

Thursday 8 March 2018

Department of Social Services
via engage.dss.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Discussion Paper – Ensuring a strong future for supported employment.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Government policy and practice must recognise that Australian Disability Enterprises provide legitimate employment for people with disability.
2. Government policy and funding must recognise that some people with disability will choose to spend a significant or all of their working life as an employee of an Australian Disability Enterprise.
3. Government language should be tempered so that it does not imply that the sole or main purpose of Australian Disability Enterprises is to prepare people with disability for other places of work and/or training.
4. Government must provide Australian Disability Enterprises with access to funding that will enable them to strengthen their enterprises to respond to the opportunities created by the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the commercial environment in which they operate.
5. Government must support ADEs through procurement by committing to spend at least 3% of its procurement budget on goods and services from ADEs
6. If the wage structure that operates within ADEs must be changed, then Government provide the necessary immediate and ongoing financial resources to ensure that NO supported employment jobs are lost or reduced as a result of these changes.
7. Government policy and practice must facilitate the fluid involvement of people with disability in work and study of their choosing.
8. Government policy and practice must recognise that employment should be part of an ordinary life of a person with disability.

About Self Help Workplace

Self Help Workplace is an Australian Disability Enterprises operating in Launceston, Tasmania. The enterprise currently employs 51 adults with disability who work across four commercial business units:

Prime Timber Production: manufacture of a range of timber products including: pallets, survey pegs, garden stakes, bins, boxes, customised packaging and processing

Merit Commercial Solutions: mailouts, print finishing, secure shredding, sewing, product assembly



merit
COMMERCIAL
SOLUTIONS



plenty
CATERING
& HIRE



encore
CLOTHING



prime
TIMBER
PRODUCTION



Encore Clothing: second hand clothing, industrial cleaning cloths

Plenty Catering and Hire: corporate catering, room and bus hire

The enterprise also offers employees a life skills program that supports employees to learn independent life skills. The program currently includes: cooking, personal and work hygiene and a kitchen garden. That program is funded primarily through an annual bequest from a deceased estate. Additional programs are offered when funding is available such as literacy and numeracy training and electronic literacy (using IT safely).

Self Help Workplace receives income from three main streams: revenue from the sales of its commercial goods and services (60%), government funding for supported employment (30%) and grants, donations and other (10%).

The views of the industry

The views in this submission represent the opinions of Self Help Workplace and are intended to provide the perspective of a small independent ADE working in regional Australia.

Self Help Workplace has also contributed to a submission made by TADES – the Tasmanian Association of Disability Employment Services of which it is a founding member. Self Help Workplace supports the views of TADES as set out in that submission. As a member of National Disability Services, Self Help Workplace has also reviewed our peak body's submission and supports the views set out in that document.

Recommendation 1: Government policy and practice must recognise that Australian Disability Enterprises provide legitimate employment for people with disability.

Self Help Workplace was created in 1962 by a group of parents who were concerned that their children who were about to/or had just left school would not be welcome into the world of work. Their inspired solution was to create a business that would do just that. From its humble origins in a small weatherboard cottage, Self Help Workplace has grown into a strong, valued social enterprise. The enterprise is absolutely committed to its mission to provide people with disability with meaningful and productive employment so they can enjoy independent and fulfilling lives.

It is often forgotten in the conversations about supported employment and Australian Disability Enterprises that ADE employees do not have to work. Their receipt of the Disability Support Pension does not require them to work. The staggering success of ADEs is that 20,000 people with disability choose to work in an ADE.

ADE employees choose to work because they:

- Feel valued at work
- Feel welcome, respected and safe at work
- Make friends at work
- Know they are making a contribution to their community
- Want to be independent

Government needs to continue to recognise and support ADEs as social enterprises that provide people with disability with much needed employment and in doing so improve the quality of lives of those living with disability.

Recommendation 2: Government policy and funding must recognise that some people with disability will choose to spend a significant portion or all of their working life as an employee of an Australian Disability Enterprise.

There is a tone in the discussion paper that people with disability ought not to spend their entire working life in an Australian Disability Enterprise. Self Help Workplace experiences very low turnover. Many of our supported employees choose to spend long periods (or an entire working life) with Self Help Workplace. This is their choice. For many, Self Help Workplace provides continuity and consistency. The low turnover allows employees to form life-long friendships, learn, practice and develop skills and provides a place to support employees dealing with difficult periods in their life. The following example illustrates this experience.

Several years ago, one of Self Help Workplace's supported employees experienced a major unexpected incident of serious mental illness. Following diagnosis, the employee took several weeks off work (longer than four weeks resulting in their suspension from FOFMS). After this intensive period, their mother contacted Self Help Workplace about organising a slow return to work. Our response was that if a return to work would assist with their recovery then we would do what we needed to do to facilitate that. Over the following weeks, the employee returned for one or two hours per week (with their mother). Over time, this was extended to longer periods and then longer periods without their mother. The employee has now returned to work on their normal hours (pre mental illness).

Self Help Workplace worked very closely with this employee's carer to reassure both the carer and the employee that their employment was not jeopardised in any way by the extended absence, and to the extent to which we could, we would provide employment (under any terms) if it would assist with the employee's recovery. This meant that Self Help Workplace did not receive funding for long periods, but we were determined that this would not influence our commitment to this employee. We are delighted that the employee has returned to work. The experience proved to be important to the health and wellbeing of the employee and their carer.

Recommendation 3: Government language should be tempered so that it does not imply that the sole or main purpose of Australian Disability Enterprises is to prepare people with disability for other places of work and/or training.

Much of the language in the Discussion implies that the sole or primary purpose of Australian Disability Enterprise is to prepare and place people with disability in 'open' employment. This is not Self Help Workplace's defining mission.

Self Help Workplace also takes issue with the use of language such as 'open' employment. This term implies that the converse 'closed' describes other employment options, such as supported employment and to do so in a pejorative sense. This is not the case. Self Help Workplace does not exclude people without a disability from our workforce. Rather, our enterprise chooses to specialise and focus its efforts on providing people with disability with work which is tailored to their needs and expectations.

The argument about ADEs as a conduit to 'open' employment also assumes that jobs are available in 'open' employment. If this were the case, then the OECD would not have ranked Australia 25th out of 29 member nations in 2010 in respect of the labour force participation rate of people with disability.

Government policy and practice needs to reflect the reality that not all organisations will have the appropriate culture, policy, practice and commitment to provide a workplace that will provide the right support and environment for some people with disability, particularly those with moderate to high support needs and people with intellectual disability. For this reason, people with disability have chosen to work in ADEs because of the specialised job design and tailored support that is offered. If NDIS is to offer people with disability choice and control, then ADEs must continue to be available as a chosen employment destination.

Recommendation 4: Government must provide Australian Disability Enterprises with access to funding that will enable them to strengthen their enterprises to respond to the opportunities created by the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the commercial environment in which they operate.

As the Government is aware, most Australian Disability Enterprises operate under significant financial constraints with modest capacity to invest in re-engineering the enterprise. Self Help Workplace acknowledges that Government has provided some assistance with the ERO Wage Supplementation and 3 rounds of business consultation funding. Unfortunately, while the latter has enabled some ADEs to receive professional advice, there is no funding to pursue the implementation of any recommendations that might follow from that professional advice.

Government must provide Australian Disability Enterprises with access to funding that will enable them to strengthen their enterprises to respond to the opportunities created by the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the commercial environment in which they operate.

Self Help Workplace recommends that the Government establish a competitive industry growth fund that will make funds available to ADEs to make capital and infrastructure improvements that enhance competitiveness, innovation, sustainability and maximise employment opportunities for people with disability.

Recommendation 5: Government must support ADEs through procurement by committing to spend at least 3% of its procurement budget on goods and services from ADEs

One important opportunity that exists for Government to support ADEs is to purchase the goods and services that ADEs provide. This not only generates commercial revenues for ADEs it also demonstrates to the wider business community that ADEs are a valued and credentialed supplier.

With an annual turnover of approximately \$1.7million, Self Help Workplace is a key element of the supply chain in Tasmania, provides much needed employment and contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of the community of northern Tasmania. In order to sustain the enterprise, at least 60% of its revenue must be generated from the sale of its goods and services. The purchase of goods and services by the Commonwealth

would not only contribute to Self Help Workplace's bottom line it would also inject valuable revenue in the regional economy.

Recommendation 6: If the wage structure that operates within ADEs must be changed, then Government provide the necessary immediate and ongoing financial resources to ensure that NO supported employment jobs are lost or reduced as a result of these changes.

The wages system that operates in ADEs continues to overshadow the good work being done in the sector. This is unfortunate as the wage system recognises the very specific and tailored tasks that characterise the work environment in ADEs.

However, Self Help Workplace recognises that changes to the wage arrangements in ADEs might result from the current matter before the Fair Work Commission. If this occurs, Self Help Workplace expects that Government will provide ALL the necessary immediate and ongoing financial resources to ADEs to adjust to this change. Such financial resources will need to reflect not only the revised wage rates of employees, but other employment costs including leave, superannuation and workers compensation insurance premiums. As with many businesses, employment costs constitute one of the biggest expenses in the enterprise. Even small changes have significant flow on effects throughout the business (including the competitiveness of goods and services in the marketplace). It is imperative that NO supported employment jobs are lost or reduced as a result of any changes in the wage structure in ADEs.

There are also likely to be significant administrative expenses associated with any change in the wage arrangements. Funding must be available to ADEs to offset the additional resources that will be required to implement a new system.

Recommendation 7: Government policy and practice must facilitate the fluid involvement of people with disability in work and study of their choosing.

The intersection of the social welfare system (disability support pension and other payments) with the employment sector has the effect of 'funneling' people with disability into different employment markets. As a result, people with disability are not able to move readily between employment schemes. For example, a DES cannot place a person with disability in an ADE and receive an outcome. A person with disability cannot work in both 'open' employment and supported employment at the same time. This constraints people with disability from:

- Enjoying a variety of employment experiences
- Trying work opportunities to see if they want to do that type of work/work in that industry
- Taking a risk and perhaps having a work experience not succeed

The literature indicates that a person might have over 17 jobs over 5 careers over their working life.¹ The policies and practices that are in place to support a person with disability

¹ See the following article that illustrates job mobility in Australia <http://mccrindle.com.au/the-mccrindle-blog/job-mobility-in-australia>

in employment must also recognise that the same variety and change may occur in their working lives.

The policy and program disconnect between ADEs and the NDIS is evident in the SLES program.

The most recent guidelines set out the following requirements (emphasis added):

*SLES are tailored to meet the participant's individual employment goals. It is expected that work experience in **open employment** will be offered as a core component and predominant activity of SLES.*

....

Providers must develop individually tailored activities to support and meet the participant's employment goal. These supports must include:

- *work experience in **open employment***
- *job site training*
- *travel training.*

The guidelines indicate a strong bias towards open employment as the only legitimate employment pathway.

Self Help Workplace has and will continue to actively work with schools, colleges and others to provide people with disability with work experience. Some of Self Help Workplace's employees have come via the work experience route.

Government policy and programs (whether that be through the NDIS or some other vehicle) needs to support people with disability to experience a wide range of work experience opportunities. However, the narrow scope of SLES limits these opportunities and therefore the employment horizon. Self Help Workplace considers that it is important that the scope of funded supports needs to be flexible enough for people with disability to try as many different employment options as possible. The opportunities for a variety of employment journeys needs to be available for school leavers and for adults entering or re-entering the workforce.

Recommendation 8: Government policy and practice must recognise that employment should be part of an ordinary life of a person with disability.

One of the perplexing consequences of the implementation of the NDIS has been the reduction in the number of people with disability looking for/securing employment. Much has been said in other contexts about the paucity of NDIS plans that include employment.

Prior to the introduction of the NDIS, Self Help Workplace had regular contact with potential employees about work opportunities and maintained a waiting list. Since the NDIS commenced in Tasmanian in 2012, NOT a single new employee has started with Self Help Workplace who has come with a NDIS plan. All of Self Help Workplace's NDIS employees have been transferred from existing case based funding places. This would indicate that there is something wrong in the NDIS planning process. All new employees at Self Help Workplace since 2012 fall within the case based funding stream and have come from visits to Self Help Workplace and word of mouth (primarily via our existing employees

who were asked to contact their networks and spread the word that Self Help Workplace was looking for employees).

Employment needs to be part of every planning conversation. The process needs to be iterative and involve all those who might be able to make employment a real possibility. In Tasmania, this also means working with people to change their view about work. For some families, work is not part of their life. Carers on pensions may not have worked. In areas of high unemployment, there are communities and families who have no lived experience of work. Effort is needed to build community understanding of work and the benefits of employment. The conversation cannot be simply asking the person with disability “do you want to work?” The planning process should create opportunities to talk about what motivates people to work (a conversation about the benefits of work). In order for this occur effectively, NDIA planners, LAC and support co-ordinators need to understand the world of work. They need to know who the local employers are (including ADEs) and what they can offer.

Concluding Remarks

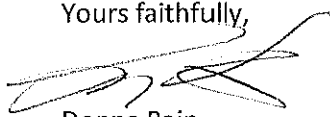
In our community, there are many people with disability who don’t work, but who have the capacity to work and want to work. Government policy and practice needs to build on this and continue to support and grow the existing employment opportunities (such as ADEs) and work with the community to generate new work opportunities.

The argument for ADEs is best said by one of Self Help Workplace’s supported employees.

Several years ago, one of our employees arrived at work in tears. She told us that on her way to work she had been bullied by some school children on the bus. When asked what she did in response, she told us that she turned to them and said “at least I earn my own money”. We are so proud of her and told her so. After the tears, there was a smile.

Any questions about Self Help Workplace’s submission may be directed to the General Manager.

Yours faithfully,



Donna Bain
General Manager