

Issues for disability service provision in Queensland in 2010

As it was

The historical background to disability support in Qld need only be covered briefly. Australia had fallen far behind the rest of the developed world and only started to catch up after the 1986 Commonwealth Act. This was the time of big impersonal services (one size fits all), segregation from society, and big institutions. During this period the 'disability industry' was run for the benefit of the big services.

Qld was slow to follow and it was not until the late 90s that progress was made and the new State Act followed the theme of the 1986 one. This, not surprisingly, coincided with a change of government.

As it became.

With the new government and new Act came an influx of people from interstate and overseas into executive positions in the new Department. Fresh blood and fresh ideas encouraged innovation in service design and provision, and encouraged participation by people with disability and their families.

Many people saw real hope of progress. Living in and being part of the community offered great opportunities for living a real life. During this period the 'industry' ran briefly for the benefit of people with disability.

As it is now.

Over the last 5 years, although the annual budget for Disability Services continued to increase dramatically, the actual amount of support reaching needy families declined each year. The bulk of the money went into an ever growing Department producing an ever growing number of glossy brochures, and ever more restrictive controls on services at the coal face.

As Professor Scott Prasser notes (P34-35, Courier Mail, 6 Aug 10) this is not limited to this one department but is symptomatic of the whole bureaucracy in this State. The scandalous and ongoing trials and tribulations of the Health Department have been making headlines for several years. The 'disability industry' is now run for the benefit of the bureaucracy.

A further major issue which is not entirely of the Department's making, is the increasing costs of providing services due to the new Award which commences in 2011. The Department only funds for wages costs and ignores the incidentals like mileage costs, and allowances for possession of a First Aid Certificate. These particular costs are set to rise dramatically. Some services are likely to fail or will have to lower the quality of the support that they provide (which amounts to failure).

As it should be

The type and quality of support needed has been championed by cleverer people than I and the writings of Michael Kendrick and John O'Brien are cases in point. The success of service

provision based on their teachings has been demonstrated repeatedly over the years.

Fundamentally the 'industry' needs to be run for the benefit of people with disabilities. The Department needs to be leaner (it could not be much meaner), and to be run in such a fashion that it actually responds to the needs of those people in this State who need the support.

It may sound radical, but it should actually provide a service to the public.