

**QUEENSLAND PARENTS FOR PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITY (QPPD)  
TRANSITION SUB-COMMITTEE**

**ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS PAPER**

ensuring a smooth transition from school to a lifestyle of choice for  
young people with disability

## **BACKGROUND**

Queensland Parents for People with a Disability (QPPD) is a parent based, state-wide systems advocacy organisation advocating for people with disabilities, by parents, against abuse and exclusion, for justice and rights.

In 2006 QPPD held a series of Forums throughout Queensland which identified the issue of transition from school to post school life as an area of concern for parents (as one parent said ... *it's a universal issue and extremely important for getting our young adults set in the right direction for the rest of their life*). Following this, a Transition Sub-Committee was formed to undertake the necessary systemic advocacy work.

The Vision and Mission of the Transition Sub-committee is

*Our Vision for young people with disability leaving school is that they will participate in the same range of opportunities and choices as all young people.*

*Our Mission is to advocate for the development and execution of strategies aimed at a systemic level, to ensure that young people with disability can pursue their chosen goals through work, further education, leisure and social activities, enjoyment of relationships, travel and an independent lifestyle.*

The following are the issues found to be of significance to families throughout Queensland. These issues are consistent with all the research that has been undertaken through formal studies:

- Negative attitudes and low expectations
- Transition planning
- Funding for post-school services
- Work experience
- Post school
- Tertiary education
- Futures planning

These Issues are expanded on below and are followed by Recommendations.

### *Negative Attitudes and Low Expectations*

- Lack of opportunities that are real and valid because there is a lack of understanding of the potential of people with disability from the general community and from service providers, of what people with disability can achieve in a social and work context
- Non-inclusive attitudes are felt very strongly by young people with disability as well as by families
- Teachers generally do not have high enough expectations of students with disability and therefore students often don't have high expectations of themselves
- Lack of understanding of the needs of people with disability and a lack of awareness of some disabilities (behavioural, stress, poor stamina, language impairment etc) can lead to inappropriate decisions (vocational and employment) and inappropriate responses being made around that person

- Lack of leadership by government personnel who could be an example to the rest of the community

#### *Recommendations*

1. A positive attitude and clear vision for the future needs to be adopted by all who are in contact with young people with disability and ideally starts at school when planning for post school life begins.
2. A cross-government public awareness campaign combined with a professional development component for teachers about taking a strengths-based approach.
3. Professional development for ALL teachers in inclusive teaching practices, values and general awareness of a range of possibilities for students. Similar training in inclusive practices needs to be provided for all personnel in government departments and for service providers.

#### *Transition Planning*

- Not every Region has a School Transition Officer (STO). STOs provide a valuable service for those schools/students that have access to them. Many do not
- Planning for making the transition from school often starts too late
- Lack of training of teachers in how to provide appropriate support to students so that they can offer choices and opportunities
- Students frequently leave school illiterate, leaving them ill-prepared for post school life
- The range of traineeships and apprenticeships that are offered while the person is in school is very limited
- Lack of formal information sharing and lack of access to accurate information
- Poor communication at all levels between people with disability/families/government departments/service providers

#### *Recommendations*

4. It is recommended that Education Queensland (EQ) give urgent consideration to engaging an STO for each Region. In the interim, it is recommended that Regional Disability Liaison Officers (RDLOs) and Local Area Committees (LACs) be engaged with students who do not have access to an STO currently.
5. NO STUDENT SHOULD LEAVE SCHOOL ILLITERATE. The skill development for ALL teachers must be improved so that they address the learning needs and styles of ALL students.
6. Post school services, disability employment agencies and employers should be engaged with the schools in providing a range of work experience and skill development training for students with disability as a means of sampling work and service options. More opportunities and range of apprenticeships/traineeships should be available to all students regardless of where they live/go to school. Reinstate a transition to work program in schools.

7. A co-ordinated cross-government approach is required so that people with disability and their families are better informed and not faced with a maze to negotiate.

*Issue for Parents – Funding for Post School services*

- Funding for Post School Services from Disability Services Queensland (DSQ) is only available to students who are 18. This results in students either missing out for a year or having to repeat year 12 when they have already graduated
- ‘Daunting’/ difficult and negative application for funding forms. Parents felt under pressure to ‘get it right’ or else funding would not be granted
- Insufficient information regarding alternative funding sources
- Strong perception that the funding is allocated very unfairly
- There is a long, ‘interminable’ waiting period until receiving the application approval or denial: families felt ‘in limbo’
- A long wait for service provision to begin – students left school in mid-November and a new intake of clients may not occur until as late as March the following year
- There is no flexibility in the way funding can be used. For example, there is no information or education provided to families and people with disability to be able to have control of the funding and to be ‘hosted/auspiced’ to establish their own business
- Lack of ‘ownership’ of responsibility within governments (Commonwealth vs. State/Local)
- There is a fear of losing post school funding if a person attempts work or work experience
- Misunderstanding of the concepts of equity vs. equality, and independence vs. interdependence. Disability requires *equitable* distribution of resources, time and effort in order to support a person with disability to live and work in the community. This is not the same as an *equal* share of the pie, but is not understood by many. Likewise it is unrealistic to expect total *independence* as a goal for a person with a disability, as we are all *interdependent* as members of our families, schools, churches and community in general.

*Recommendations*

8. A cross-government approach to provision of funding and supports is necessary to ensure that students with disability are able to leave school when the need arises, or when they finish year 12, even if they are not 18. Access to services and support should be available to ALL students with disability as they exit school regardless of their age. Some students are excluded from schools or find school untenable and/or have precarious living arrangements.

9. The process of application for funding currently means that families are required to focus on a very negative view of their son/daughter. This ‘deficit’ model of assessment should be replaced by a ‘strengths-based’ approach which views a person from the perspective of what they *can* do and their potential. Listing what a person can’t do is also

at extreme odds with how families present their son/daughter to schools, potential service providers and or employers.

10. The process of funding approval/denial requires a more expedient approach and services need assistance in recruiting suitable staff in order to be ready for their new intake of clients.

11. Funding incentives for work experience/volunteering should be offered rather than using post school funding. This would remove the fear of funding reprisals. People need to have the post school funding safeguarded as work experience/volunteering is often short-term or interim.

#### *Work Experience*

- Lack of valid, real, work experience both at school and post school.
- Lack of goal setting at school to incorporate work experience/work testing

#### *Recommendations*

12. Cross-government co-ordination of programs, supports and funding is required to effectively manage work trials as many will lead to engagement in traineeships/apprenticeships or further education. (See also 7 above).

13. People with disabilities who want to engage in work experience/volunteer work should be offered funding incentives.

#### *Post School*

- The maze of choices is confusing – ‘which program, what are the best access times, is there flexibility and appropriate support’? Families have difficulty in knowing where to start
- Perception that larger organisations do not deliver an individual service
- Programs are driven by the service, rather than by the client
- Employment agencies lack expertise and understanding and are often driven by ‘funding guidelines’
- Services do not provide programs that assist the progress of the person with a disability through life. This could include personal development, skills building and relevant activities leading to opportunities to purposefully contribute to a person’s community
- Lack of service accountability and quality means that a service is often ‘not compelled to do the job’. There is a perception that some employment services are ‘creaming’ (i.e. not taking on clients who may be seen as high support) in order to retain/gain funding
- Employment services seen as ‘non-productive, non-creative and inflexible’
- There are some examples of good practice by some services. This should not be limited to the ‘lucky few’; there should be an expectation of a right to the same level of quality service response and delivery by all employment services
- Reluctance of employers to employ people with disability, including governments

- Lack of awareness of employers of government benefits and incentives for employing people with disability
- Huge disincentives to attempt anything beyond welfare is threatened by the potential loss of the Disability Support Pension, healthcare card, Disability Employment Network support and post school funding.
- Lack of roles for people with disability within the workplace.
- When working for award wages, this starts a review of the Disability Support Pension (DSP), and in many cases means the loss of the pension. If the job is lost, then often only Newstart is available as reapplying for the DSP may not be an option.
- Under the DEIR funding for ‘skills employability programs’, Disability Employment Networks (DENs) may be inundated with referrals for clients with very minimal support needs who have been assessed for job suitability. There is a concern that DENs will be overwhelmed with these clients, and not be able to service the clients with higher support needs.
- Respite services deliver post school services that are the same as respite
- Lack of opportunities offered by services for people with disability to engage in work experience/volunteer/unpaid work
- When students with disability apply to Centrelink for DEN referrals, and undergo Job Capacity Assessments (JCA), this starts a review of the DSP. In fear of losing this, many people with disability are not taking the risk and are not applying to DEN’s or seeking work. This is a huge disincentive.
- Students who attend special schools ONLY may access DEN’s without first applying to Centrelink and undergoing JCA pathways. All students with disability should be treated equally and equitably.
- There is a lack of supports for apprenticeships. People who are eligible for Disability Support Pension who wish to undertake apprenticeships must undergo the onerous task of once again providing medical evidence as proof of disability in order to be eligible for the New Apprenticeship Wage Support scheme. This program provides the additional funds for extra learning supports for undertaking apprenticeships. This additional assessment may mean up to 10 weeks delay for the additional study support funding.
- Access to DEN services is restrictive because the program is capped. Many school leavers are finding themselves with nowhere to go.

#### *Recommendations*

14. Support and smoother access to services/ supports/ work experiences etc. needs to be put in place so students with disabilities will have better understanding of options and less confusion about the process of leaving school.

15. Services and families need encouragement and support to create opportunities for work experience/skill development both individually and in groups in order to progress people with disabilities. Funding to post school services needs scrutiny about the programs offered and how they are developing the person with the disability. Many are engaged in leisure/recreation activities as a means of managing groups of people by

fewer staff. People with disabilities are engaging in group activities in order to “stretch” support hours.

16. DSQ and the Commonwealth investigate ways to provide incentives for people with disabilities to engage in unpaid work/work experience. As they are supported to do the job and gain expertise the employer receives a huge benefit by the unpaid work that costs the employer neither time, money or human resources. Employers are offered incentives to employ people with disability and there are productivity-based rates of pay, but there are no incentives for the people with disability to do unpaid work. If they undertake unpaid work, they are forced to use their post school funding in order to learn in 1:1 situations.

There is a great need for safeguarding funding for people with disability who attempt work, work experience or volunteering. As a person who receives supported wages must also be receiving the DSP, then those who undertake unpaid work or work experience/training should not be in fear of losing funding. Those who attempt award wage open employment should be able to return to post school funding, support from a DEN and the DSP, should a job be lost. Those who have been in employment will surely want to return to work and this would be a means of support or alternative training in the interim.

17. People with disability and their families should be able to direct what activities they want the service to provide. Currently, service providers (both post school and employment) manage clients according to staffing availability and the programs they offer.

18. People eligible for the Disability Support Pension should be immediately eligible for programs such as the New Apprenticeship Wage Support scheme, and any other programs or services that they may wish to access. Repeat assessments of a person with a disability is a waste of time, money, resources that could be better directed, and is extremely prohibitive and stressful for the person with a disability and their family.

19. Disability employment agencies need to address the perception of families and others that the only clients they will support are “the easy ones”. Employment agencies need to demonstrate that they are seeking and finding employment for all their clients, not just the “cream” of the clientele. Ideally employment agencies would be funded by how many people with significant disabilities are employed successfully and how they maintain their jobs. Employment services need to engage with employers and find niche roles for their clients, not just find a job that a person may do. Employers and employment service staff must work together to ensure that the person with disability is accepted and valued by other staff members for the role to be successful. (see Jobsupport Inc. Sydney)

20. Eliminate the ‘cap’ on DEN services so that school leavers can access the services and the pathways to work.

21. The Special Employment Placement Officer role should be reviewed and enhanced. Workplaces should adopt the 'affirmative action' used as in the initiative for the Equal Opportunity for Women in the workplace. Employers would be responsible for the education and training of staff, policies and practices in relation to the employment of people with disability.

#### *Tertiary Education*

- Limited access to TAFE courses, especially in rural/remote areas
- Limited support to attend courses, especially for people with high support needs or sensory or physical impairments – people often required to provide their own support
- Courses for literacy and numeracy are targeted at people who already possess literacy and numeracy skills. There are no bridging courses available for literacy and numeracy for students who leave school without these basic skill
- Centralisation of skills-based courses/apprenticeships to only two campuses will exclude many people with disability who cannot drive, as public transport is not in the vicinity of the campuses.
- When a person using a DEN service enrolls at TAFE to do further study to enhance employability, they must be suspended from the DEN service. Students at TAFE require additional support for the work experience practical component of their course. Without it 80% fail their course.

#### *Recommendations*

22. TAFE needs to deliver a broad range of course material for people with disabilities and support from DETA is needed to enable students to attend from rural/remote areas.

23. While a teacher, mentor and tutor is available at TAFE, people with high support needs should have access to personal support where required. If every person came with their own support it makes for a very crowded classroom!

24. Courses for literacy and numeracy, horticulture etc should have a practical component that services a local business or community centre rather than simply simulated situations. This will establish some connections to possible future employers.

25. Literacy and numeracy bridging courses need to be available for students with disability who enrol without those skills despite their numerous years of schooling.

26. Skills-based courses/apprenticeships need to be retained in community campuses as this will provide ease of access for students with disability as well as establishing links to local prospective employers.

27. Additional supports need to be in place for students accessing TAFE for practical work experience components of the course. This could be provided by the DEN if the clients were retained rather than suspended from the service for the duration of the course.

### *Futures Planning*

- Parents feel lack of security about the future ‘what will happen when I die’?
- Lack of adequate support leads parents to the realisation of the need to support their son/daughter throughout their lifetime as a safeguard; there is a feeling of never being able to have a ‘retirement’
- Lack of sustainable friendships

### *Recommendations*

28. There are a few organisations that assist families planning for the future financial and accommodation support for a family member with disability; this is not available to all families in Queensland. There is a need for cross-Government collaboration to provide a worthwhile system of support that enables people with disability to live without fear of the future and affords a life of autonomy and individuality.

29. Families should not have to provide an unpaid support system until they die. People with disability who do not wish to live in congregated/group home accommodation should not have to live with their parents because there is no alternative. There are many models of support from overseas that need to be researched and trialled in Queensland in order to seriously address this very significant issue.

30. People with disability need relationships within the community which are forged at school, work and in their local community, where they are known, understood and valued. This can be facilitated by direct person-centred support systems, and relationships will develop and friendships made. This can lead to freely-given natural supports which keeps vulnerable people safe and in the long term results in considerable financial savings to the community.

## **Conclusion**

All research and anecdotal evidence points to transition being the absolute crucial point of a young person either moving into vocational training or employment or falling between the gaps and having neither. Research indicates that schools do not have the resources to meet this need fully. Families are saying that what is needed is a clear transition path to follow, together with a whole of government collaborative, coordinated approach.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

School Transition Officer (employed by EQ; there is not necessarily an Officer in every Region)	STO
Education Queensland	EQ
Regional Disability Liaison Officers (Commonwealth funded)	RDLO
Disability Services Queensland	DSQ
Post School Services	PSS
Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and the Arts	DETA
Local Area Committee	LAC