



Australians for Disability
and Diversity Employment
(ADDE) Inc.

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

CONSUMER GROUP ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

AUSTRALIANS FOR DISABILITY AND DIVERSITY

EMPLOYMENT (ADDE) INC REPORT

JUNE 2014

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Background

In July 2013, the then Minister for Employment Participation, Hon Kate Ellis, advised Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment (ADDE) Inc. that the Australian Government would be providing \$41,000 to a number of national disability organisations, including ADDE to assist in improving the delivery of Disability Employment Services (DES). The specific purpose of the one off funding grant was to lift consumer engagement and knowledge of the DES program, facilitate provision of consumer advice to the Government about the needs of people with disabilities in the context of the DES, and look at ways to improve future Disability Employment Services. The Australian Government further indicated that a major focus of the funding is to enable the Government *‘to hear about issues affecting the client group your organisation represents in order to improve DES,’* in order to *‘better assist this group to effectively access information on DES and to hear how we could improve program performance.’*

The project commenced early in the 2013/14 financial year and was to be completed by 30 June 2014.

Our obligations in accepting the one off funding grant included:

a consumer engagement strategy to be provided no later than 1 September 2013;

a mid-term progress report to be provided by 1 February 2014;

a statement or declaration that funds made available under the project were expended for the project, by 31 July 2014.

Findings

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) concerns work and employment. It requires the Australian government, as a State Party to the Convention, to:

“recognise the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities ... safeguard and promote the realisation of the right to work, by taking appropriate steps... to:

(d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programs, placement services and vocational and continuing training;

(e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;

(f) Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workforce;

(g) Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market;

(h) Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities....”

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ADDE believes that the DES employment system plays an integral part in meeting the Governments obligations to assist people with disability achieve a higher quality of life particularly around employment and financial security.

ADDE ran several focus groups and many individual interviews with our members over the project timeframe. It is significant that those mostly involved with the collection of data for this project had a disability.

After reviewing the responses of the individuals, and the three focus groups there were clearly a number of common themes. Approximately 75% of participants noted some degree of dissatisfaction of the DES system.

“They gave me great advice about everything, including advice about self disclosure of my vision loss. They were of great benefit as far as giving me confidence in myself.”

For the remaining group there was extreme satisfaction and positive outcomes. It is ADDE's belief that there is clearly some very high performing DES's and a larger group of under performing organisations with many operating adequately but could improve.

“Often the job application would be closed and even filled before I knew it was open. Struggling to read the newspaper to even know what was available. Not being confident that my interview answers were in my best interest.

At times the method they used for finding jobs, IE, I think it might have been a Commonwealth Employment Services matching system would suggest ridiculous and unrealistic job prospects which were a waste of time. It obviously did not factor in that I was blind.”

ADDE was recently funded by DEEWR in 2013 and ran twelve workshops in the Barwon region and Newcastle for universities, larger employers and local governments promoting the value of employing people with disability. The deliverable was to establish a working relationship with the employers and suitable DES providers. At each workshop we invited a DES expert to promote themselves and advise what they can do for the employers in terms of workplace modifications, training and financial assistance. This enabled ADDE to see first hand and confirmation of what our consumers have reported. Three of the ten DES providers who presented at our workshops were clearly exceptionally high performing DES's the others ranged from poor to average.

Access to information about the DES program itself was highlighted as an issue both for employers and people with disability. Employers in particular commented that their commonly used channels for information about employment (e.g. SEEK, LinkedIn, etc) don't provide opportunities for employers to indicate a willingness to

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employ people with disability in their searches, nor do they provide links to DES providers.

Recommendations

- The Department needs to undertake a strategic review and redesign of the Disability Employment Support system in Australia using a approach involving employers, people with disability and the employment industry (mainstream and disability-specific).
- The Department needs to set up a marketing program like they did for the aged promoting the DES success cases to Employers.
- The Government needs to invest in educating employers and *marketing the reasons why employers should engage people with disability*.
- The Government should offer incentives to DES providers who employ people with a disability. ADDE believes that there is a critical need for the DES providers to actively promote the employment of people with a disability within their own organisations.
- A review of the case load of the employment consultants as the general opinion of our members was that the consultants did not have enough time to properly service them due to excessively high case loads.
- Case workers need to show more respect for their clients.
- Disability awareness training programs need to be set up for all DES staff as a mandatory condition of employment.
- There needs to be more clarity and transparency around what services and supports are available from the DES in the pre employment and employment stage.
- DES providers need to offer a mobile service where clients can be visited by staff at the client's home where it is extremely difficult for the client to get to the DES.
- DES should provide a service to assist clients with a disability to set up and run their own business.
- A system that allows for workplace trials rather than the interview process should be put in place.
- There was almost unanimous agreement around the concept of the DES funding being reviewed and a new model developed similar to the TAC and

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NDIS funding model where funding is linked to the individual job seeker. The Department should seriously consider further investigation of this model.

- The timing of obtaining workplace modifications needs streamlining to ensure the requirements of the employer and employee are met in a timely manner.

Summary of activities and deliverables

Activity or deliverable	Brief description of activity or deliverable (include dates)	Status (i.e. completed, in progress) and any issues/comments
Developed a questionnaire for members around the DES programs	Appointed a project coordinator and two appropriate consultants to work on the data collection and DES promotion. Published brochure and questionnaire material at a members meeting on September 12 th regarding the overall project. Publicised the NESA project on the ADDE website and on ADDE Facebook site. The standard questionnaire document can be seen in Appendix 1	Completed
Contacting members to ascertain appropriate members to participate in the surveys and focus groups.	Consultants rang members to invite them to participate in focus groups to be held in Melbourne and Sydney	Completed
Promoted the DES programs at ADDE committee meeting , Facebook and the ADDE Website	Circulated materials supplied by DEEWR regarding the DES services. October 2013	Completed
Conducted a focus group with several members	Carried out face to face interviews with several members recording their experiences with DES providers. October 2013	First focus group completed but ongoing
Attended Consumer group meeting in Canberra	November 14 th 2013	Completed
Conducted a focus group in Sydney	December 1 st 2013 Held a discussion with fourteen members and gathered feedback on	Completed

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	the DES system around each individual experiences. (Appendix 2)	
Attended the Getting to Yes seminar	Attended the session run by NDRC Luci Macali on December 2 nd . The session was well attended by many employers and several highly performing DES providers. ADDE also had a member on the panel of experts with a disability. The panel of three provided and insight into what people with a disability faced when finding employment	Completed
Conducted another focus group held in Melbourne in March 2014	A group of fourteen consumers attended a session held at Ross House in Melbourne on March 2014. A summary of the feedback can be found in Appendix 3.	Completed
Attended the Department's consumer engagement meeting in Canberra in April	Presented feedback to the participants and gathered information on the progress of the Department to implement some changes to the DES system.	Completed
Collated the individual questionnaire responses	Prepared a summary document of individual responses of their experiences with dealing with a DES including both positive and negative comments and suggested improvements. (Appendix 4)	Completed
Report	Wrote a final report with recommendations to the Department of Social services.	Completed

Appendix 1: Disability Employment Services Consumer Engagement Strategy, Questions 2013 - 2014

	What has worked well for you?	What has not worked well for you?	What would need to Change?	What can our organisation do to make it work for you?
People who have used a DES	Do you have a job now? Yes No	What did not work well for you when you used a DES?	What would need to change for a DES to work well for you?	What could our organisation do to make a DES work well for you?

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	<p>Did a DES help you to get a job? Yes No</p> <p>How much do you want to find a job?</p> <p>What worked well for you when you used a DES?</p>		<p>What barriers have you faced when looking for work?</p>	
People who have not used a DES	<p>Do you have a job now? Yes No</p> <p>What worked well for you when you were trying to get a job?</p>	<p>What did you find hard when you were trying to get a job?</p>	<p>What would need to change to make it easier for you to get a job?</p>	<p>How could our organisation help you get a job?</p>
People who had tried to use a DES, but were not eligible	<p>Do you have a job now?</p> <p>When you couldn't use a DES, what did you do?</p> <p>Tell us how well this worked for you.</p>	<p>What did you find hard when you were trying to get a job?</p>	<p>What would need to change to make it easier for you to get a job?</p>	<p>How could our organisation help you get a job?</p>

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	What has worked well for you?	What has not worked well for you?	What would need to change?	What can our organisation do to make it work for you?
People who had not heard of a DES	<p>Do you have a job now?</p> <p>Yes No</p> <p>What worked well for you when you were trying to get a job?</p>	<p>What did you find hard when you were trying to get a job?</p> <p>Now that you know about a DES, are there any reasons why you would not use them?</p>	<p>What would be the best way to give you information about DES?</p> <p>Hard copy? Email? Website?</p> <p>Now that you know about DES, how do you think they could help you get a job?</p>	<p>How could our organisation help you to find out more about DES?</p> <p>How could our organisation help you find out about other ways to get a job?</p>
What do you believe ADDE should be mainly focused on?			<p>If the government was to change the way funding was provided such as allocating funding directly to you for you to use a DES to find work, would that help?</p> <p>How could you see that working?</p>	

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Would you like to become involved with ADDE's activities and or committee?				
What skills and or training do you consider you would need to become more jobs ready?				

Appendix 2: Disability Employment Service consumer group workshop

Vision Australia

4 Mitchell Street Enfield

December 2nd 2013

Facilitators Geoff Crawford & Nick Gleeson

Summary of feedback from focus group

Positive feedback from several members around Vision Australia a specialist DES in providing adaptive technology and ongoing support for people that found employment

Told to go and get some training and then we will help you with finding a job

DES don not provide enough information to employers around workplace modifications and job access

Total lack of understanding of disability

Total absence of knowledge about disability

DES should be able to send jobs out to PWD job searchers

Specialist DES has a better understanding

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Employers need more education

DES needs to understand individual needs

Work place trials rather than interviews

PWD tend to be “labelled”

DES should link more closely to commercial recruiters

DES needs to be able to focus on getting people “job ready”

Individual funding model similar to the NDIS sounds like a good ideal and is worth investigation

DES could provide a service to assist a PWD set up their own business

Appendix 3: DES FOCUS GROUP – Ross House Melbourne.

Facilitators – Geoff Crawford, Martin Steward and Gordon Trott

Vision Australia ok with their own clients but no go if not.

Vision Australia good in training including updating practices.

Very helpful in a relaxing environment.

After two years you are out of program and forced to another DES.

Part time work and only has casual.

Help finding job for you

No training only advice. A little help but positive.

I am doing voluntary work at the moment.

DES helpful with my confidence & resume making.

Not good with lacking knowledge of suburbs.

Not having staff that stays long.

Not good with negotiating with employers.

Long time unemployed with only short time part time work.

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DES talks at you, not to you.

One DES gave good on job support.

After two years drop off register and have to reregister through Centrelink with a 12 week delay.

No continuance.

One DES not funding transport.

Case worker sick or not available but no-one else able to take the case workers appointments with no notifications.

Case worker very helpful with her job seeking.

Job hunting over 10 years.

First DES not helpful, not much contact.

Second DES was just the opposite.

Third DES not very helpful.

Big delay in equipment delivery.

Need help with body language.

DES very helpful with pre-interview training.

Copy write problems arose and take too long to fix.

Reluctance to transfer to another DES because of red tape involved, not happy with changing case workers often.

Experiences of being used at one particular employer. Changing of staff but I was not told by DES so left in the dark.

Lack of communication to their clients. Lack of knowledge of equipment prior to employment.

Not enough hands on experience.

Job club mock interview all good but should focus more in job training.

Spend more time in meaningful stuff.

The work site assessment must be done so that you can be employed in work that you are suitable.

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Agencies need more understanding of ones abilities and adjust their teaching accordingly.

Lack of knowledge on what is available (Jaws etc).

More needed on job matching.

Had good experience with his DES.

Their work plan was extremely good.

Another DES job planning was poorly done.

Another DES no work place assessment done.

Most DES's more interested in money than getting their clients full time work.

Case workers have very large case loads.

Problem with their training, some very demoralising.

Put in little boxes to tick off.

Increase the need for appropriate training.

Lack of feedback from a DES.

DES bully & harass clients.

NDIS too slow in implementing the full program.

Too much scrutinising and keeping records.

More info please about funding the individual rather than the DES? It sounds like a great idea (unanimous)

Appendix 4: A summary of some of the comments from individual surveys during the project.

Often the job application would be closed and even filled before I knew it was open. Struggling to read the newspaper to even know what was available. Not being confident that my interview answers were in my best interest.

At times the method they used for finding jobs, IE, I think it might have been a Commonwealth Employment Services matching system would suggest ridiculous and unrealistic job prospects which were a waste of time. It obviously did not factor in that I was blind.

***Nothing really. Only that they provide lots of support to find work and realistic work.

As an advocacy organization, it would be great if you continue to work with organizations such as DES and Government bodies to provide a better service.

Having someone help look for work. Knowing that DES could assess the workplace and ensure I could use the computer system. Ensure that any employer concerns would be dealt with and reassuring them that any computer teething issues would be resolved.

My biggest barrier when looking for work is early disclosure of my vision loss suddenly the job on offer would be no longer available.

I really gain a lot from peer support and from networking opportunities.

My biggest barrier is age and having a slight vision impairment. My impairment is not severe; however, it still limits my ability to work.

***I think greater awareness of Disability Employment Services needs to happen as I was not even aware there was such a service available until recently.

***Yes, Wise Employment, and they were useless.

***The staff needs more training; staff needs to empower people with disabilities they need to employ people with a disability so that they can speak from experience.

Lack of understanding and hard for an employer to understand my physical disability Employers can't think outside the square.

Lack of understanding about job access and workplace modifications.

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Doing a mock interview was one of the most important things; it enabled me to get a job.

I was unemployed for a long time and often there were very few job opportunities. There were times where the DES found a job and I started but the technology was not compatible. This was disappointing and frustrating.

***A DES should have closer connection to employers. They should educate the employers about disability and especially make them aware that totally blind people are not a risk in the workplace, that they can travel independently and that most times technology is able to be used. They should especially support totally blind people by reading job adverts from the newspapers.

Close relationship with employers so that they do have a better understanding of vision loss.

A lack of knowledge especially about total blindness.

No, I used a DES and reported each month and they didn't give one ounce of help.

***I have since found a part time job myself.

DES did nothing to help me.

DES Programmes were always challenging.

When an employer knew I had a disability they would start putting up barriers. They would say things like "you will not be able to see this or see that". When told about adaptive technology they were not convinced and also thought it would ultimately cost them money. They would choose an easier option by employing a non disabled person.

To have a Disability Employment Service that really understood what I want to do and not try and place me in a "sheltered workplace environment". "I want to work but I do not want "all the s-t involved with a DES".

***Having DES funding directly to me would help. I think part of this funding should be allocated to being able to buy appropriate clothing for job interviews and for wearing once work is found. I also believe that it would be good to have a budget that can be used by the individual with a DES.

A DES could be paid for certain tasks, for example, writing of resume and being able to buy clothing for usage to find work and for being employed.

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I am registered with a DES but in the past I have been disillusioned with some of the work done by a previous Disability Employment Service. I would like to work if the right job came along for me.

I had a lot of peer support from other members of the group at the Disability Employment Service. I was great to be able to talk to others in a similar situation to me. The staff at my current Disability Employment Service are brilliant.

I had a very bad experience with a Disability Employment Service where they got me to come in, did nothing and went home no better off. They seemed to just want to fulfil their process requirements. I have felt in the past that DES have lied to me and not had my best interest at heart.

They must have a positive attitude and treat each person as individuals.
My age has been a barrier.

Keep ensuring DES' have the best interest of people and do a good job.

1 on 1 time with staff DES worker. Quality time searching with that person to look for relevant job opportunities

Attending group sessions was a waste of time for me.

Using volunteers who at times did not fully understand job search. Often feeling like I was wasting my time because in a group situation jobs were often not relevant to me and at times jobs were mentioned that were not even relevant to the entire group of people.

There should be more 1 on 1 quality time. A DES that is proactively knocking on doors of employers to find work, to break down barriers. To identify with employers job opportunities by physically meeting with them.

Identifying existing roles held by people who are blind or vision impaired and encouraging DES and employers to hire other blind/vision impaired people.

Wise employment understood my needs and found a suitable job that I am still **currently employed in for over 20 weeks so far**

Previously with another DES I was not treated with any respect at all and did not find employment.

Staff need a better understanding of disability

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There was a situation at a DES where the staff member assisted me with my resume and finding jobs but the problem was I did not understand and was not aware that every job I went for did not address the job criteria and after 8 months someone noticed this problem.

The barrier I faced was my vision loss disability and disclosure. I recall how everything was positive over the phone but as soon as I entered the interview room and they realized I was blind it went completely flat. They went through the formality of interviewing, however, my interview was 1 third of the length of the previous person's interview. I knew I did not get the job.

DES needs more resources and staff to look for suitable jobs to apply for.

Initial information was sent to me in print. Braille was eventually provided for certain things but it was almost seen as a favour, an in-house special request. One of the presenter's at the Job Club was not in tune with the audience and appeared to have little if any relevance to finding work.

More emphasis on "job spotting" opportunities. Engaging clients in a "reality check" of what is feasible for them to do as work.

Job fares and workshops could be made more relevant and specific for people who have a disability. ADDE should be an educational channel to employers as far as assisting people to be established in a new job and remind employers that until a person has everything in place, IE, adaptive technology, they should not be judged in that probation period. ADDE, should be in touch with people who are blind or vision impaired or at least with DES to encourage people to have a better understanding of self advocacy. An awareness of what their rights are and an awareness of resources/support available to them if needed.

Barriers

Having an interview that was equal and did not focus on my disability but focused as with anyone else on my ability to do the job. Not being aware of potential perceived barriers prior to the interview. Being in a job and being stuck because a DES can not be funded to assist a person to develop because they already have a job. A barrier to finding work is that a DES can not be funded for someone looking for work who is over 65 years of age. Another barrier is that a person in a supportive employment position can not be assisted by a DES as that DES will not receive funding. A DES can assist but will not be funded for this person seeking work.

One possible benefit of funding being attached to the individual is that a person may be able to access more than 1 DES because certain DES may have specific strengths, which is not possible at this stage as funding is only made available to 1 DES.

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I was assisted by someone who had appalling communication skills, however, this was not relating to my vision loss. His poor communication skills related to his own performance and affected everyone.

A DES does their best, however, being in a regional area has its own environmental challenges and at times it is out of their control.

A barrier for me is not being able to use an organization's programs, IE, MYOB is not accessible and yet is often used in a business. Self disclosure of my vision loss has at least lead me to not even receiving an interview despite my many years of expertise in that field. Living in a regional area often has the barrier of not being a local person and less chance of being successful until being accepted by the community.

The case workers were ignorant of my needs and apathetic towards seriously wanting to help me.

Case worker load needs to be decreased

More training on disability issues and focus on the ability not the disability.

At times DES are to general and do not look at the specific requirements of an individual. Material used in workshops at times was not accessible for me. At times I would be frustrated by the lack of response to my phone calls and emails and the repeated need to resend this request for assistance or follow up.

There should be more one on one. There needs to be a stricter policy around responding to a person's phone call/email enquiry. A better understanding that an individual may have more than one disability and that more than one DES should be involved with this individual to maximize finding work. In my case I would like less "fuss" around my involvement with Centalink as I have never had difficulty with the organization.

I live in a regional area and more assistance to attend a DES would help. If it meant traveling to Sydney that assistance is given to me in order to stay over and attend workshop.

What did not work well for you when you used a DES? (Everything was fine. They were good.)

I find the criteria is often the greatest barrier as (drivers licence is often required". I have found at times there is varying levels of discrimination which is very difficult to prove as I believe they give the job to someone who does not have a disability because that is an easier option. I also feel I am faced with a barrier as I can not use a computer without having breaks and I think an employer will see this as disadvantageous.

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They gave me great advice about everything, including advice about self disclosure of my vision loss. They were of great benefit as far as giving me confidence in myself.

DES needs a closer connection with corporates and companies so that there are greater employment opportunities.

Provide information to the DES' and provide information/education to employers.

I experienced discrimination. I obtained 40 interviews out of 52 applications; however, as soon as they realized I was blind, when I arrived at the interview, suddenly they made all sorts of excuses. I have since set up my own business and it is booming now.

DES did not help me find a job. My work was very specific and there seemed to be little opportunity to be placed in that field

DES should continue to advocate, to encourage employers to find work for people with disabilities.

What barriers have you faced when looking for work? Not having the skills and access to adaptive technology. Having limited use of my arm which meant less physical capacity.

Allocating funding directly to you for you to use a DES to find work, would that help? This would really like this to happen as this may help to find work in my specific field and also help with obtaining specific equipment and training in my field.

I have very low support needs so I tended to be treated as any normal person rather than a pwd.

Staff put me in the "easy" basket to find a job as I am a well qualified graduate with previous work experience.

If DES could send someone to come to me that would be a huge assistance to me.

DES has been trying in a way to find me a suitable job but with no success to date.

No one seems to have an understanding of what I face on a day to day basis with my disability and yet my mind is perfectly good

Staff needs to understand more about disability and the adaption's I require when applying for a job.

Generally employers have a perception that we are inferior due to disability.