

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF JOB NETWORK

A submission from the Tangentyere Job Shop

1. Introduction

1.1 The Tangentyere Job Shop is a not for profit, Aboriginal controlled Job Network member, based in Alice Springs. It has a specialist Indigenous Intensive Assistance (IA) contract, together with a Job Matching contract for Indigenous and non-indigenous jobseekers. The Job Shop also has a small Community Support Programme contract.

1.2 The majority of Job Shop's IA jobseeker customers face major barriers to employment (79% of them are Level B). Historically, Aboriginal people have had limited access to the mainstream labour market of Alice Springs. This is slowly changing. Education achievement levels remain depressing. In the Central Australian region in the Year 2000, Aboriginal people formed 49% of the student population, yet only 12 Aboriginal people completed Year 12.

1.3 In Alice Springs there are four Job Network members – Employment National, Centacare, Industry Training and Employment Counsel (a private Sector organisation with its head office in Central Queensland) and the Tangentyere Job Shop. There used to be one CES office, looking after the Whole Alice Springs region, and at different times covering the Central Desert Region of Western Australia and the Pitjantjatjara Lands in South Australia. The only other coverage under Job Network in this region is for the south west corner of NT by the Nyangatjatjara Employment Services.

2. Issues

a) What are the main benefits and disadvantages of the policy framework underlying Job Network?

2.1 The main advantage of Job Network in Alice Springs for jobseekers and employers is having a choice of service, so that they are more likely to access what they need in employment services. Under the former system, there was only the CES free service for all job seekers and employers, plus one private employment agency. Centrelink remains as the gateway, and that role is understood.

2.2 Few people in Alice Springs would now want to revert to the old policy framework, although many want additions in infrastructure.

2.3 The major disadvantage of the policy framework is that most people outside the system don't understand it, or aren't even aware of it. None of the publicity has been very effective, because it has relied on national, glossy propaganda that meant little to employers and even less to the long-term unemployed.

bl What is the record of Job Network in improving quality and cost effectiveness of assistance to the unemployed, compared with previous arrangements?

2.4 The previous arrangements were not as bad as the Coalition Government continues to state. There is no doubt that some programmes in *Working Nation* and its predecessors were expensive in placement costs, but that was because the target group was particularly disadvantaged in the labour market.

2.5 For some of the old labour market programmes, the guidelines were far too restrictive, because they were nationally designed. All former CES workers confirm this. The administrative costs to get a waiver were significant, and probably not recorded. The beauty of Job Network is that the intervention can be structured to meet the needs of the individual or small group. Secondly, depending on how bureaucratic the Job Network organisation is, these interventions can be arranged as soon as there is a provider or relevant option available. This does encourage better value for money. The risk of cheap interventions is partly offset by the need to gain outcomes.

2.6 Out bush, the success is more limited. The CES attempted to deliver jobs and training where people lived, and Job Network coverage is far more restricted. Where Job Network service exists on a full time basis in this region, it is a far better alternative. The new Indigenous Employment Policy programmes have a very strong focus on private sector activity, and limited availability for bush people. This does not meet the employment and training needs of much of the Central Australian labour market.

cl Has Job Network provided more sustainable employment outcomes?

2.7 The Job Shop did not have a contract in the first round. Our comments are subjective, but evidence tends to indicate that Job Network is now doing more for Aboriginal people living in town than the old system. The CES was a mainstream operation, even with the introduction of case management. The Job Network emphasis on employment and education outcomes keeps us all focused on these results. The risk is still the emphasis on 6 months as an end point, because this was the timeframe for much of *Working Nation*. There was some legitimate criticism that 6 months was not enough time to have some people getting back to the world of work and staying there.

DI Have competition and choice been enhanced?

2.8 Competition and choice have been enhanced in Alice Springs and in part of the broader region. There is no doubt that a lot of Aboriginal people finally appreciate having their own "black CES". They feel that the service is designed for them, and meets their needs better. This includes a more flexible list of interventions, support including mentoring, and funding for specific barriers that range from clothing and equipment, to fines, to accommodation support.

e] Suggested improvements in tendering?

2.9 Only masochists love the process used for the first two tender rounds. It is understood that the Federal Government needs to be accountable for the use of a very serious amount of public money to deliver employment services. The proposal of an offer made to those performing successfully is reasonable, so long as these Job Network Members don't then take over all the market. Other existing Members, such as us, will be keen to bid for a reasonable share of the market

f] Suggested improvements in performance measuring and monitoring?

2.10 The milestone period of six months is good, because it allows for a realistic time to improve performance. The contract is quite clear on outcomes and performance indicators for the two services we deliver. Monitoring visits are always professional, and the follow-up documentation is appropriate.

2.11 The major concern is the absoluteness of the star ratings. It is useful for all concerned to have some assessment of performance, and to reinforce the competitiveness of the market. The need is for local adjustments factors, so that the final scores accurately reflect the labour market. . The star ratings say that all ratings equate, and this is strongly disputed.

g] Suggested improvements in coordination?

2.12 We have local meetings on average every quarter where the Job Network Members meet with Centrelink and DEWRSB. This provides a very useful opportunity to talk over operational issues as well as flag more policy-related items. The Job Shop is delighted with the service from Centrelink. Referrals are appropriate, exits are made quickly when necessary, and basic customer information is given with full professionalism. Our relationship with DEWRSB is positive, and the information flow of faxes, phone calls and any other communication is impressive.

2.13 The National Employment Services Association (NESA) has played a vital role in coordination. The NESA annual conference has become the major event for the full spectrum of Job Network Members to swap better practice ideas and discuss the latest ideas and initiatives of DEWRSB. NESA seeks responses from its members on specific issues, so that an industry wide perspective can be put to government and DEWRSB. Finally, NESA has been a key factor in the establishment of Special Interest Groups to improve service and practices. The Job Shop has been a member of the Indigenous Group and has appreciated the opportunity to be part of this national developmental process.

h] Should there be an extension of purchaser-provider model to other areas of Commonwealth Government service delivery?

2.14 The comment has been made that the purchaser-provider model does not allow for an independent arbiter if there is serious conflict. There has been a suggestion that the market would benefit from something like the Employment Services Regulatory Authority that existed under *Working Nation*. The Job Shop has no great problem with an independent body, but is opposed to any unnecessary level of telling us how to best assist our customers.

The best opportunity for Indigenous people in Australia in economic and social development is regional agreements, and this is an ideal opportunity for positive purchaser-provider processes and outcomes. DEWRSB and other agencies such as DETYA, FACS and ATSIC are encouraged to consider this model.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Job Network has allowed Indigenous enterprises to be established to deliver better service to Indigenous people. Economic development and economic independence were the two goals encouraged by the late Mick Miller in the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy. Job Network needs to grow with this in mind.