Effecting a system change in the delivery of employment services for people with disabilities: a view from Australia*

Trevor R. Parmenter
Centre for Developmental Disability Studies, The University of Sydney, PO Box 6, Ryde NSW 1680, Australia

Accepted September 1999

The Australian Disability Services Act [24] signalled a dramatic change in the delivery of employment services to people with disabilities. The Act introduced alternative integrated employment options to traditional sheltered employment services. Despite the steady growth in the numbers of disabled people working in the integrated options, a concomitant drop in the number of people in sheltered employment programs has not occurred. Reasons for this are explored in the context of the implementation processes put in place by successive governments. It is argued that the most serious challenge facing contemporary vocational service provisions is the reconciliation of a person-centred values philosophy with services driven by neo-classical economic policies.

Keywords: Australia, disability, integrated employment, support need, training

1. Introduction

This paper will provide an analysis of the social and historical developments that have helped shape the provision of employment services for people with disabilities in the Australian context. In particular it will address the contemporary challenges that human services organizations are facing in attempting to reconcile what Schalock [55] has described as... “two powerful, potentially conflicting forces: person centred values and economic-based restructured services” (p. 55).

The philosophies and principles that have underpinned the development of Australia’s disability programs have not been dissimilar to those of many other Western industrialized countries. Consequently, similar patterns of service delivery and community attitudes towards people with disabilities have emerged in Australia’s relatively short history of white settlement, spanning just over 200 years.

2. Geographical and historical background

The vast Australian continent (77m square kilometres or 30m square miles) is a multi-cultural society populated by approximately 19 million people with about 65% living in the capital cities of the six states and two territories. The majority of the population lives in two coastal regions, the largest along the eastern and south eastern seaboard and the smaller along the south western coast. Almost three quarters of the Australian land mass is relatively uninhabited owing to its barren nature. Sparse isolated populations, including many of its indigenous aboriginal population, present governments and human services organizations with immense difficulties in providing adequate support to these isolated communities owing to the tyranny of distance.

Australia has a federal system of government with the six states and two territories having their own legislatures; a situation similar to Canada and the United States. However, the Australian parliamentary structures are based upon the British Westminster system owing to its colonial history.

With the emergence of welfare programs conducted and/or financially supported by the Federal and State governments, the needs of people with disabilities and their families were recognized. As disability programs developed, the Federal Government, through its welfare departments, took responsibility for a broad range of accommodation, employment and income support services. Respective State Governments, through their
health departments, essentially provided institutional accommodation services to those with very high support needs, particularly those with psychiatric illness and severe to profound intellectual disabilities.

It is noteworthy that the Australian Federal Government enacted legislation in 1910 to provide the first invalid pension scheme for people with disabilities. The *Social Services Act of 1947–1977* broadened the range of pensions, benefits and allowances. It also led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS) which provided a medically oriented rehabilitation program to people with physical or sensory impairments in a number of large hospital-like centres situated in the capital cities of each of the states. This period strongly reflected the “medical model” approach to the delivery of disability services.

The role non-government agencies could play in service provision was recognized in 1967 by Federal legislation which allocated funds to subsidize the establishment of education, residential, vocational and day activity programs. The combination of the medical and welfare/charity models of service saw a rapid increase in congregate residential and vocational programs throughout Australia in the post World War II period; especially in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Handicapped Persons Welfare Assistance Act of 1974* extended government subsidies to Activity Therapy Centres for people deemed to be unable to be placed in sheltered workshops. The activities in these centres, however, were essentially similar to those in the sheltered workshops. The major difference was the level of government support.

It is salutary to realise that both sheltered workshops and the activity therapy centres emerged as a place where people with disabilities could be involved in “gainful” activities. For the majority of families it was a place where their disabled sons and daughters with disabilities could fill their day, participating in “busy” work and often social activities. In many ways it was an extension of the special school which a majority had attended. Owing to poor productivity, wages were minimal, with significant disincentives for regular employment options.

Despite one of the stated goals of sheltered employment being preparation for open employment, only a minuscule number of disabled workers ever transferred to regular community-based jobs. Very few “training” allowances offered by the Federal Government were ever taken up by the sheltered employment industry. For instance, in the period 1974/75, 123 training fees were paid; 54 in 1975/76; 44 in 1976/77 and 20 in 1977/78 [49].

However, during the 1970s Australia was being influenced by a number of social, philosophical and political forces, including the world-wide emergence of the independent living movement for people with a physical disability and the growing acceptance of the normalization principle for people with intellectual disabilities as enunciated by Nirje [47] and Wolfensberger [62,63]. Research that demonstrated that people with severe intellectual disabilities could perform quite complex vocational skills [9,31,59] also began to lay the ground for subsequent policy initiatives that would challenge the position of sheltered employment [49].

### 3. Winds of change

The election of a reformist Federal Government in 1972 provided a change in the essentially conservative climate that had permeated the welfare services in Australia. The proclamation of 1981 as the Year of Disabled Persons provided a further impetus for governments, service providers and the community generally to re-examine attitudes towards the way services were being provided to people with disabilities.

In 1973 the Federal Government established, through the CRS, two pilot Work Preparation Centres for school leavers who had a mild intellectual disability in response to community pressures that challenged the perception that this group could only cope in a sheltered environment. Over the next ten years a network of seven centres were established, providing a model for intensive vocational training that led to open employment outcomes. These centres also trialed service delivery models that preceded the later adoption of a network of competitive and supported employment programs across Australia. During this development period the CRS supported a University Affiliated Program of active research through the Unit for Rehabilitation Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney [61].

In 1983 the Federal Government sponsored three initiatives that were to have a profound effect upon disability service provision in Australia. The first was the funding of an Australian chapter of Disabled People’s International; the second, the establishment of the Disability Advisory Council of Australia that consisted of people with disabilities or their advocates, replacing earlier advisory panels that consisted of mainly service providers; and the third, the setting up of the Handicapped Programs Review, a landmark development in the Australian disability scene.
The Review which involved a nation-wide consultation with people with disabilities, their families and service providers culminated in the publication of *New Directions Report of the Handicapped Programs Review* [33] and the enactment of the *Disability Services Act* [25]. One of the outcomes of the review was the promulgation of seven positive consumer outcomes as a basis for program development for people with disabilities.

The key outcomes were:

- a place to live in the local community
- paid employment
- to be competent and self reliant
- the opportunity to be involved in a range of community relationships and activities
- security
- community respect and acceptance

The *New Directions* report concluded with a vision for the future of Australian disability policy:

This report provides a stimulus to the new directions of the Commonwealth Government’s effort in the provision of services for people with disabilities. Some of the options and recommendations outlined will not be easy to implement, whether due to the complexity of administrative issues to be resolved, budgeting constraints, attitudinal factors or resistance to change. It is appreciated that as new ground is broken mistakes will be made (p. 118).

The report was especially critical of sheltered workshops and activity therapy centres, including the types of work performed, low wages, poor working conditions and their inherently segregated nature. In respect of their training role the review found that training appeared to be an end in itself, was not time limited, and rarely led to open employment. In this respect the review questioned the quality of training provided by inexperienced and unqualified staff.

4. A new paradigm

The *Disability Services Act* [24] which replaced the *Handicapped Persons Assistance Act* [36] signalled a significant paradigm shift in the operation and funding of government assisted programs. It basically attempted to take the initiative for the planning and execution of disability services away from the powerful service agencies and to shift them to consumer groups. However, the shift was essentially from the service sector to the bureaucratic machinery of government.

The Act which came into operation in June, 1987, introduced two new employment types designed to overcome the poor performance of workshops in placing and supporting people in the open labour market. The first, “Competitive employment training and placement services” (CETAP), were designed to assist people with disabilities to get, and keep, jobs in the open labour market which pay full award wages. The second, “Supported employment services” (SE), were restricted to people who could not be placed in the open labour market on full award wages, and who, because of their disabilities, required substantial ongoing support to get and maintain employment [45].

The Act incorporated the principle of “least restrictive alternative” into its hierarchy of supported employment models; ensuring that the level of, and type of support a person receives is appropriate to their level of need. Under this principle the traditional employment services, that in the main assisted people with low to moderate support needs, were given a five-year transition period to restructure their operations to comply with the new service types (see Fig. 1).

The government was confronted with at least two significant challenges. It had to support the establishment of a nation-wide network of innovative employment models, while at the same time encouraging the traditional services to undertake the transition process it had mandated. To respond to the first challenge it supported a series of demonstration projects which were designed to stimulate the adoption of the innovative employment models. A subsequent analysis of a number of these demonstration projects, which compared their efficacy and effectiveness in producing consumer outcomes to a sample of traditional services, showed there was no clear-cut association between service type and efficacy and effectiveness outcomes [46].

This finding was not surprising given the relative lack of experience of the field and the need for lead time to develop a pool of entrepreneurial providers. From the outset the Government’s emphasis was on the numbers of persons placed in open employment; a reasonable outcome it might be argued. However, there was little stimulation of research into how these outcomes might be more effectively achieved, especially issues related to staff training and the achievement of the broad range of consumer outcomes outlined in the Review.

Disappointingly, the Government failed to implement one of the major recommendations of the Report *New Directions*, namely the establishment of a National
Bureau of Disability Research. In the Report the following objectives were suggested for such a Bureau:

- development of innovative and effective service options for people with disabilities in the accommodation, employment support and training needs;
- development of better models for integrating people with disabilities into general community life; and
- development of appropriate program planning; monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

Among the possible reasons for this recommendation not being accepted was the assumption that Australia could simply profit from overseas research. Australia has a long history of not recognizing the achievements of its own scientists. Nevertheless, with economic rationalist policies emerging, successive state and federal governments have employed economic and business consultancy firms to examine, in particular, the economic aspects of disability services. A weakness of this approach, from a consumer perspective, has been that subsequent reports have had limited access and have not been open to peer review. It is interesting to note the comments of the architect of the new directions in disability services, Senator Don Grimes, who made the following observation on his return from an overseas diplomatic appointment in 1992:

... Consultants are used to delay the implementation of programs when the real reasons are budgetary or even political... I have the greatest respect for accountants, economists and management specialists in their place, but if the are left alone to produce solutions to problems, they have the unfortunate tendency to forget they are dealing with individuals and not just numbers or beans [35].

The second, more difficult, challenge lay in changing the hearts and minds of those controlling the substantial network of sheltered employment agencies. For instance, in 1993, 24,276 people with a disability or 67% of people supported under provisions of the Disability Services Program were employed by “Business Services” (Sheltered Workshops). Of these people, 1,936 were unpaid [20]. In many instances there was a reluctance to accept the fact that many more people with disabilities could be successful in more productive integrated employment settings. There were, and still remain, strong vested interests to maintain the status quo, both from families and the management echelons of the sheltered industry.

The legislative mandate, not surprisingly, met strong resistance, especially as the new models were funded at a much higher per capita level than the traditional models [48]. The climate was not aided by the extreme
negative associations that were promulgated concerning the sheltered industry, attracting the same opprobrium that surrounded state residential institutions. For instance, the Government initially declined to allow the sheltered industry to establish or sponsor the newer models, reinforcing the view that those organizations were not to be trusted.

Morath’s [46] analysis suggested that the Government should have played the role of being “an influence and not a controller of the environmental determinants” (p. 303) that lead organizations to change. Applying Porter’s [52] competitive model to the sheltered employment industry Morath [46] suggested that it might have been more productive for the Government to have invested in incentives that would have fostered a more competitive environment among the sheltered workshops.

5. Reconfiguration of the sheltered employment industry

Recognizing the immense difficulties in effecting the transition process the Government in 1991, through its Department of Human Services and Health, commissioned the Mt Eliza Australian Management College to establish a National Technical Assistance Unit (NTAU) to assist sheltered workshops to achieve transition with the terms of the Disability Services Act. In its 30-month involvement the NTAU undertook 74 projects which impacted on 105 organizations across Australia, representing 69% of the sheltered workshops, employing 75% of the employees with a disability.

Among its activities in facilitating the transition process the NTAU encouraged:

a) a greater spirit of co-operation between sheltered workshops and job placement agencies to increase the movement of employees to open employment;
b) the development of accredited vocational training and skill development for management, staff and disabled employees;
c) the development of better business practices in sheltered workshops to increase disabled employees’ wages; and
d) the development of appropriate accountability procedures for the industry.

The work of the NTAU helped to diffuse the impasse between Government and the industry; an agreed strategic direction was agreed to by the industry in accord with the spirit of the Disability Services Act; the establishment of access to significant new sources of funding and finance development for organizations with sheltered workshops; and the development of tools to assist managers and directors with comprehensive approaches to planning and implementing organizational change.

The work of the NTAU was one of a number of initiatives the Government undertook to encourage the transition process. There continued to be resistance on the part of a major section of the sheltered employment industry and successive concessions have been made. As early as November the presiding Minister gave an assurance that the industry would not be defunded come 1992 [10]. This was followed by a number of transition strategies including a blue print for action [37] which foreshadowed the Disability Services Standards [38] and associated review processes; new administrative arrangements in 1993 [21]; the Disability Quality Council [43]; and the then Government’s response to the Baume and Kay [8] review of the Disability Services Program [44].

While each of these requirements has lapsed consequent to the election of a conservative government in 1996, services were still required to develop transition plans by March 1997 and to have implemented award-based, productivity-based wages by 1999. The success of the transition initiative may be best measured by the numbers of services that have completed the process. By June 1996, some nine years after the promulgation of the Disability Services Act only 35 of some 480 traditional employment services had made significant progress toward meeting the principles and objectives of the Act [22].

This situation is possibly not dissimilar to that obtaining in the United States where integrated employment as a policy initiative was first implemented. Reviews have suggested that while there has been a significant growth in the numbers of persons in integrated employment settings, the use of segregated employment has remained essentially the same [41]. Kiernan et al. [41] have suggested that the growth in integrated employment is possibly due to “increased referrals and the greater emphasis on seeking such employment from those entering the system” (p. 19). This would also be true in the Australian context for the Government has targeted disabled school leavers in its funding of new employment services. Families of disabled young people also are favouring integrated services over the traditional models [50,53]. Several states have also instituted innovative school to work transition strategies for school leavers with a disability [54].
With the change of government in 1996, sheltered employment has been recognized as one of approved employment options and is now accommodated under the rubric of “supported employment”. There is a degree of sophistry in the current argument that sheltered employment provides an additional vocational option and supports the principle of consumer choice. Kirby [42] has suggested that sheltered employment can provide a useful training step for a number of people with higher support needs. While some may argue there has been significant improvement in the quality of traditional employment services which is not demonstrated by a change in funding status under the Act, critics argue little has changed since the Handicapped Programs Review [28,26]. Whatever the case, with the acceptance of sheltered workshops as an appropriate model of service delivery, the transition of sheltered workshops is no longer on the agenda.

Despite the note of pessimism concerning the transition of traditional services, the marked successes of disabled people accessing the open labour market [1] is testimony to the vision in the recommendations of New Directions. Over the last decade there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people supported in employment in the open labour market. The 1985-86 Census of Disability Services [14] reported 245 clients placed in the open labour market and still in support at the end of that financial year. Of the almost 10,000 jobs in the open labour market on 30 June, 1997, just over 52% had commenced in the previous 12 months [2]. As at September 1998, there were 358 agencies across Australia supporting people with disabilities in integrated employment. In the previous twelve months a total of 30,668 people with disabilities were recorded to have been supported, and of these 7,706 people had been supported for over one year. The 1991 [19], and which is now in abeyance; the Review of Individual Needs Analysis pilots and research on an Individualised Funding Approach; subsequently known as the Consumer Focussed Funding Approach which was piloted in new supported employment services from 1991 [19], and which is now in abeyance; the Review of Funding Arrangements announced in 1991 [37] and undertaken in 1992–93; the Vermont study in 1993 [60]; the Strategic Review of 1993–95 [8]; the establishment

6. Equitable funding and service access arrangements

A key feature of disability services prior to the Disability Services Act was inequitable funding and service access arrangements [33]. The Disability Services Act was introduced with the promise to fix the “irrationality, inequities, and disincentives associated with the traditional funding approach” [34]. In spite of this promise, the irrationalities, inequities and disincentives remain.

Funding for service providers is historically-based, with annual block grants which are indexed from year to year. The initial level of funding is that which applied either in the year prior to the introduction of the Act, or the level which was negotiated in the services’ first year of funding after the Act came into force; where those negotiations were ostensibly guided by what was originally intended to be a trial financing strategy [23]. Even for those services initially funded under the financing strategy, their current funding levels do not necessarily relate to the number of clients assisted, their support needs, nor the support they receive. Not surprisingly, variations in average per capita grant levels under the historical funding system are significant. For the 226 services surveyed in the service costs survey, they ranged from an average of $A1,677 to $A59,505 per client per annum in 1993–94 [21]. There appeared, furthermore, to be no relationship between the amounts paid for each client and the average support needs of those clients.

There has been a string of reviews, studies, reports and committees each with the intention of developing new funding arrangements. They include: the Arthur Anderson study in 1987 [4]; the two financing strategy discussion papers in 1988 [15,16]; the financing strategy of 1989; the assessment research project announced in the 1990 budget [37] which spawned the Individual Needs Analysis pilots and research on an Individualised Funding Approach; subsequently known as the Consumer Focussed Funding Approach which was piloted in new supported employment services from 1991 [19], and which is now in abeyance; the Review of Funding Arrangements announced in 1991 [37] and undertaken in 1992–93; the Vermont study in 1993 [60]; the Strategic Review of 1993–95 [8]; the establishment

of a Technical Advisory Group on Funding and Assessment in 1995, and the Department’s 1995 discussion paper proposing new funding arrangements [23]. Although the current Government promised in 1996 to introduce a system of case-based funding, it plans to implement this aspect of reform slowly ensuring that new funding arrangements are fully tested before they are introduced. Baume and Kay’s [8] recommendations for a unit-cost funding approach, recognition of the additional costs for people with high support needs; triennial funding agreements; arrangements which ensure the accountability for funding and consumer outcomes and improved management information systems mirror recommendations in the 1985 Handicapped Programs Review [33]. After thirteen years, there appears to be broad bipartisan agreement on the need to reform funding arrangements and agreement on the general direction that reform should take. This agreement is broadly consistent with the direction proposed in the Handicapped Programs Review.

Although the Government introduced a needs-based planning process in 1992 and planned to introduce an independent service access, assessment and referral system from 1997 [44], it is difficult to accept that much could not have been done earlier. It is quite possible that the inequities in service access would have been much reduced if the Government had implemented the suggestion of the Handicapped Programs Review to provide funds to individuals (rather than new services) on an individual needs basis to enable them to purchase services themselves. There are concerns, however, that individualized or case-based funding may not be the panacea. Given the relative geographical isolation of many services in Australia, a purchaser of services will have extremely limited options in being able to “shop around” for an appropriate service. Infrastructure funding needs and the ultimate financial viability of service organizations loom as critical questions to be addressed. Again, the focus of responding to individual needs and economic considerations present a challenge to both policy planners and service providers.

7. Measurement of outcomes

Incorporated into the Disability Services Act [24] were seven principles and fourteen objectives that were to become the basic yardstick against which programs and services were to be measured. It is interesting to note that the first objective, “Services should have as their focus the achievement of positive outcomes for people with disabilities, such as increased independence, employment opportunities and integration into the community”, has not been adequately tested, some thirteen years after its promulgation.

The reasons for this are complex, but the essential fact remains that successive administrations have not been able to come up with adequate measures to test whether “the individual needs and goals of the people with disabilities receiving those services” (Objective 4) are being achieved. The consumer outcomes negotiated by the Department of Community Services and Health in the early years of the Act were criticised by the Australian National Audit Office [7] as being too vague, and for being statements of desirable outcomes rather than objective measurable outcomes.

Responding to these criticisms, the Department first developed a consumer outcomes guide [17]; then a statement of minimum outcomes [18]; and finally the Disability Services Standards [38]. A Disability Standards Review Panel was also established to review any appeals from service providers should their service be not deemed to comply with the Standards when audited by the Department every five years.

In the context of the Handicapped Programs Review, the weakness of the Standards is apparent for they do not explicitly address two of the three recommended outcome measures; namely the number of people placed in employment and the maintenance of that employment. They certainly did not respond adequately to the criticisms of the National Audit Office which called for measurable performance indicators, a situation noted by the comprehensive review of the Disability Services Program conducted by Baume and Kay [8].

In 1992 service providers of integrated employment services initiated the development of the National Information Management System (NIMS) to provide data for their own management systems, to exchange data with each other and to comply with statistical reporting requirements. In order to satisfy the government’s accountability obligations the Department of Human Services and Health supported the initiative. With the support of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) the system began in January, 1995. Since then all integrated employment services have been provided with a computerised system which includes standardized definitions and data items concerning clients and their job history.

The objectives of the National Information Management System were:
to enable agencies to collect and manage information about their services, its resources and its clients with a goal of improving service quality and client outcomes;

- to provide the Government with comprehensive statistical information (apart from financial accountability data) about open employment services funded under the Disability Services Act, and

- to enable the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to support these objectives and fulfil its own charter to develop, analyse and disseminate national statistics on disability services [1].

Since January, 1995, AIHW has published a quarterly summary and analysis of data together with annual reports. The NIMS database contained four main sections; relating to agencies, client characteristics, client jobs and the degree of support provided, and details about employers. Among the positive outcomes from the NIMS project identified by Anderson and Golley [2] the following are of particular merit:

- The tripartite management process (service agencies, government and AIHW) has proven to be a very successful national data development exercise.

- The data available have assisted a number of service provider networks in their benchmarking activity and sharing of information.

- Other research bodies have found the NIMS information very useful in terms of monitoring outcomes for people with disabilities in the labour market. NIMS is regarded internationally as one of the best systems of its kind in the world.

- There is now detailed longitudinal data about open employment agencies and their clients for four and a half years.

It was the intention of government to extend the NIMS to the sheltered employment sector, but a decision was taken by the government to decommission the system as from 31 July, 1999, and to transfer the responsibility for the collection and analyses of these data to the service sector. This decision possibly confirms the view that governments are increasingly distancing themselves from a close involvement in the delivery processes of disability services. Across all Australian governments, Federal and State, there has emerged a policy that focuses on a distinct split between the purchaser and the provider of disability services. There is also an accelerating trend for governments to transfer direct service provision to not-for-profit and for-profit agencies. At both Federal and State levels, it is evident that economic considerations are replacing the commitment to the broad range of consumer outcomes that were espoused under the provisions of the Disability Services Act [24].

8. Emergence of neo-classical economic policies

Currently, the “disability industry” has become enmeshed in a much larger government agenda. The emerging neo-classical economic rationalist policies, driven by an increasing globalized economy, has pushed the Federal Government to embrace the policies of macro- and micro-economic reform. The role of macro-economic reform is to reduce dependence on overseas capital and hence reduce the current account deficit. The implication of micro-economic reform is to enhance competition as a means to efficiency and thus reduce the cost of production. The neo-classical economic engine driving this approach is basically about ‘utility-maximization’ given limited resources. It is about individuals using their resources to achieve the highest level of satisfaction possible. The essential ingredient is that people must be free to choose how they use their resources. David de Carvalho [13], summed up the position well – economic reform means reducing interference by governments.

It is not hard to see why economic rationalism is associated with a political ideology that emphasises individual freedom, plays down the negative distributional impact of greater economic freedom, and abhors intervention by collective institutions like governments in the affairs of individuals (p. 4).

This is the very argument being used to support the privatisation of disability and other welfare services. The irony is that the emerging forces (those of the free market economy) present a tantalising and seductive similarity in their goals and processes to many of the contemporary goals for people with disability and their families. The concepts of freedom of choice, more control over one’s life, release from government regulations and self-determination all appear to sit comfortably in both areas. This is the very paradox referred to by Schalock [55] above.

9. The Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement

Early in the 1990s the Federal Government, in a spirit termed the “new federalism” and with the co-operation
of State Government Premiers, initiated the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). One of COAG’s basic roles was to rationalise the responsibilities between Federal and State governments in order to achieve fiscal savings through reduced overlap or services.

One of the first examples of this new spirit of cooperation was the first Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA) signed by all Australian governments in 1991. Its stated goals were to develop a coordinated, rationalised and integrated approach to disability services in Australia. The Agreement required the States and territories to enact legislation parallelling the 1986 Federal Disability Services Act to ensure continuity of services across states and a commitment to the same set of principles and objectives. One State, New South Wales (NSW), went further and enacted a Community Services Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring Act (CAMA) in addition to its Disability Services Act NSW, after strong lobbying by consumer groups. CAMA has been an effective “watchdog” in challenging undesirable practices in both government and non-government agencies.

A basic shortcoming of the CSDA, was the inadequate funding provided by the Federal Government to enable the States and Territories to achieve fully the outcomes mandated in their respective legislation. As over 70% of all CSDA funds are expended on accommodation services, the shortfall in these services is particularly evident. Many thousands of people with disabilities remain in congregated care, many thousands live at home with parents who are aging and many thousands continue to live in substandard for-profit boarding houses.

Towards the end of the five-year Agreement, the Federal Government commissioned an evaluation of the CSDA which culminated with the report in Getting Real, compiled by Professor Anna Yeatman. Some of the more significant of the 50 Recommendations made were:

- There is a need for a clearer specification of program objectives, i.e. what are the desired outcomes for people with disabilities and their careers?
- There is a need to clarify in more specific detail the target group for a rational disability services system.
- There is a need to implement multilateral planning to map the level of unmet need, rather than a series of bilateral arrangements.
- There is a need to effect better co-ordination of service delivery, an example of ways to meet the needs of a person who requires both vocational and day activity options.

- The funding should be given to service providers for identified individuals, with levels:
  - linked to the assessed support needs of the individual
  - linked to the standard of services provided,
  - allowing for flexibility and innovation,
  - able to move with the individual from one service to another, and
  - be dependent on the achievement of outcomes for individuals

The general thrust of the report called for funding to improve responsiveness and flexibility and for a system that provided better co-ordination and integration to allow people to access a range of service types more easily. It also responded to the call by people with disabilities and their careers for a greater say in how programs are planned and delivered. Implicit in the Report is the dissatisfaction of people with disabilities and their careers with a heavily bureaucratised and professionally dominated service system. A way has to be found to ensure that quality standards are maintained, but at the same time recognizing that equitable partnerships have to be formed between government, service providers and the ultimate users.

10. The future

A number of factors have affected, and will continue to affect, the delivery of employment services for people with a disability in Australia, especially those with an intellectual disability. Significant among these are the economically driven focus and the continuing high structural unemployment, particularly among Australian youth. In addition, there are significant competing welfare and social pressures such as the rapidly aging population, issues related to drug dependency and escalating health services costs that are demanding more urgent policy imperatives from governments.

Coincidental with the social reforms embodied in New Directions and the subsequent Disability Services Act, Australia’s economic policies were being re-shaped to respond to a highly competitive market-place economy. The social justice goals became enmeshed in the broader shifts in economic policy that emphasized competition and a transfer of former government-conducted services to the private sector. Key policy reports that have accelerated these developments include those from the Commonwealth Industry and Industry Commission, especially the Independent Committee of...
Inquiry on National Competition Policy [40] known as “The Hilmer Report”.

Goldsworthy [32] has proposed a “changing paradigm—s” model to illustrate the evolution of the “market-place paradigm” from earlier charitable, welfare and community business approaches to the delivery of disability and aged care services (see Fig. 2). It is suggested that a large number of services remain within a welfare paradigm. Those that have moved to a community business approach include a number of enterpriseing sheltered workshops and the majority of open employment services. However, there remains a significant gap between the traditional and more innovative services. The next decade will see further competition pressures that will challenge all services. Already significant numbers of mainstream vocational placement agencies have not withstood market place pressures and have lost their funding. It is anticipated that employment agencies in the disability field will soon face the same challenges. It is interesting to note that people with disabilities in Australia have the opportunity to access employment services either through specialized services auspicated by the Disability Services Program within the Federal Department of Family and Community Services or through generic labour market programs operated by the Federal Department of Employment, Workplace Relations & Small Business. Another department, the Department of Family & Community Services, through its Centrelink, co-ordinates services, including employment and the disability support pension.

As private, for-profit agencies increasingly become a part of the labour market scene, additional competitive pressures will be placed upon the traditional not-for-profit services. The disability community has resisted suggestions that disability employment programs should become a part of mainstream labour market programs on the basis that they would lose their positive discrimination focus. However, this is an option future administrations may seriously consider.

The Federal Government has commissioned a number of high profile consultancy firms to conduct national enquiries into the disability services; some under the aegis of its Productivity Commission. These include a national survey of consumer satisfaction with disability services programs, the impact of aging on disability employment programs and an enquiry into the “business model” (sheltered workshops). The message is clear, the economic impact of these services is being scrutinized.

Employment programs in this field have faced strong competition in securing jobs in the open market, given the continuing high level of youth unemployment. Australia, together with a number of European countries, has had great difficulty in finding jobs for its youth and this has impacted upon those with a disability [51]. In 1992 youth aged 15 to 24 years experienced an unemployment rate of 41%. In 1999 this had dropped to 15%, which compares to the overall unemployment figure of just over 7% [5]. Many young people with a disability have found jobs that have essentially low level skills with few career opportunities available.

On a more positive note there has been an encouraging trend in the growth of integrated employment over the years 1995–1998. In 1995, 8,924 people with disabilities who were receiving open employment support were in work; 11,284 in 1996 (26.4% increase); 13,906 in 1997 (23.2% increase); and 16,799 in 1998 (20.8% increase). However there has also been a trend for new jobs to be less likely to be on a permanent regular basis and more likely to be on a casual basis [6]. There is also a significant trend towards part-time jobs, a situation reflected in the general employment scene in Australia.

In 1998 people with an intellectual/learning disability constituted the largest group (43%) receiving open employment followed by those with a psychiatric disability (24%) and those with a physical disability (16%). For new entrants to programs in the quarter ending September 1998, the distribution of primary disabilities indicated a larger percentage having psychiatric (27%) or a physical disability (20%) compared to earlier figures. There appeared to be a significant drop in the proportion with an intellectual/learning disability (35%).

Compared to the emphasis that innovative employment services have placed on management practices, relatively little attention has been paid to skills training [29]. Ironically, the demonstration that people with severe disabilities could learn complex vocational skills was one of the catalysts for the development of integrated employment. Sadly, Australia has not continued to build upon this earlier research. The result is that it appears that people with high support needs are being denied the opportunities for integrated employment. Indeed, under the provisions of the CSDA, there would appear to be a deliberate intention on the part of the Federal Government to shift the costs of supporting this population to State Government services that are already stretched to provide post-school day programs. The growth of numbers of people with disabilities in non-work services in Australia resonates with Butterworth’s and Gilmore’s [11] commentary on the USA scene when they question “the clarity of the service sys-
tem’s commitment to employment as a primary goal” (p. 7). One conclusion that may be drawn from these trends is that agencies are screening out consumers who present difficult training challenges [58].

11. Conclusion

It is trite to say that the employment scene for disabled people in Australia is under extreme pressure. As with other social welfare areas, the political agenda is presenting new challenges that will require astute response strategies if we are to maintain a commitment to what many see as a basic human rights issue.

In many ways Australia lost a wonderful opportunity to set in place a much larger national network of vigorous and successfully integrated employment structures and programs. Some might argue this has been achieved. Undoubtedly, there is evidence that since 1986 there has been a steady growth in the numbers of disabled people who enter full-time integrated jobs and are receiving full award pay. But there is evidence, too, that there has not been a diminution of numbers in sheltered employment. There is evidence, too, that the number of disabled people who have no gainful day options is increasing.

As Senator Don Grimes admitted in 1985, mistakes would be made in attempts to move to “new directions” in disability services. As this analysis indicates the problems were complex, but there have been some serious mistakes made. Foremost among these was the Government’s lack of a coherent theory base concerning how reform might be effected. It is salutary to note Elmore’s [27] comments,

The magnitude of the task suggests that we should not expect to see immediate large-scale adoption of promising new practices. It also suggests that progress will come from an explicit acknowledgement that problems of scale are deeply rooted in the incentives and cultural norms of the institutions, and cannot be fixed with simple policy shifts or exhortations from people with money (p. 25).

Or as other specialist policy analysts, Schön and Rein [56], have noted,

We see policy controversies and disputes in which contending parties hold conflicting frames. Such disputes are resistant to resolution by appeal to facts or reasoned argumentation because the parties’ conflicting frames determine what counts as fact and what arguments are taken to be relevant and compelling (p. 23).

It is suggested that successive Australian Government administrations have not effectively analysed and strategically responded to the conflicting frames held by the various players; the consumers, service providers and families.
The intransigence and resistance to change on the part of the sheltered employment industry was not handled effectively. While there has been a promising growth in integrated programs, these too, are beset with potential problems. We still do not have comprehensive benchmarks for what constitutes good practice; we do not have good data on the long-term success of people in integrated settings; and we still have inequities in the levels of support provided, despite the continued promise of an equitable case-based funding arrangement. The future will decide whether there can be a common ground found between the economic rationalist approach and the social justice position, supported by international human rights declarations that all people have an inalienable right to a satisfying and productive vocation.

References

[21] Department of Human Services and Health, New administrative arrangements recognizing the needs and aspirations of people in sheltered workshops for whom open or supported employment is neither a realistic objective or goal, Author, unpublished paper, Canberra, 1994.


[43] Lawrence, C., Quality assurance in the disability sector, News Release CI 362/95 from the Minister of Human Services and Health, 18 October, 1995a.

[44] Lawrence, C., Response to working solution, the final report of the strategic review of the disability services program, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1995b.


[54] Riches, V., Parmenter, T.R. and Robertson, G., Youth with disabilities in transition from school to community, Unit for Community Integration Studies, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1996.


