

## **Skill Ecosystem Draft Strategy March 2007**

### **Project Name:**

National Disability Service Workforce Management Project

### **1. Industry details**

#### 1.1 Descriptor of the industry sub-sector

Non government, disability service providers across the full range of service types covered under the Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement.

#### 1.2 Brief industry profile

Disability organisations deliver a broad range of services to people with disabilities and their families and carers under both state/territory and commonwealth funding programs. The Commonwealth Government directly funds employment related services (both open and supported employment) for people with disability and jointly funds disability advocacy services. The respective state and territory governments fund (with contribution from the Commonwealth), accommodation support, respite, community support, and community access to people with disability.

The CSTDA Annual Public Report (August, 2006) reported a total of 8,824 service type outlets, 73% of which were non-government and 27% being service outlets run directly by government agencies. A total of 187,806 people per year were reported as accessing CSTDA funded services at a total cost of \$3.3 billion. While non-government organisations are “subsidised” rather than being funded for the full cost of service delivery, the majority of disability organisations are fully reliant on government funding to cover their costs. As a result, they are heavily reliant on the contributions of volunteers (for both support work and committees of management), and limited fundraising capacity.

Over recent years, funding arrangements have become increasingly prescriptive and accountability/compliance obligations have increased markedly. The disability industry has also experienced a significant shifts in community expectations regarding service delivery models, in particular, a shift from centre-based to community and home based models of support provision. These changes have had significant implications for the incidental workplace learning, supervision and collegiate support available to support workers, and changed the expectations of employees in middle management positions.

## **2. What are the issues and challenges the skill ecosystem strategy in your industry aims to address?**

### **2.1 Issues/Problems**

Key issues/problems identified relate to disability workforce retention.

1. Lack of awareness of service providers of the key change drivers and their critical impact on workforce capacity and management issues and the lack of established collaborative networks to address these challenges.
2. Service model and job design changes (reflecting changes to social policy and community expectations around the delivery of disability services) have had a negative impact on the access of workers across all levels to adequate supervision, peer support, and incidental learning & development opportunities.
3. Poor quality interface between the disability service provision sector and the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

### **2.2 Details**

On the whole, a shrinking national labour pool, low industry attractiveness and a lack of understanding of contemporary work “drivers” of both traditional and non-traditional groups employed in the disability sector have resulted in the sector being poorly positioned to attract and keep suitably qualified staff. Vacancies are often difficult to fill; staff turnover in some areas is up to 33% (DSQ 2001) but very low in others. The recent WA report indicates up to 24% of current disability workers there intend to leave within next 3 years (ACROD/WACCI, 2006). However, once in the sector, workers (especially older workers) tend to stay, particularly if employed in government-run services – e.g. Victorian government services 3.5% turnover, 7.9 years average service - comparable figure for non-government services is 9.0% turnover; average length of service data not available (DHS Victoria, 2005).

Inefficient recruitment practices, including inaccurate or misleading job descriptions and advertisements, failure to include values and attitudes in job descriptions, and inadequate selection processes, make retention of good workers unlikely (DHS Victoria, 2005; NDA/KPMG, 2006). Low remuneration levels, lack of surety in hours and limiting work structures and arrangements are also considered to be significant barriers to worker retention (ACROD WA/WACCI survey, 2006).

Work structures and job design in particular have altered to accommodate changing service delivery models, significantly increased compliance obligations

and shifting expectations of workers; however, these innovations have still not kept pace with the needs of the workforce. Over the past 20 years, the disability sector has seen a major shift from centre based service provision to community based and in home support. This means staff are often required to work alone, using their own vehicles, working one-on-one with people in the community or in the clients' own homes. The opportunities for incidental learning, problem solving, debriefing and collegiate support have been significantly reduced. The availability of (and funding for) supervision, and formal training and development are also failing to prove adequate for current models of service delivery.

To date, the disability sector has made limited use of national training qualifications and training, and the uptake of traineeships for new entrants has been poor (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, 2005). National qualifications are available for care workers and for supervisors (Certificate II in Community Services Support Work, Certificate III in Disability Work, Certificate IV in Disability Work, Certificate IV in Service Co-ordination – Ageing and Disability, Certificate IV in Community Services Advocacy, Certificate IV in Community Services – Lifestyle and Leisure, Diploma of Disability Work, Advanced Diploma of Disability Work). With some exceptions, there are few formal opportunities for accessing formal training and recognition processes. With a high number of service providers being very small with limited infrastructure, lack of obvious career paths and a perceived lack of willingness to invest in staff (rather than clients) are also likely to be barriers to attraction and retention of staff.

With regard to relationships between disability service providers and VET providers, while some strong partnerships exist on a regional basis throughout Australia, service providers often report high levels of dissatisfaction with both content and outcomes of disability qualifications (and training). The level of collaboration between the sectors to consider and address the changing needs of the workplace (i.e. those that relate to changing legislative and regulatory requirements, shifts in funding and service delivery models and workplace culture) is currently considered inadequate.

### **3. Evidence and methodology**

#### **3.1 What evidence are you relying on in your identification of the existence and nature of these issues/problems?**

The issues have been raised and considered by a national workforce issues forum over a period of 18 months. They were identified from the collective experience of disability services, either directly from organisations represented at CEO (or HR manager) level on the forum, or represented through National Disability Services officers in each state. As a member based organisation,

National Disability Services actively seeks and receives feedback from services of all types and sizes on a wide range of issues. Feedback indicates that workforce capacity is a major concern for service providers in every state and territory.

References attached support the findings of the group.

### **3.2 Comments about the evidence you have used**

Evidence as represented by the day to day experience of service providers is considered critical, with the literature review providing context in which issues can be more clearly defined and considerations given to solutions. While there is some useful workforce planning data available for the broader community services and health sector, the paucity of disability specific data through the usual sources (ABS, productivity commission, AIHW) has limited our capacity to progress the issues identified.

## **4. Strategies**

### **4.1 What are the strategy ideas your network has developed so far?**

#### *Data collection*

1. Pilot sites to gather benchmark data on retention indicators (turnover, fill/vacancy, percentage roster coverage, use of agency staff) at commencement and completion of pilot.
2. Survey and focus groups to gather data on perceptions of current staff and management re: needs and expectations relating to job design and workplace structure, from employee and employer perspectives.

#### *Resource Development*

3. Development of an information kit and workshop program to inform/raise awareness of the nature (demographics and drivers) and extent of the key challenges and opportunities associated with workforce capacity for the disability sector. *The information kit and workshop would not only raise awareness/knowledge of relevant demographics and drivers but provide a forum for management and staff to consider the impact of external and external factors (threats and opportunities) on their own infrastructure and workforce arrangements and start planning to position themselves better for the future.*
4. To use data collected (strategy 2) to inform the development (and piloting) of a tool and train the trainer workshop program to support disability service providers to customise job design to better reflect the needs and expectations of their current and future workforce. *The toolkit is likely to include a range of guidelines, checklists and examples to inform job redesign at a local level. The*

*toolkit itself will be standard, however, it is anticipated that each site will choose and customise differently, resulting in a broad range of options being piloted. It is also anticipated that the toolkit will include guidelines to support individual employees to negotiate more flexible working arrangements both on commencement and during the period of employment. The kit will be available in both hard copy and electronic versions.*

*Establish and support pilot sites (and comparison sites)*

5. Develop overarching framework and timeline for implementation and evaluation of pilots.
6. Conduct a two day national meeting with 2 representatives (project champions) from each pilot site to introduce the overarching implementation and evaluation framework, introduce and instruct participants in the train the trainer workshop package and tool, and to ensure alignment with the broader project goals. *NB a one day national debrief meeting would also be conducted on completion of the project.*
7. Establish local steering groups (of relevant stakeholders) to customise job design and working arrangements to accommodate employee and workplace requirements for nominated job categories/employees/sites.
8. Identify and negotiate the type and frequency of support to be provided by the Project Manager.
9. Analyse industrial relations impacts and resourcing issues associated with new staffing job models.

**4.2 In which enterprises, regions and/or organisations will trialling and implementation take place?**

Minimum of two pilot sites (and one comparison group) in each state (*NB: these sites are indicative – letters of support held by NDS*)

**5. Intended Outcomes**

**5.1 What is the intended overall outcome of the skill ecosystem strategy?**

To develop processes to improve staff retention in a diverse range of disability services through a combination of job redesign and skill formation strategies.

**5.2 More specific outcomes and/or outputs of the skill ecosystem strategy**

- To develop an information kit and deliver a program of workshops to service providers regarding the nature (demographics and drivers) and extent of the

key challenges and opportunities associated with workforce capacity for the disability sector.

- To develop and trial a workshop program and tool to support disability service providers to customise job design to better reflect the needs and expectations of their current and future workforce.
- Improved practice and innovation in responding to the workforce challenges faced by the sector as demonstrated through the pilot sites.
- Enhanced understanding within the sector of the interrelationship and relative importance of the various change drivers and strategies to address these. More specifically, identifying the strategic points at which best leverage can be exercised.
- To facilitate the development of sustainable relationships between disability organisations and VET providers to increase collaborative problem solving around workforce issues at a local level.
- Informing sector input into the CSTP review:  
Development of an impact paper on job (re)design and the effect this will have on:
  - IR arrangements
  - Financing of the sector's workforce
  - VET partnerships and delivery models.

## **6. Describe the outcome measures that will indicate whether or not strategy goal(s) have been achieved.**

*Outcome Measure (and method for assessing)*

- Quantitative data on shifts in turnover, fill/vacancy, percentage roster coverage, use of agency staff (pilot organisations will collect benchmark data on commencement and at the end of the 12 month pilot program).
- Quantitative data on shifts in perceptions of staff and management regarding degree to which job design reflects needs and expectations of worker and service provider respectively (independent researcher/project officer will gather data through electronic and telephone survey, and focus group processes).

- Documentation of models of job redesign and implementation.
- Delivery of impact report including strategies for addressing IR and financing issues for the sector.
- Articulation of trialled VET delivery strategies which support redesigned job roles.

## **7. Sustainability**

### **7.1 How will strategies be continued, replicated and/or extended to other parts of the industry if they are successful?**

Strategies have been designed to allow for ease of replication (focus on resource/tool development and train the trainer method of delivery) following the pilot phase. National Disability Services has the infrastructure and breadth of representation across the industry in all states and territories to ensure resources and information are made available in a timely, responsive manner.

### **7.2 In what ways do you consider that the strategy proposed would be useful for other industries?**

It is anticipated that a tool which supports a workplace to customise job design to better reflect the needs and expectations of their current and future workforce would have relevance to a broad range of industries. The issues identified in relation to the disability industry have specific relevance for the broader community services industries.

## **8. Relationship to other initiatives**

### **8.1 How do these strategies relate to other work the project network members are involved in?**

The strategies are well aligned with the stated purpose of National Disability Services and will allow the National Disability Services workforce issues working group to progress their work on building a sustainable workforce.

The specific focus on retention for this project means there should be immediate as well as longer term gains. In addition to addressing job design and structural issues in the workplace, the data gathered will inform strategies for attracting

new entrants into the sector. By having a greater understanding of the drivers of both current and potential workers, service providers will be better positioned to evaluate the relative benefits of their recruitment and retention strategies, and plan more effectively for the future.

While a disability skills formation strategy is currently being negotiated in Queensland and there are a range of relevant, but currently unconnected projects operating across Australia, there are no formal linkages with other key industry strategies or reports.

## **8.2 Are there any aspects of the Skill Ecosystem Strategy that are being or could be resourced by other government or industry-funded programs?**

There are a range of workforce related initiatives that complement the Skill Ecosystem Strategy and are currently funded under the Strengthening Non Government Organisation Program in Qld. NB these funding initiatives cross the broader Community Services and Disability portfolio.

## **9. Project Partners**

The NDS national workforce issues group will establish a project steering group which may include other stakeholders. The national workforce issues group has started to identify other key stakeholders to engage, e.g. public and private training providers, unions, schools, other community service providers, government agencies. Discussions between two of the larger pilot sites (Yooralla in Victoria and Endeavour in Queensland) and the HSU (Vic) and ASU and ACTU (Qld) re: their involvement are currently underway. It is anticipated that these stakeholders would be involved in the initial development (concept design) phase of the job design tool/process, through the NDS steering group, but more intensively at a local level with respective pilot sites.

*Members of the National Disability Services National Workforce Issues Committee (primarily direct disability service providers)*

Ken Baker, CEO, National Disability Services  
Chris Elston, GM Corporate Services, Endeavour Foundation  
Wallis Westbrook, Executive Director, Health and Community Services Workforce Council, QLD  
Dr Tony Shaddock, University of Canberra  
Shirley Crowe, Director, Human Services, Australian Foundation for Disability, NSW

Suzanne Becker, General Manager, Windgap Enterprises, Rosebery, NSW  
Marsha Sheridan, Deputy CEO, Yooralla Society, VIC  
Diana Heggie, CEO, SCOPE, VIC  
Robyn Bradshaw, General Manager, Karingal Inc, Geelong, VIC  
Ian McCallum, Director, Accesspay, Deepdene VIC  
Robert Depold, CEO Barkuma Inc, Adelaide, SA  
Carlo Calogero, State Manager, National Disability Services WA  
Valmae Rose, State Manager, National Disability Services Qld  
Paul Byrne, Executive Officer, Oakdale Services, Rosny Park, TAS  
Geraldine Harwood CEO, Optia, South Hobart, TAS  
Gordon Trewern, Director, Nulsen Haven, Cannington, WA  
Amanda Caldwell-Smith, Essentra Personnel (employment service and RTO), NSW  
Kevin Mead, CEO, Challenge Armidale

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