

family

A D V O C A C Y

Submission to the Department of Social Services on Establishing a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

“...Students who have access to real jobs while they are in school and plans in place to meet their ongoing needs upon graduation...have a better chance of being employed after graduation.”

Individualized Career Planning for Students with Significant Support Needs Utilizing the Discovery and the Vocational Profile

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About Family Advocacy

Family Advocacy is a Federal and State government funded disability advocacy organisation that works across New South Wales (NSW) to advance and protect the rights and interests of people with developmental disability¹ (hereinafter “disability”). It was founded by families 30 years ago who had a strong Vision that their family member with a disability would have a meaningful life by experiencing the same opportunities and living conditions as the majority of Australians. This includes being included in things such as education, employment, and community and the right to live safely and with dignity, free from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Family Advocacy supports families in their advocacy with and at times, on behalf of, their family members with disability from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and people from metropolitan, rural and remote areas. We provide support in the following ways:

- Statewide Advocacy advice and advocacy information to individuals;
- Advocacy development for family members of a person with disability - Advocacy is often undertaken by families and these efforts can be required over the lifetime of their family member; and
- Systemic Advocacy - informing government regarding legislation, policy, funding, monitoring, and practice in areas that impact on the needs of people with disability.

We also have an initiative, Resourcing Inclusive Communities, which undertakes capacity building across NSW, all project work focused on the philosophy that people with disability thrive in the heart of the community, sharing the same everyday experiences as their fellow Australians. We share our vision of social inclusion with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). One of our projects is the School to Work Project, which is discussed later in this submission.

Family Advocacy welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Social Services (DSS) in response to Establishing a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence. We commend DSS for undertaking consultation for this. We applaud the Federal Government for their commitment to this Centre and know that the potency of this will rely heavily on establishing a robust structure targeted, appointment of expertise on innovative and successful models of employment and with a strong ethos within the Centre that all people with disability can access and experience success within the world of work with the right supports.

We would be more than happy to meet with the DSS regarding our suggestions in this submission.

¹ Developmental disability is a disability that occurs in the developmental period of a person’s life (in the period from conception to adulthood) and includes but is not limited to: autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and any combination of physical, intellectual or sensory disability.

1. Why do we need a Centre?

1.2 What should be the core functions of the Centre?

1.1 Family Advocacy agree with the common themes shared by the DSS that have featured in past discussions and submissions around the need for a Centre:

- A one stop shop
- Build evidence-based practice
- Build the capacity of employment service providers
- Have a key quality control function
- Consolidate data
- Provide accessible information and resources
- Enhance collaborative competition

1.2 We fully support the need for a Centre with the core functions mentioned: to increase employment outcomes for people with disability and increase the capacity of employment service providers.

As the DSS has mentioned, people with developmental disabilities face many barriers to open and self-employment. And their families face a significant responsibility to support them. The current system is complex and multilayered which makes it very hard for a person with developmental disability and/or their representative family member to navigate with success, somehow being expected to “find their way”. We encourage the DSS to acknowledge “Family” as the “mission critical” conduit to “increase employment outcomes for people with disability”. However we do not support the Centre design to incorporate support and resources for people with disability or their families. We do suggest although that this is addressed through a separate strategy. Family Advocacy through our initiative is attempting to bridge the gap between expectation, knowledge and action amongst young families of children with disability and this capacity building work is essential in continuing to support the necessary steps to achieving successful employment outcomes. This project and others will be essential and should complement the anticipated scope of the Centre.

We also believe the capacity building of employers is essential as we know from our families, inclusion works well when the employer not only has the “will” but also the “skill” to employ a person with disability. This Options paper suggests the Centre could assist employers to ensure they are offering best practice in disability employment. Whilst this is warranted, we believe there is much more scope for the Centre to share good practice, research and information beyond those employers who are already employing a person with disability. There is no doubt many employers who may have the “will” but perhaps not the confidence to employ a person with disability. Given the one stop shop concept previously mentioned, it makes logical sense to add “education and capacity building of employers” as a core function of the Centre.

This, however, would need to be set up carefully and in many respects act as a resource function but should be separated to some extent from the core work of the Centre. Employers, for example, would primarily be in contact and advised by the employment organisation and this relationship would be jeopardized if this was also a major focus. It would make sense, however, to have the Centre develop employer focused resources and generalized support.

2.1 Who can the Centre assist? Are there any groups missing?

2.2 How can the Centre work with stakeholders to increase the employment rate for people with a disability?

2.3 What can the Centre do to increase the capacity of employment service providers?

2.1 We agree with the Options Paper that the Centre can assist:

- a) Employment service providers
- b) Employers
- c) Supported employment services
- d) Disability advocates

We commend the Minister for Social Services for acknowledging people with complex and support needs in this discussion. We have previously discussed the concept around the hierarchy of disability where often, the people with high support needs that are left off the agenda or not genuinely considered in the solution process. Specifically, we agree the Centre could help support the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, employers and others in the disability sector to enact the principles developed at the Supported Employment Roundtable which developed principles aimed to ensure people with high support needs have informed choice and control, real options for employment and a range of support to meet their employment goals.

2.2 The Centre should look abroad to other jurisdictions with evidence-based practices as the USA for examples now have decades of evidence and practice examples. This work does not have to start from scratch and cannot wait for many years of research to occur prior to the adoption of models of employment already tested and proven.

2.3 We encourage the Centre to adopt a successful framework that already exists, such as the Customised Employment approach to employment operating in parts of the USA for nearly three decades, which works with the person with disability at the Centre and collaborates with the employer, employment service provider and the family. We refer to our lengthy discussion around these elements in our [Submission to Treasury Employment](#)

[White Paper](#), parts of which are extracted below. An important consideration in this is that customized employment is utilized as a core competency for all employment staff. This was also a strong recommendation within the Disability Royal Commission final report.

There are 2 examples in the USA that provide training and technical assistance:

[LEAD Center](#) – “The National Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD) is a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) policy development center. The LEAD Center delivers policy research and recommendations, technical assistance, and demonstration projects to promote inclusion and equity, and facilitate the adoption and integration of inclusive WIOA programs, policies, and practices. The LEAD Center strives to advance systems-level change that results in competitive integrated employment, living wages, and economic advancement for people with disabilities.

The LEAD WIOA Policy Department Center is led by [National Disability Institute](#) and is fully funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.”

[Association of People Supporting Employment First](#) (APSE) - “the USA national certification organisation, Provide skill-building with an expectation for employment across job coaches and developers, supervisors, key employment staff, case managers, job seekers including young adults who are still in school, and families.”

- 3.1 What are your views on the models presented?
- 3.2 Are there any models for a Centre to consider that are not included in this paper?
- 3.3 What can the Government take from existing models of Centre of Excellence? What should be ruled out?

We recommend the LEAD Center mentioned above as an appropriate model. Independence is paramount.

- 4.1 Where could a Centre be best placed (for example, within a government agency, a university or as stand-alone institution)?
- 4.2 Are there any models for a Centre to consider that are not included in this paper?
- 4.3 What elements of the proposed role of the Centre or its functions should be prioritized?

4.1 & 4.2 As mentioned above, the LEAD Center is ideal as it is a stand-alone Centre.

4.3 Start with the right expertise. Establish the core competencies for training and some good practice examples of current model. Organisational change support should also be a key offering within the Centre. Many current employment organisations will be required to adapt or completely change their approach to employment support with many such organisations potentially lacking the experience to undertake this. Having specialist support to assist organizational change will act as a good strategy.