

# QUEENSLAND PARENTS FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY INC (QPPD)

## TRANSITION SUB-COMMITTEE

### POSITION STATEMENT

*Making the journey 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.*

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Issues Paper is to draw together the extensive, comprehensive research that has been undertaken over the past 10 years by a wide range of agencies (including the investigations of this Sub-Committee) with the view to providing this information to the relevant government bodies, advocating that they embrace the recommendations of the research. These studies have identified very clearly what the issues/barriers are for young people in this transition period and all have come to remarkably similar, if not identical, conclusions and have made similar recommendations as a way forward to overcome these barriers. The QPPD Transition Sub-Committee fully supports and endorses these recommendations.

As well, the Transition Sub-Committee has undertaken its own research and has identified what are the major issues for parents around transition – which once again, are similar, if not the same as those identified in the research which has been undertaken over the past decade.

The purpose of this paper is also to emphasise the importance of this issue to parents. As one mother has said:

*For many families, the vision they have for their child begins to develop while they are at school. The child's interests, personality and skills help to form the types of activities that the child may do while at school in areas of subject selection, work or work experience and any potential career paths after school life ends. **The same can be said for children with a disability.***

## RESEARCH

The following list provides an indication of the extent of the research (this is only what the committee is aware of – there is most likely more) that has been undertaken over the past 10 years:

- **2007 - Curtin University** – Employment/day options interface for people with disabilities
- **2007 – Telethon Institute for Child Health Research** - Leaving School: maximising participation and life outcomes in youth with Intellectual Disability transitioning from secondary school to adult life
- **2006 - Griffith University** - Quality Outcomes for Students with a Disability –Transition Practices and Post School Outcomes in Queensland Schools
- **2004 - Disability Services Queensland** - Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF)
- **2003 - Office of the Public Advocate Queensland** - Navigating the Pathways from School to Work
- **2002 – The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation** - Lighthouse Initiative
- **2001- Queensland Department of Employment and Training** - *Equal Access?*
- **2000-2005 - National Strategy** - Bridging Pathways

(For an expanded summary of the above research, see Appendix 1)

As well as the above research, under the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) the Queensland Bilateral Agreement sets out areas of mutual concern to be progressed by both governments. One of these areas is “strengthening cross government linkages, particularly at critical life stages and transition points by movement of people with disabilities from school to appropriate employment, day options and training services”. There is a commitment to undertake joint analysis of policies and practices that impact upon this movement.

## KEY ISSUES FOR PARENTS

The following are the issues or barriers identified by parents that prevent young people with disability from moving successfully from school into adult life:

- Lack of coordination between all the relevant agencies which is seen as being vital to the transition planning process
- Low expectations and negative attitudes
- Lack of understanding of particular disabilities and the impact this has on decision making
- Lack of information or information not ‘user-friendly’ about what services and supports are available
- Transport – the expense, logistics and personal vulnerability of people with disability using public transport
- Lack of appropriate, flexible support which really meets the needs of the individual
- Program/interface complexity – the maze of services, programs, levels of government and sectors seems impenetrable

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following summarise the recommendations which are consistent across all the above research projects and link strongly to the barriers identified above:

- The need to start the transition process early, preferably from Year 9
- The need for a strong positive vision and high expectations

- The need to engage families in the transition planning process as well as the student and to allocate adequate resources to enable this to happen
- The vital importance of whole of government and cross sectoral approach as well as cross jurisdiction (Commonwealth, State and Local government)
- The need for cooperation to reduce duplication and to make more effective use of knowledge and resources
- The importance of alliances and liaison between schools, employers and employment agencies
- The importance of students participating in meaningful work experiences
- The need for flexible guidelines around the involvement of VET in school programs
- Supporting young people with disability to secure and maintain employer involvement
- Agreed levels of resourcing to provide appropriate support in acknowledgment of the program complexity and need for navigation

## CONCLUSION

Despite the research and the many initiatives that may have been undertaken over the last decade, there still remains significant numbers of young people with disability who are not making the transition in such a way as to lead to a purposeful, productive and meaningful life. QPPD strongly believes that enough research has been undertaken to allow everybody to understand what the issues are and the recommendations are as clear as day as to how to address the issues. These results have not varied over the years or over the various projects – all issues, outcomes, recommendations are the same and have not changed – but the situation has not changed; it remains the same. **It is time for action and implementation of the recommendations.**

QPPD believe it is time for all stakeholders to acknowledge and recognise that this is a very complex systemic issue and requires a commitment from everyone involved to break down the isolation in which many of the agencies operate. QPPD would like to see as a first step a mechanism by which a 'Protocol' or 'Memorandum of Understanding' could be developed between all stakeholders as to each one's roles and responsibilities. This commitment could provide a way forward for the development of strategies to implement the recommendations from the research.

# APPENDIX 1

## QUEENSLAND PARENTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

### TRANSITION SUB-COMMITTEE

#### Summary of Research into Transition and Post School Outcomes for Students with Disability

Curtin University – 2007 – Employment/Day Options Interface for people with disabilities  
No information to date (March 2008)

Telethon Institute for Child Health Research – 2007

This project is funded from the Australian Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the project “Leaving School: Maximising participation and life outcomes in youth with Intellectual Disability transitioning from secondary school to adult life”.

Quality Outcomes for Students with a Disability – 2006 Transition Practices and Post School Outcomes in Queensland Schools

A research team from Griffith University, headed by Dr Dennis Meadows, was engaged by the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts in 2006 to “examine the relationship between transition practices and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities”.

The following summarises the key findings of the project “for consideration”:

#### Students

- The importance of students participating in meaningful work experiences
- Travel training should be prioritised in the curriculum as transport to and from work experience presented difficulties
- There needs to active involvement of students in their transition planning process – with adequate resources and support to enable this
- Life skills instruction should be located within the context of each student’s environment
- Successful transition outcomes were particularly difficult to achieve for students with more significant disabilities and other groups of students who “fall through the gaps”

#### Family Involvement

- The involvement of families in the transition process needs to start earlier
- Information on post-school services provided to families needs to (a) be more user-friendly, (b) be delivered earlier in the transition process and (c) accurately reflect post-school offerings

## Program structure

- Department of Education needs to develop a policy document setting out its support for transition activities and describes how the process should proceed
- Transition-related philosophy, policies and procedures and program structure needs to be developed
- Lack of follow up by schools after their students have left
- Increase the number of School Transition Officers
- Professional development for staff involved in the transition process to be implemented at various levels

## Interagency collaboration

- Communication and coordination between government departments, schools and post-school agencies is necessary

### *Education and Training Reforms for the Future - 2004*

This was a collaborative project between Disability Services Queensland, Department of Education and Training and Department of Education and the Arts, established by the Framework Implementation Committee (FIC) and funded by DSQ. It was a Pilot Project carried out in three shires throughout Queensland – Murrumba, Ipswich and Townsville.

Key findings of this Project are as follows:

- Improved information and opportunities for further education and training
- Transition planning
- Better coordination of services
- Availability of appropriate support
- Improved perceptions by potential employers

### *Navigating the Pathways from School to Work – Office of the Public Advocate Queensland, 2003*

This Discussion Paper supports the Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2000-2005 – “*a society that values people with a disability, upholds their rights and supports their equitable participation in everyday*”. It also supports the ETRF and has identified the following challenges for people with a decision-making disability:

- Need for a strong positive vision and high expectations
- Timely access to support and resource management
- Program complexity – need for navigation
- Adequate and flexible transition periods
- Availability of secure employment

The above needs to be addressed through the following components:

- Early intervention
- Cross-sectoral and whole of government collaboration
- Partnership with families and informal networks

### The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) Lighthouse Initiative -2002

ECEF is supported and advised by representatives of:

- Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)
- Australian Disability Training Advisory council (ADTAC)
- Brooker Consulting
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Dept of Education, Science & Training (DEST)
- Dept of Employment & Workplace Relations (DEWR)

The ECEF *Lighthouse Initiative* Evaluation Report was presented in 2002. The initiative was a disability action research project aimed at increasing the access of people with a disability to vocational education and employment. It had an overall goal of increasing the participation of students with a disability in the VET system, in order to create viable pathways to meaningful employment.

Key Findings:

- The need for an early intervention approach – from Year 9 onwards
- The importance of cross sectoral and whole of government approaches – cross departmental (Commonwealth) and cross jurisdiction (Commonwealth, State and Local government) cooperation is needed to reduce fragmentation and duplication, to make more effective use of knowledge and resources and to encourage a holistic approach
- The importance of alliances between schools, employers and CEPT agencies
- The important role of VET in schools programs in creating viable pathways
- Providing support to secure employer involvement
- Agreed levels of resourcing to provide appropriate support – need for increased funding to support students with a disability as part of transition planning and should be viewed as a front end cost producing an investment which outweighs the initial input.

### Equal Access? – 2001

A Report on six Action Research Projects into improving outcomes for students with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Vocational Education and Training. This research was undertaken by the Queensland Department of Employment and Training. It identified existing barriers to inclusion of people with a disability and recommended ways of improving outcomes for students.

### Bridging Pathways – National Strategy 2000-2005

A national strategy for increasing opportunities for people with a disability in vocational education and training states that success depends on:

- Developing links with employers and employment assistance services
- Supporting effort to undertake further education and life-long-learning
- Promoting collaboration through partnerships – a coordination mechanism to bring together support across government agencies

- Ensuring compliance with legislation and regulative frameworks, e.g. Disability Discrimination legislation and the Australian Recognition Framework standard on access and equity