**Submission on Disability Support Services**

I, John Gilbert Bennetto, have been on the DSP since May 2004, related to a chronic and complex dual diagnosis. This diagnosis(es) does not however now preclude me from working in the capacity that I am able to, with my medical and psychological supports firmly in place.

I began an attempt to get help from the DES sector in 1999 when I was still on Sickness benefits (I was assigned to CRS as a result). They found me some good placements for work experience, and so my first experience was positive. I then worked normally in my now long retired from profession until my illness forced me onto the DSP. A couple of years of working on myself to get “better” I felt I could return to work in a limited degree and sought assistance from the DES, after completing a JCA.

I have since been to the following organisation, all equally appalling and negative:

CRS x2

Centrecare x2

Help Enterprises (what a misnomer)

Australian Red Cross DES (2 years, 6 consultants – no help at all)

EPIC (since August 2014 – still no job; now offering me volunteer placements)

I am a highly educated man with a university degree and a Certificate in General Nursing (a profession I can no longer return to as it prolongs my illness). All I am offered are jobs such as cleaner, car washer, warehouse worker or forklift driver. I would have been better off never going to University or attending Nursing School as all the jobs I am offered are as unskilled labourers, telemarketers or other “jobs” I can find for myself and require no help in looking for.

Your interest areas:

We are interested in your views on nine specific topic areas:

* Workforce Participation of People with Disability

What participation? I am offered no suitable and sustainable work and so do not participate. All interviews I have had I have generated myself. I got a job myself as a PHaMs Support Worker in 2013, but had problems related to my illness. The NGO was neither supportive nor understanding and my contract, as a result, was not renewed.

* Different needs of People with Disability

I have gone to great pains to present the levels at which I can work, and what limitations I might have. These are never addressed. I am also over 50yo, and as a result suffer from age discrimination as well. This is a well-documented discrimination today, yet it remains unapproached.

* Principles for Changes to Disability Employment Services

There need to be massive changes. I have worked as an employment consultant myself, in a voluntary capacity and see my role as going out and reverse marketing my clients. The EC’s in the organisations I have been with, and still am, do not do this! They wait for jobs to be sent to them, jobs that I call “disposable jobs’ as they can be found in any employment section under “General” in any newspaper. What’s the point of a DES? To market me as an individual and to explain to employers the benefits of employing me, financial and skills-wise. This IS NOT done!

* National Disability Insurance Scheme

Good idea in theory, but in practice it has many like me worried. I was a part of forming the NDIS feedback for rollout by running the Wellways NDIS MI Recovery Program in Brisbane, so I understand it very well. I have never been approached by anyone from the NDIA and yet I have been asked recently to fill out an online survey on how they’ve supported me. They haven’t!

* Personal Helpers and Mentors

Useless. I have worked as a PHaMs Worker myself, and while I found it rewarding using my own experiences and skills, the support workers I have had and have interacted with will only agree with what I say, offer a few paltry suggestions…then “See you in a fortnight”. I ask for honest opinions, but they cannot give them (policy). What do they actually do? I could write a book on what PHaMs does not do!

* Australian Disability Enterprises

No help at all. Just a big hole, filled with staff that do nothing and receive funding for doing nothing. They write policies and have meetings. Run a few community projects to look good and that’s it.

* Disability Employment Services

I know how they work, and I know how they should work. I have been ‘parked’ so often over the years I have to scratch my head. I have never gained one interview for work, let alone work itself from any DES. I have heard the same thing from everyone I know who has been under any DES. I have complained endlessly, and with good reason to both DEWAR and the Social Workers at Centrelink. The only option offered: try someone else.

* Job Services Australia

A joke, and a well-funded bad joke it is. It serves to keep people on a DSP hidden from the unemployment figures. Does it help us get employment? True sustainable, meaningful and supportive employment? No. Does it offer alternatives that do not require you to go and do it/ fund it yourself? Never. I am thoroughly disillusioned with the whole of JSA and what they do (or not do, as in my experiences).

* Support for Employers.

I am not an employer, but once was. I, as an employer in the past would want direct contact with EC’s, have the financial supports explained in detail and know that if I am employing someone with a disability that I will be supported by the DES. I have yet to hear of this happening.

In summation:

I have been working with DES’s for years and never have they even remotely come close to helping me return to the workforce in a meaningful, supportive and sustainable way. I have always explained the limitations I have with regard to my illness (and they are small ‘barriers’), yet am only offered jobs that fall far outside of these:

1/ 3 days a week, eventually leading to full-time

2/ Team-based, as I am socially isolated through being unemployed

3/ Day work only, no shifts (this is a medical necessity)

4/ Utilising my vast skillset, and failing that, helping me to re-skill