basis of the final years of secondary school rather than be an addition to, or an adaption of, the mainstream curriculum[[6]](#footnote-6).
* Ensuring young people with disability exit school with a job or having had quality work-based opportunities, and as a result have clear pathways for being continually engaged in employment, on-going learning and/or training.
* Creating locally-based cross-sectoral partnership networks (between education, industry, disability, employment, training, and youth service providers) to improve the post-school outcomes of young people with disability and create employment opportunities in the open market and within their local community.

**Accessibility**

Accessibility is integral to workforce participation. Accessibility issues include type and format of information, building accessibility and facilities (including Changing Places), and regular and accessible public transport options. Information needs to be comprehensive and easy to navigate. Existing information needs to be streamlined and consolidated.

Flexible employment practices such as working hours, the option to work from home, appropriate technology and flexible leave arrangements, such as special leave provisions for people with disability as a result of chronic medical conditions. Part-time and job share arrangements will also facilitate the engagement and retention of people with disability in the workplace.

**Summary of key points**

* People with disability make a valuable contribution to the workforce. Recognition of this contribution should be a core principle that informs the framework.

The framework should:

* Adopt a strengths-based approach though enabling language and concepts.
* Strengthen support to provide a holistic approach to individualised planning, funding and services that are embedded and integrated into the person’s existing natural supports and local community.
* Increase integration of the perspective and needs of employers.
* Balance a shift towards market-based employment services with the sustainability of niche or specialist services, particularly for small disability sector organisations. This is particularly relevant in regional and remote markets.
* Recognise that while information and communications technology will streamline the online environment for employment services, it may compromise provision of a personalised and holistic system, embedded in a local context.
* Support people with intellectual disability and / or high support needs achieve their employment goals through individualised funding, person-centred planning and individualised services and support.
* Provide appropriate support to all people with disability. While workplace and personal support is important to successful employment outcomes for some people with disability, Personal Helpers and Mentors may not always be appropriate.
* Ensure education, training, skill development activities and work-based learning experiences (including life and social skills), is based on an individual’s capabilities so the person is equipped for relevant job placements.
* Include flexible work practices and accessibility as key facilitators to secure and retain employment.

**Attachment A**

**CAM-CAN & Associates**

**The case study demonstrates people with disability, including profound intellectual disability, have a commitment to working and valuable skills and talents to contribute**.

Cameron Whitelaw is a proud business owner and operator; he lives in his own home and enjoys a life where he is valued for what he contributes. Cameron was born with a profound intellectual disability. Upon leaving school in 2008, the mainstream employment options available to Cameron in his local community were extremely marginal. Cameron's disability excluded him from supported employment.

Using a facilitator, Cameron, his family and friends identified and recorded his life goals and aspirations. A microboard governance model was established and  
CAM-CAN & Associates wasformed. CAM-CAN is a waiting service. Cameron and his support worker can come to a home or business and wait for deliveries or installation work. While waiting, CAM-CAN also offers a range of tidying jobs for small fee and provides a voluntary pick-up and delivery service to people in the community.

CAM-CAN has been uniquely designed around Cameron’s skills and interests. He is continually developing life skills, facing new challenges and meeting people. As a result of his innovative and creative support arrangements, Cameron is surrounded by friends and lives a fulfilling life in the community.

Cameron has successfully achieved more than what the current disability employment services system could offer him.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Western Australia, 2012, (cat.no.4430DO005),* viewed 17 July 2015<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02012?OpenDocument> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wakeford,M. Waugh,F. (2014) Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative’ report (retrieved at http://www.tickettowork.org.au/research/transitions-employment-australian-young-people-disability-ticket-work-initiative/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. KMPG.(2009) ‘The Contemporary Disability Service System. Final Report’. Victoria, Australia: Victorian Department of Human Services. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wakeford,M. Waugh,F. (2014) Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative’ report (retrieved at http://www.tickettowork.org.au/research/transitions-employment-australian-young-people-disability-ticket-work-initiative/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kohler,P. and Field,S.(2003). ‘Transition-focused Education: Foundation for the future’, The Journal of Special Education, 37(3), 174-183 cited in Wakeford,M. Waugh,F. (2014) Transitions to Employment of Australian Young People with Disability and the Ticket to Work Initiative’ report (retrieved at http://www.tickettowork.org.au/research/transitions-employment-australian-young-people-disability-ticket-work-initiative/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)