

5th March 2018

Australian Government
Department of Social Services
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Submission: Ensuring a strong future for supported employment

The Community Industry Group (CI Group) is pleased to provide a submission to Department of Social Services with regard to the 'Ensuring a strong future for supported employment'.

About the Community Industry Group

The Community Industry Group (formerly known as the Illawarra Forum) is the peak body working for community services organisations and for communities in south east NSW. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For twenty five years, the Community Industry Group (CI Group) has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector. We regularly engage with those organisations, services and individuals that work in supporting disadvantaged community members to collect their opinion, expertise and recommendations.

General Comments

Supported employment plays an important role in supporting and improving the lives of people with a disability, and their carers. Australian Disability Enterprises, (ADEs), provide economic, social and training opportunities to persons with disability and the wider community. For most ADE employees, their job is not simply 'just a job', but a life-enhancing experience which enables them to build friendship groups, develop relationships, and feel valued in a supported work environment that caters specifically for individual developmental, physical and socio-emotional needs whilst offering choice and participation in the local community.

Here in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions we are fortunate to have long standing ADEs such as Greenacres, The Flagstaff Group and The Disability Trust whom for decades have

provided ongoing supported employment to local persons with a disability, who due to their level of disability and various systemic challenges have not been able to access open employment in an ongoing manner.

Strategies to support employment participation for people with disability

People who are employed by ADEs value to the support and flexibility that these specialist employers are able to offer. There have been numerous instances of people with disability who have moved from an ADE to open employment, but found they could not thrive in the open environment. Many felt they were not valued by their employers or colleagues, and were left feeling isolated and unsupported. There are instances of people with disability who became depressed or suffered from stress before returning to the ADE environment after a period in open employment.

While the NDIS has a focus on encouraging financial participation for people with disability, the reality in the local area is that very few plans include any employment outcomes. There is a clear need for planners, Local Area Coordinators, and representatives of the NDIA to develop clear understandings about the supports and programs needed to enable people with disability to transition into employment. Employment ambitions should also be included in every NDIS plan discussion for people of employment age.

Strategies to support employer/providers to offer effective employment opportunities

Many ADEs already provide non-employment supports to people with disabilities, and many are exploring further opportunities under the NDIS. However, the importance of ADEs and their unique models of enterprise, must be acknowledged and valued. ADEs exist primarily to encourage and support employment for people with disabilities and while some may choose to expand their offerings to include non-employment outcomes, it is vital that the ADEs model continues to be funded as a viable option in its own right.

It is important to note that this is not about organisations transitioning their services delivery in order to remain viable. Rather, this is about the Australian Government recognising and valuing the additional benefits ADEs deliver to supported employees, their families and carers.

The opportunity for ADEs to specialize as providers of employment supports for people with disability in open employment situations has been floated in the Discussion Paper, and this indeed may be a very good way to share their knowledge and expertise. However, such a

specialization must be accompanied with incentives and income opportunities in order to make it a viable activity.

Strategies to facilitate greater choice and control for NDIS participants

The Discussion Paper identifies the market stewardship role of the NDIA in encouraging providers to deliver employment outcomes. An obvious step in achieving these outcomes is the inclusion of employment outcomes in NDIS plans. We strongly encourage targeted planning approaches for the various age cohorts so that employment is discussed as an outcome at every plan meeting – whether that is young people planning for future employment, or older people looking to establish employment or progress their career.

The only way to encourage more employment is for every NDIS participant who is assessed as able to work to have employment included in their NDIS plan.

In conclusion I would like to thank the Department of Social Services for providing the opportunity to comment on the future of supported employment. Should you require further information on any of the points raised in this submission please contact me on 02 42 4256 4333 or email at nsloan@cigroup.org.au

Sincerely,



Nicky Sloan
CEO

