

13 July 2015

Disability Employment Taskforce  
PO Box 7576  
Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Dear Sir/Madam

**National Disability Employment Framework – Discussion**

Thank-you for the opportunity to comment on the Issues Paper, *National Disability Employment Framework*. The Endeavour Foundation commends the Disability Employment Taskforce for its work in preparing an Issue Paper on such important issues that have a direct impact on Australians with a disability.

The Endeavour Foundation provides feedback around the Australian Disability Enterprise in the attached submission. We note the time available to submit comments, so this submission is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the nine topics listed for discussion.

We are happy for our submission to be published and would be pleased to continue our involvement through any community forums, consultations or conferences regarding the Issues Paper.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Issues Paper. Further enquiries should be directed to Angela Burdon, National Program Manager on 07 3896 6008.

Yours faithfully,



David Barbagallo  
Chief Executive Officer

**Endeavour Foundation**

**Submission to the Department of Social Services - Disability Employment  
Taskforce  
National Disability Employment Framework**

**July 2015**

**Submission Title:** Submission to the Department of Social Services  
National Disability Employment Framework – Discussion

**Date:** 13 July 2015

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## **Endeavour Foundation**

Endeavour Foundation is an independent not-for-profit organisation supporting more than 3,300 people with a disability from more than 230 locations in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

We are one of Queensland's oldest charities, founded in 1951 when a group of parents unwilling to accept the limitations placed upon them by the education system, joined together to provide an education for their children with a disability.

Today, the Endeavour Foundation is a diverse community organisation providing person-centred support for people with a disability a part of the everyday community through education, training and life skill development, employment, accommodation support, respite and recreation. Endeavour Foundation has 28 Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) located across three states and employing 2125 people with a disability.

## **Overview to Submission**

There are approximately 20,000 people with disabilities employed within Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs).<sup>1</sup> These programs are the predominant supported employment option for people experiencing significant barriers to employment.

This submission proposes that

- ADEs provide employment to people with disabilities who have significant barriers to the open employment market and furthermore provide a service both unique in the disability employment services sector and vital to the people it supports.
- Given the extensive barriers to accessing open employment faced by many people who are employed within ADEs, it is likely that the absence of this opportunity may mean a significant number will not be employed.

In addition to outlining specific areas of benefit to people with disabilities and the wider community that ADEs are able to provide, the submission also addresses some of the sector challenges presented by the changing context in which disability services are funded and delivered.

Whilst acknowledging the need for transformation within the Supported Employment industry, this submission highlights some of the innate social and economic benefits provided by ADEs. With support and collaboration, ADEs could be poised to become the most successful point of entry, training arena, return to work platform and active support network for people with disabilities in the employment market.

If supported through a process of commercial and support realignment the ADEs of the future could provide an optimal environment for people with disabilities to begin their career.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (July 2013), *The Future of Wage Setting in Supported Employment*, Australian Government, Canberra.

## Australian Disability Enterprises

### Benefits

In 2010, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) reported that for employment outcomes for people with a disability Australia was ranked 21 out of 29 countries.<sup>2</sup> Further, Price Waterhouse Coopers, in their report of 2011, added that people with a disability in Australia are only half (50%) as likely to be employed as people without a disability.<sup>3</sup> For comparison within OECD countries the relativity is 60% and considering the top eight OECD countries, the relativity is closer to 70%.

Whilst it is acknowledged that reform is needed, it is also important to recognise that generalist criticism of Australian Disability Enterprises is to undervalue the incredible and quantifiable contribution ADEs make both to the community and to people with disabilities.

At their core, ADEs provide employment to a group of people who would otherwise be excluded from this experience. Whether this is used to increase skill levels and move people on to open employment positions or whether this is simply the provision of a normalisation mechanism, ADEs provide the 'employment experience' to people who have significant barriers in employment participation. These experiences may be undervalued by those who, with relative ease, can step into jobs. As mentioned above, for people with a disability the open employment market presents significant barriers that many are unable to overcome.

It should also be recognised that many ADEs employ a high percentage of people with an intellectual disability. In 2012 the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that "the unemployment rate for people with intellectual disability was high in comparison with other disability groups, regardless of severity.....This may partly reflect the unique barriers that people with intellectual disability face in accessing education and work."<sup>4</sup> Thus ADEs provide a meaningful and productive experience for the cohort of people with disabilities who experience the greatest barriers to employment.

### The provision of Core Employability Skills

In the open labour market, core employment skills are a pre-employment expectation but are not necessarily part of the knowledge base for people with a disability, especially those who are school-leavers transitioning into the workforce. Most employers expect a new employee to understand basic workplace behaviours, professional protocols and cultural norms. The majority of companies seeking staff through open employment do not have a staff member with knowledge and understanding of behaviours that may be exhibited by a person with a disability. Thus

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<sup>2</sup> *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries* (2010), OECD Publishing, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (Australia) 2011, *Disability expectations: investing in a better life, a stronger Australia*, PWC, (Australia).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian Social Trends, March Quarter 2012', *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40March+Quarter+2012#lfp> (at 09 July 2015).

their experience of employing a person with a disability has the potential to be negative for the employer and the employee.

ADEs spend a significant amount of time in training and reinforcing core skills to enhance employability. Such training regularly includes assisting employees to understand the importance of their contribution towards the team; promoting positive behaviour support techniques; enhancing basic workplace health and safety understanding; stress and anxiety management, assisting Supported Employees in interactions within the community; and working with the individual's support network to maintain employment. Support such as this is not routinely available in open employment settings and it is a concern as to whether many of the people employed within Australian Disability Enterprises would be able to comfortably transition to an open employment situation where this 'core skills' assistance is not available.

### Transferrable industry-based Skills

The ability of ADEs to develop transferrable skills for people with a disability is an important aspect of their operation. For example, the provision of a training program in the use of a flow pack machine (food packaging) or collating equipment (mail sorting) is common in ADEs. The use of such equipment is not, however, confined to the disability enterprises. Thus the skills gained in the ADE are "transferrable" and validated through a vocational certificate issued following training and demonstrated competencies. Together with the core skills gained by participation in the ADE workforce, these transferrable industry-based skills provide vital development opportunities which could alleviate some of the many barriers people with disabilities experience when seeking open employment.

### Lifestyle Support

With the forthcoming implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) it is difficult to quantify the proportion of people, currently employed within ADEs, who may be eligible for funded supports within the NDIS. Currently, many people rely on their position within ADEs to provide life skills education and support as they receive no other funded assistance. Such supports can include advocacy within the criminal justice system, housing and tenancy issues, as well as assistance in managing interactions with government departments and statutory authorities. The absence of such supports, currently being provided through ADEs has the potential to correlate with an increased frequency at best with support agencies; and at worst with entities such as the criminal justice system, homelessness services and law enforcement agencies. Supported employees within ADEs receive assistance with many aspects of their lives beyond the work place environment including paperwork, information provision, and administrative requirements government agencies place on potential service recipients (Centrelink, tenancy agreements and other similar services).

### Breaking down barriers to work

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, some people with a disability experience employment restrictions, including being restricted in the type of job they can do, the number of hours they can work, or the requirement for special assistance in the workplace.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

People with a disability, who had an employment restriction, were less likely to be participating in the labour force (46%) than those without an employment restriction (71%)<sup>6</sup>. Of the 69% of people with disability who had an employment restriction, the most common restrictions were the type of job or the number of hours they could work (51% and 31% respectively).<sup>7</sup> People with profound or severe disability were the most likely to have some kind of employment restriction (92%).<sup>8</sup>

ADEs create a flexible working environment that provides an allowance for the style of employment the individual requires together with a strategic plan for achievable improvement and goals. Higher working hours are encouraged by ADEs however their programs are flexible enough to accommodate long periods of time out of work when or if required by the individual.

Working together with specialists within funded organisations, ADEs can provide an ideal environment in which to 'experience' work. They provide employment tasks that are designed to be achievable for an individual's skill set and are often structured around what someone can do rather than a specific task the business requires. This is one of the major contrasts with an open employment environment. For example, a person who may not have extensive literacy or numeracy skills and who is nonverbal may have minimal opportunities within the open employment market. Such an individual, however, may be able to work purposefully and productively within an ADE program. This is due to the fact that such characteristics are familiar to ADE staff who do not view the staff member's disabilities as barriers.

### Social Inclusion

A socially inclusive society can be defined as one in which all people feel valued, their differences respected and their basic needs are met in order to live with dignity. One of the core reasons people with a disability nominate for working in an ADEs is that of social inclusion. Anecdotally, a common opinion expressed by those who work in ADEs is that the ability to be a 'worker' has resulted in the individual feeling valued and respected for the job they do. The notion of contributing to their community is also one that is highly regarded by employees.

Those who work in ADEs are provided an opportunity to meet and work in a team environment, which in turn enhances each individual's ability to navigate changing social situations. This allows for the development and growth in skills that are utilised in interactions outside the workplace.

It is important to note that for many people who work in ADEs this is their only form of support service. If the support and services provided by their ADEs were to be removed it may have further significant repercussions for the person who, without any external contact or support network may then find themselves in a very real crisis.

### Transformation Opportunities for ADEs

The changes the wider disability sector is experiencing present an opportunity for ADEs to adapt to meet the underlying aims of the NDIS. In order to achieve this, ADEs

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

will need to consider modifications to both commercial businesses and support methodology. Crucially, ADEs must move to create more people-centred and goal-orientated yet commercially viable businesses employing a diverse range of people with disabilities. This is a challenging, yet achievable goal.

Increased commercial viability for ADEs is currently being achieved through a variety of strategies. These include a combination of automated processes and 'by touch' processes, which allow for higher volumes and competitive turnaround times whilst ensuring people's abilities, are able to be accommodated. Diversification into new and non-traditional markets is proving beneficial in creating new revenue streams whilst providing new skills development opportunities for people with disabilities.

Improvements such as streamlining and creating interactions between various streams working in the field of disability support, would potentially allow for a supported integration and transition into open employment. This could then create a structured, progressive and supported pathway. Although the Australian Government has announced its intention to adopt a similar approach, no further information has been provided as to how this would be facilitated or who may be eligible to participate.

Programs around developing careers within ADEs are also a positive move within the sector. Many ADEs are working with structured career development strategies for individuals to enhance their wages, qualifications and to take on more responsibility within their current employment.

A structured transition for supported employees, from ADEs into either retirement or open employment is not currently provided within the ADE framework. It is, therefore, difficult to facilitate such processes within funded organisations with limited resources. Changes that would allow adequate resourcing for such future planning would be beneficial to the employee, their family and the employer.

## **Summary**

ADEs are employers of people with disabilities, and without ADEs over 20,000 people may not have a job. Regardless of considerations of what many label as not 'real' work, the supported employees themselves consider their current status is as a 'worker' and that it is a critical and positive influence in their lives. People with disabilities working in ADE sites are clients and customers and it is their opinion, together with outcomes for them, which should influence actions.

ADEs provide an environment in which employees have the opportunity to acquire core employability skills; transferrable industry-based skills along with social engagement and inclusion skills; all of which are a necessary part of being an active member of the community. By providing a sense of value, increased self-esteem and purpose participation within ADEs can also minimise external support requirements and for some participants, prevent negative experiences such as homelessness, becoming victims of violence or from entering into the criminal justice system.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the ADE model requires development in order to maintain continued commercial viability whilst contributing to positive employment outcomes for people with a disability this is a challenge that many ADEs are currently addressing through programs of commercial diversification and in the creation of new and varied support programs for Supported Employees.

The OECD contends that, “the best way to fight benefit dependence and exclusion among people with a disability is to promote their re-integration into employment if they can and wish to work”.<sup>9</sup>

It is the view of the Endeavour Foundation, that it is critical to hold on to ADEs as a vital employment option for people with disabilities and better still, make it ‘work’ for those who can and wish to be employed.

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<sup>9</sup> *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries* (2010), OECD Publishing, Paris.