

Disability Employment Services Reform 2018

GPO Box 9820

CANBERRA ACT 2610

Via email to: [DESReform2018@dss.gov.au](mailto:DESReform2018@dss.gov.au)

16 November 2016

Dear Disability Employment Services Reform branch

**Re: Improving employment outcomes for young people with disability**

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) is a Victorian advocacy service that works alongside young people with disability between the ages of 12 and 25, to raise awareness of their rights and to support them to achieve their goals.

YDAS provides one-to-one support to young people with disability through its individual advocacy service, and tackles systemic issues affecting the full and equal participation of people with disability through its policy work. YDAS is informed and guided by a steering committee made up of young people with a range of experiences of disability. YDAS operates as a core agency of Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) – the state’s youth peak body – and is funded by the Victorian Government Office for Disability.

YDAS welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed changes to the Disability Employment Services framework. We have chosen to comment on those issues of particular importance to young people with disability, as we are satisfied that the submissions of other disability advocacy organisations have adequately addressed the other discussion points raised in the consultation paper.

While we welcome the proposal to expand the role of Disability Employment Services to assist young people with disability with the transition from education to employment, there is a need for early intervention in this area. Research shows that building experience in the job market early in life can enhance an individual's long-term employment prospects.<sup>i</sup>

According to data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 41% of Australia's full-time students (aged 15-24 years) worked a part-time job most weeks.<sup>ii</sup> However, it can be far more difficult for young people with disability to access and pursue employment or volunteer opportunities while still in school, preventing them from developing career experience or networks or a proper understanding of workplace environments. DES providers could play an important role in bridging this gap by providing assistance to young people with disability who have the capacity and desire to work part-time while completing their studies. Students with disability should therefore be able to access support from disability employment services from 15 years of age, so that they have the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

In recognition of the evidence base for early intervention, we assert that referral for disability employment services must not fall to Centrelink alone, as this would not adequately meet the needs of people with disability who are under 16 years of age. There must be a broad range of options available to meet the needs of students with disability, including self-referral or referral by a high-school career counsellor, case manager, Local Area Coordinator or youth worker.

YDAS is also concerned that the current framework does not reflect the transient nature of Australia's workforce. Research suggests that the average Australian will have around 17 employers from the time they leave school until retirement.<sup>iii</sup> However, young people with disability face additional barriers to accruing career experience: they are not able to access assistance from a DES provider if they are already working eight or more hours a week. This means that young people with disability are often *underemployed* when they would like to be working more hours, or are stuck working in entry level roles when they have a desire to progress to something more challenging.

YDAS asserts that people with disability who are already in employment should be able to access support from disability employment services to assist them to transition to another job. Such measures are crucial in ensuring that young people with disability have access to the same opportunities for career advancement and economic security as their non-disabled peers.

Finally, a human rights-based approach to service delivery requires participants to be properly informed about their rights and how to exercise them. Information about disability employment services and participant rights and responsibilities must be made available in plain English, as well as alternative formats such as Easy English, Braille and audio. Further consideration must be given to how this information can be integrated into an early intervention approach. This may involve DES providers playing a lead role in providing information to relevant professionals across the education sector, such as high school career counsellors.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our feedback. Achieving positive employment outcomes for young people with disability is part of our core work and we welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>i</sup> Gregg & Tominey 2004, Kawaguchi & 2014, and Mroz & Savage 2006), in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Young people (15–24)' (2015) accessed 12 December 2016 <http://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-welfare/2015/young-people/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, '4102.0 - Australian Social Trends' (March 2010) accessed 12 December 2016 <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features40Mar+2010>>.

<sup>iii</sup> McCrindle, M. published in McCrindle-Research Blog, 'Job Mobility in Australia' (June 2014) accessed 12 December 2016 <http://mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/job-mobility-in-australia>.