



Karden Disability Support Foundation

Submission to the Productivity Commission about the Disability Care and Support Draft Report April 2011

Introduction

In February 2011 the Productivity Commission released its draft report into Disability Care and Support and stated:

“The disability support ‘system’ overall is inequitable, underfunded, fragmented, and inefficient and gives people with a disability little choice. It provides no certainty that people will be able to access appropriate supports when needed.....The central message of this draft report is that a *real* system for people with a disability is required — with much more and better-directed money, a national approach, and a shift in decision-making to people with a disability and their carers.” (Overview and Recommendations, p.5)

Karden Disability Support Foundation strongly supports the findings and recommendations of the draft report but highlight a couple of areas that we believe require further consideration by the Commission. These areas are around workforce issues in delivering disability services, in particular the professionalisation of the workforce, efficiency of pricing and the need for the individual and community capacity building work that is undertaken by not for profit organisations to be supported in the structure that is proposed in the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Background

Karden Disability Support Foundation (KDSF) is a not for profit organisation that was founded in 2006 and provides individualised services to people with a disability in the Ballarat, Victoria area. Our service model is one that people have significant choice over their staffing, rosters, times and days of support and the outcomes of what they want their support agency to deliver.

Over the almost five years of our life, we have grown over 900%, thus proving that the model we offer is one that is embraced by the people in our local community that have a disability. In research undertaken by Dr Carmel Laragy in regards to our model of support, it was identified that a significant component of our success has been the support and training we have provided to our staff. We have maintained a very stable workforce with a less than 6% staff turnover rate over the 5 years in an industry that is experiencing significant issues with turnover, attraction and retention of staff. Further, we have only ever advertised for staff 4 times in 5 years due to most people applying for work with us being encouraged to apply for work with us by the people we support or their friends who work in the sector. Our approach to recruitment has been one based on employing for fit with our organisational values and attitudes and training for skills.



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Overview

KDSF strongly supports the concepts of individualised approaches and funding for all people with a disability. The models proposed in the Productivity Commission's draft report are one that we feel is the most meaningful and positive changes ever proposed in the disability sector however we believe that it is imperative that some further consideration is made into the benefits that Not for Profit organisations bring to the community and to the delivery of services for people. Further, whilst the Commission identifies that the relaxing of minimum training requirements be considered as a strategy for growing the workforce in the sector, there are skills required to be a capable and competent worker that must be maintained.

Dr Carmel Laragy in her submission to the Productivity Commission's Disability Care and Support Public Inquiry (2010, pg 1) identifies that "for individual funding to achieve successful outcomes, there needs to be adequate funding; available information and support services when required; appropriate services to purchase; opportunities for social inclusion, and suitably trained and supported support workers". We support Dr Laragy's statement and concur that all of these elements need to be present in a system of support for people with disabilities.

The Commission identifies in the draft report (Overview, p 39) that the most important skills that workers bring to disability support services are "empathy, a capacity for listening and social skills". KDSF support the idea and have proven success in selecting staff for attitudes and qualities rather than a formal qualification however identify that for support to the people we serve to be successful in an ongoing manner, training is a fundamental requirement. We have many examples of staff who have come to us with these skills, and with training, they have become leaders within our organisation. The training we provide enables staff to recognise the complexities of the work they do and allows them to be able to respond to the needs of the individuals they work with.

Given the low wages and the undervalued status of workers within the field, it is easy for many in the community to assume that the work is unskilled and equates to not much more than 'glorified babysitting'. This undervalues and fails to recognise the unique skills required in providing person centred practice, a strengths based approach to skill development, positive behaviour support, dignified personal care, monitoring of ongoing health and chronic disease conditions and in facilitating relationships that allow for people's ability to be their own agents of change in their own lives. A further concern in not having some minimum levels of training for staff is that whilst demonstrating empathy and listening to what the person they support wants, a staff member may not understand their duty of care or health and safety requirements and may then place themselves, the person they support and the organisation they work for at risk.



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The value of the community building work that not for profit organisations do within the community has been an area not widely understood and recognised. The Productivity Commission itself undertook a review of the Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector (January 2010) and identified that the behaviour of not for profit organisations is driven by their mission or community purpose and that their processes help to maintain trusting relationships with those they serve, thus forming trusting relationships which were primarily seen as more trustworthy than those of corporate and governments.

A concern of KDSF is that any model of 'efficient pricing' implemented in a National Disability Insurance Scheme needs to be clearly identified if it is a full or partial funded price and if a fully funded price, needs to ensure it includes market wages and associated on-costs and a recognition of the coordination aspects involved in providing individualised services. As the Productivity Commission identified in their report, "Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector" (January 2010), partial government funding can undermine the viability of not for profits by making it difficult for them to plan and to invest in developing their capabilities and attract and retain staff. Whilst an NDIS needs to be financially self sustaining, the system needs to clearly factor in the real costs of providing services to people with a disability.

Of further concern to KDSF is that the model proposed in the NDIS shows no preference for not for profit organisations, and as such, it is our belief that 'for profits' will increasingly enter the market place. Whilst healthy for competition and ultimately 'customer' choice, 'for profits' have the benefit of being able to raise capital in numerous ways compared to not for profits, thus causing a potential competitive disadvantage. Given that by its very nature, the focus of 'for profit' organisations is on return on shareholders or owner's investments, there is a possibility that people supported by disability services may not have the same focus on the development of individuals and the community. Our concern is that while direct support needs will be met, much of the work in community engagement will be lost and it is this work that develops positive community perceptions of people with a disability in our society and thus helps to increase community inclusion and participation.

KDSF Recommendations

1. KDSF believe that whilst a mandatory qualification need not be a requirement of staff supporting people with disabilities, minimum levels of training need to be adhered to in order to ensure that workers understand the complexities of supporting all people to live their lives in a way that is meaningful to them whilst ensuring dignity of risk is balanced with duty of care and other legislative requirements such as workplace health and safety are adhered to.



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2. KDSF believe that there needs to be consideration of the community development work that not for profit organisations do when providing services to people with a disability. This work is fundamental to improving inclusion and participation opportunities for people with a disability in our community. Research shows that people with a disability have improved quality of life outcomes when they are seen as valued members of their community and are included in the social fabric of the community. It is for this reason that we see an NDIS needs to incorporate an element of community development in not only its tier structure but in the requirements for service delivery agencies.

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