

DR KAREN HOOPER:

So we'll move on to our fifth presentation for today and I'm joined by Des Ryan, a disability advocate based in Rockhampton. Welcome, Des, good to see you again.

DES RYAN:

Thank you.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

For the benefit of the public record, Des, before you make your comments, would you please just state your name and whether you're representing yourself?

DES RYAN:

Yes, my name is Desmond Ryan and I'm based in Rockhampton, and I represent myself. I come with the baggage of working for Community Solutions, of course, in this employment area, and also being QDN chair at the moment.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thank you, Des, would you like to make your comments?

DES RYAN:

You know, I mean, your report was pretty comprehensive, much more comprehensive than what I've sort of initially expected. But I suppose it comes with the territory. And the points you've made in your report, about 21% (INAUDIBLE) NDIS surveys have reported that their most recent that the NDIS helped them get a job that's right for them. So, the slow rate may partly reflect the low proportion of plans which is in your report, with an employment goal of around 20% increase in the most recent review. And reported they are in paid employment, below the target of NDI of 24%.

They all highlight a few factors that all the people involved in the planning process, in the last few years, have not been able to achieve employments of people with disability. And really, it's just a long history in this area, that it's been pretty flatlining, the participation rate of people with disabilities for years, it's not just a new thing. With all of the social changes that have happened, with the mainstreaming of employment with the fact that people have greater expectations, now people with disabilities that is, and probably higher education outcomes, too. And more services, if I want to get them to this stage because, like, if you look back at my history, I had a spinal injury in 1968. When I was 14.

So I completed a few years of education, going back to school as best I could, with every truant, (INAUDIBLE) Student or being held back write to me in their spare time so that I got through a few subjects or five about five subjects up to grade 12. And that stood me in good stead. But basically, I just went back into a shell of reading, because I was a high level quadriplegic, and I went nowhere, because what was there to do, there was nothing, it's only in the late 80s, really, social changes have started to happening with Bob Hawkeyes and but there a long time and so many important social changes involved in services started to develop, and late in the 80s, we had (INAUDIBLE) One wheelchair ramp for the whole of Rocky. And then two, and then more gradually in the 90s.

And then, the training facilities were becoming about education. I started joining a lot of social groups and build, you know, community employment options and a lot of other community services were developing and I was involved in a lot of them, that volunteer work led to me realising that education is key and because I, the transport factor was there to help me. And then later on, I started to get some service, some care hours, I started to take benefit of that started going back to study. In a few years I was having work.

And it just shows that it doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's without the service, there's no way you can perform and become employed, because you've got so many impediments in the way. And, you know, we've got to start looking because of all these a lot of these roadblocks have been removed and the NDIS is there which is a wonderful support, and it should really be able to address a lot of those, the deficits that occurred in the person's life, Those NDIS planners and the LACs should all be sort of analysed for their performance over time.

And they should be assessed on that. Even if it's not released regularly to the public, but entirely they should be assessed and the poor performing, one should be weeded out. Because it's holding up the whole NDIS- the results. You know, with the design of the whole disability employment scheme, it's focused on competition, which means that employers are secondary, in a lot of ways really the primary focus is on getting and should be on getting the best employee, yet a small market of people in a region like Rockhampton with disabilities is divided among many or the few providers of disability services.

And I just can't understand that why the potential employer wants to employ the greatest employee for himself, and sometimes the employers that they are being recommended to maybe isn't the best. If it's a particular niche, wow, why isn't just one provider in deaf services in the area is available to the whole pool, if they've all got access to the help, that is the benefit of this Regional Advantage Program, which we have funded for a year, which had the potential to choose candidates from any of the providers. It's the only sane solution, unfortunately, it wasn't coming up against human faith. Each of the deaf services are very reluctant to share their employee list.

I mean, if the program existed for a longer period of time, and not in the middle of this pandemic, we would have had better results. The service was able to achieve some great results, even in the middle of a pandemic, we had a trial ready to roll out with a government department and wasn't focused on percentage, it was focused on some targets and that had come off in this region. The potential to roll that out state-wide, would be amazing, across the state. That's just one department.

They add up to 250 jobs with a certain niche factor of skill. That was a discrete set of skills, that would require some training but once that was in hand, people could provide great service that was a reward wage. And we've had other success factors as things going on over time. Getting back to the point that it is excellent. It highlights a lot of depth deficiencies. And then, of course, things that the federal government are not focused on the employers. What I want to see that happen is really focus on the employees we mentioned there that about employment strategy. I hope they implement it as a matter of high importance, because in this region, because we've been able to get some of these employers to help us in some of our lobbying and we have done these events, where we've had a lot of employers along and we've been to university, councils, who are large employers in these small regions.

And they're willing at the moment the university to look at their HR policies, because they have realised that yes, we met with them, they've agreed that their HR policies are holding back their dissipation rights for people with multicultural programs, because they have been aware of some research recently that prove that. So, they're willing to be involved with us. And with the multicultural community and our recent events about people to work together, get another large employer.

So we can use the two HR people together, to look at rationalising or working on their HR policies for both so that they look at targets and look at improving their participation rates. And once we get that, that's not going to happen overnight. But it will make available a major change in this whole region. And if that is successful, that is something that we rolled out across Australia. But what the advantage of getting employees involved is that you get the right people. It opens the door and bring their reputation along and bring their contacts along and when they speak people do listen.

Though, I'm not aware of all the details in the participant because of the deployment strategy with federal government have planned but it sounds to be the answer, for what the future needs. You know, this funding is going to finish reasonably, that the communities lose their benefit of and realise some of the potential of it. And they are going to keep going in some form in this region anyway, at least that I know of. And in the other two, maybe in different focus but at the moment, I'll still be working on it in the longer term. And even if I wasn't working, I'd work on it. I think it's not really hard. And it's, I can see the wings in the future. Just scroll down so I can read, what I'm gonna say.

I have covered a bit in my last few remarks, some of the things that I've said before, but I think anything that motivates and moves employers towards having a critical and informed look in employing people with disability should be supported. We've had some employers come to our events where they had a successful outcome, and they've agreed to talk to us and one of the guys said, I won't say exactly what he said. He apologised for being such a, whatever it was the word he used. Because he had agreed to meet someone, eventually, after telling us that it was too hard, it was too much hard work, too much time, agreed to. It was a girl, kept coming back asking, yeah about giving a person with a disability a go, he finally agreed. I think the lad had turned up 4:45, he had gone there home at 4:15 and forgot.

And running to work at 4:00, 7:00, sorry. And he realised, oh, so he said, he had put him on the kitchen, now he called me the next day and said he is one of the best workers. He's got him trained up in a lot of other areas. And this is like a common thing that comes through some of these employees that we get that they're, that they have a great result, have someone turns up and they are grateful for a job, and then stays in the job longer. So, the fact that group is twofold. One is to get a message out there to other employees, about the benefits. And you know, the benefits are so much. Basically, what it's about is making a profit and, and the other focus of that group is to look at ways of talking to other big companies about starting that process with their HR policies, when they're these much larger companies, so that they give them wider community and guide so that people get a fair go It doesn't matter whether it's a multicultural background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background or those with a disability.

The last part of my talk is about independent assessment. I can tell you that surveys that we've done through QDN and to my knowledge speaking of people with disabilities is independent assessment is viewed with great scepticism. To my knowledge, I could be wrong. It can't be set up, implement the independent assessment, in a not for-profit company. What will this mean? The longer term cost of this project, its efforts to justify its existence, why does it mean for the future? To me, it sounds like the rollout of electrical supply Queensland, the selling off of Telstra, NBN it'd be one of the main outcomes of both costs will go up, that negative factor, the user satisfaction and benefit. And I mean, there's a lot of work going into selling independent assessments. And I'm not closing my mind to it. But I think that's going to be a roadblock in the longer term benefits the community as a whole. Yeah, my summation.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thanks very much, Des, for those insights. And as you know, the analysis in our draft report found that the introduction of the NDIS hasn't seen a noticeable improvement in employment outcomes for people with a disability, either in Queensland or nationally. And you obviously raise the very important role that employers have in the employment of people with a disability, I just wondered what your view, Des, is around whether the scheme is supporting the capacity of people with a disability to take up suitable employment opportunities?

DES RYAN:

Yeah, I mean, to be honest, a lot of services, I come in contact a lot of carers, as you probably realise, because I'm a high level quad. And, for instance, they've told me, the clients, they have want support and they don't want to just go to the library, go to the gardens, go to the shopping centre, looking at other people spending money and have a coffee. Some of them socially they just can't meet with large groups of people. And they have got be into volunteer of work and they are quite well accepting. You know, initially, they're so many things like, oh, I don't know, but anyway, he is there working in sent pictures of Paul, sorting stuff in the backroom and quite happy. They will have him any day of the week.

So, it's just an example of volunteer work isn't even examined in our, when they send those... the census. I think it should be, that's another way to pick it up. Volunteer work leads to work. And it's I don't think I would have been working, I never applied for a job in my life, I've just had work come up out of the blue to me, and I've been very lucky but not everyone can be so lucky, and having all the contacts. And I just think we shouldn't just look for volunteer work. Like one of the things we have this employee group is working on is getting multicultural society to put in some submission for that part time volunteer coordinator, who's got some money to pay for the insurance aspect, just a part time role.

But you know, volunteer work is, I know there is a way this should improve, it's something in the order of 24% higher chance of employment. So, it gives you a great track record, people look on you favourably. They treat you a lot better when you are working as a volunteer, a lot more respect. And look at the Council, I've got a tremendous number of volunteers. They don't always value them that well as they should or treat them on a fair bases.

I think volunteers got a lot of potential too.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Just on the issue of workforce shortages in the disability sector, do you see that there are sufficient opportunities for people with a disability to take up opportunities in the disability sector.

DES RYAN:

I really couldn't say there is stream of roles more carers that is blatantly obvious that, I mean all the services that I know are looking for workers. And there's lots of issues around that, I'm no expert working in that area.

Yeah, there is a lot of unmet needs there. But I don't have all the answers, though.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Just moving off the topic of employment, Would be really interested in your insights into the type of plans that are available within the NDIS and the benefits of self managed plans, versus other forms of plans in terms of giving participants greatest choice and control. So in our draft report, we've encouraged you know, I guess, an in depth look at ways to enable participants to take up self management where that's appropriate. just wondered if you have a reaction to that suggestion in our report?

DES RYAN: Well, I was in Your life- Your choice DES RYAN: Well, I was in Your life- Your choice before I came into self management, and, you know, I slowly didn't even self manage, completely managed by Your life- Your choice at first. And but then I realised I was doing all the work. What am I doing? I'm still sending invoices to people anyway. Or as in a private capacity, what's the difference? And it's not that hard. And I realise you've got to be reliable, you've got to be responsible. You've got to not everyone can look at their own best interest properly and deal with people. Sometimes they don't, they're not the best advocate for themselves. I think the one thing I know is that advocacy is critical. It's a critical factor and it's not valued enough for people with disability across their lifespan, and at times, everyone's going to need some advocacy.

I take the point down, about employing people with disability. That's one thing that comes back to me, you gotta be making a profit. Like when we search, we got the employees involved. we wanted a few role models to have at our little cocktail parties. Example, we come across people that couldn't believe one of these ladies or young girl who had a intellectual disability, I think, and she is working in childcare, and she had a childcare certificate and she was a star. And like, every day, she was like a rock star and she loved those kids and kids love her.

She couldn't go shopping without being swarmed by kids coming up to her, over the lifespan. You know, oh. They are just so many inspiring stories come out of that little search. We were thinking, wow, you know, there's so many good things happening and these employers need the recognition so that like you can't sell Vegemite without talking about Vegemite advertisements all that might be a great product, but it's got... it comes with promotion and we have been lucky with our regional advantage plan, we've got some money for videos, we have produced some great videos, unfortunately, a little bit targeted half and half to people with disability as well as the employer, were really I think it needed to be just only the employer.

And we now got one or two now, which are going to be just the employer talking to an employer, because it is I don't feel it's going to be much benefit talking to the employer and tell him, you're gonna feel better by employing someone. Some employers will, there are lots of social advantages, but really, when you're running a small to medium business, you know, profit is everything, if you're not making a profit doing it, you know, it's hard to go broke making a profit, you know, and if the employee's turning up, the one thing I know about working out my lifespan since starting 1992 is that the people who turn up are the best employees, the people who are there every day. Most people want to do a fair day's job. And you can work with people who turn up, but when people don't turn up, you can't turn it around or change, give them a bit of training and help them to, you know, if they going through a bad period, work with them till they come good.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

So, Des, what do you hear from employers sort of represents the main barriers to employing people with a disability? Is it just a lack of information?

DES RYAN:

I think well as (UNKNOWN) said, you know, too hard, haven't got enough time, you know, is busy. You know, they don't want to look at that. There's too many unknowns in the midst of it, you know, people won't turn up reliably people are afraid of sickness, you know, all but all the (INAUDIBLE) inquiries that are out there, you know. You just got to go searching from the uncommonly available and the stats, that people stay in the job longer. They have no more sick leave than anyone else. They turn up and sometimes they're just not as good as another employee, they are even better.

You know, like, for instance, Kanga beans in Rockhampton contacted me after they had a new employee, they already had employed people because she had a previous experience of working with working for Endeavour. And they are turning over a million items of bottles and the recyclables every month. I think a month or year or a week in Rockhampton. That's nine different regional site that the main thing that means to turn up this great set of skills and an award wage and they know with Endeavour and all the other just because they would be some employees now regionally, they are already some of them working there now. They will take as many as they can get, and over time I keep turning up.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

And from your perspective and what you hear from others that you speak to that have NDIS Plans, are NDIS employment support supporting participants in finding and maintaining employment, or there scenarios for improvement there?

DES RYAN:

Oh, to be honest with my role, I'm not sure I've already commented on that.

My focus is with employers and with, you know, he's been busy, I'm not going to media, I'm involved a lot more in disaster prevention they are and the disability includes a Disaster management proof and all of that, and on the disaster recovery, that thing. So it truncates your exposure to every focus and what other people's benefits the NDIS. And I know it's right for me in that. But then, you know, because you manage your costs and it can be passed down to your private workers and you are not paying at the top level the standard, rate is, then they, re-evaluate your package then.

And then, whether your carers leave, you try to find people market rates and you have to pay for a service your package is getting knocked about tremendously. So you feel as oh, you know, you got to keep fine tuning, just keep in there. Once you find a good LAC, then you just keep going back, follow the rules. You've just got to be reliable and consistent over the long term. If it's there, it is a remarkably flexible thing. And you just gotta keep talking to people that if you make a mistake, which I've done in times, done the wrong thing, go back, rewind it. Let them know, put the money back in and it's alright. You just got to be reliable and consistent throughout the whole period.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

OK, Des, can I sound you out on our recommendation around price deregulation? Do you have any views on that recommendation?

DES RYAN:

Yeah, I think the pricing Commissioner sounds good to me. I think that's a great idea. And, you know, because maybe in different regions, because you could think about Queensland with its regional areas, and rural communities. And, like, I know what, like one of my carers said I will run over 15 minutes. And I said, sorry mate, this isn't our that's not why he said, oh, I'm driving back 40 minutes out of town the real customer, but he's probably not getting paid that much. He is driving 40 minutes on a Friday afternoon, that's a long 40 minutes. But then again, people in Brisbane, do that every day of the week, don't they? I've got a friend who's a travel agent who I spoke to about all the stop lights in town. And as she went through something like 40 stop lights to get to work?

Wow. I used to realise depends where you live in Australia. You know, 40 minutes isn't that much when you compare to certain areas, but there's lot of carers doing work for not much money sometimes and in short periods of employment. And next, and like one week, they've got five hours, the next week, they've got 45 hours. It's people got to pay rent, still rents are high in the region. So there's lots of factors that go into this case and in the workforce. And you think that with this pandemic you'd have plenty of workers, um-mm I don't know. It's about being fully motivated to come to work and they I don't mind taking people shopping, I don't mind taking people to university or still but personal care is for everyone.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Another set of recommendations that we have, Des, is around increasing the supply of information to NDIS participants on price and quality as a way of allowing them to make informed decisions and exercise choice and control. I would really interested in your perspective around how you go about finding the supports for yourself and whether that information, if it was more readily available would actually be a good thing in making the most of your plan?

DES RYAN:

Thing about, you know, you've got a choice. And it's a much better word. But you have choice. The thing about carers, you've got choices about your carers. And they've got choice about who they work for.

If I have got a carer who turned up, they might have political views. they may have lots of different views of things totally different from me. But you know, the worker that turns up, I work with them.

I don't... I rarely... rarely, say nothing, to somebody, it might be once a year, maybe, or once every three years, with lots of carers.

You just work with people you have got, they will do a better job, if you explain to them. Why, and if there's a reason why you're doing it this way. And then if they're not, they're not changing over time, well, that's when it can be a problem. For most people will work your way. If it's sensible and safe for them, you know, you try to provide a safe environment for people. I always feel like my carers, come in, I always say things like, help yourself with a cup of tea and make sure the apron's on because I just feel like, they might have been looking down on me if I wasn't being nice to my carers you know. Anyone come into our house they get treated like, royalty.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

So, Des, so I'm conscious of time. Are there any final remarks or observations you'd like to share with us?

DES RYAN:

No, I just think I'd like to know more about that based employment strategy by the federal government, and I'd love to see what they do about, it's gonna get a lot more critical focus in the future, because obviously, it's critical to the to the NDIS, is it's based on that type of employment rate that will improve over time, unless then the next cost of this whole package. So it's in everyone's benefit, to get employment work. When we first started looking at this employment, (INAUDIBLE) I was actually looking at the volunteer side as well. And a group of employees and consultants, we met with the Archbishop of the Anglican Church.

And it was the other members met with that bishop of the Catholic Church. We talked to them say basic things like, well, you know, the church (INAUDIBLE) The church is, there's a lot of workers that work in the church in different roles. And, you know, you just volunteer to be a volunteer coordinator, there was talk about them, putting some money in for a coordinator that will coordinate that role and volunteer person taking up searching and finding volunteer opportunities for people with disability. So there was a place in Western Australia that have done that over a long time, that I had come across, and they had some success and in success, like that builds more success, doesn't it? When you get a successful employment outcome. Which is basically, employment outcome for an organisation. A lot of places in the world, in Australia, have their roles for volunteers, and it's probably gonna be a big effect in the future with ageing population. And the more you sit around, doing nothing, the more you lose, you lose your skills, your health, everything.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Well, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon. And we appreciate your observations and wish you well, Des.

DES RYAN:

Yes, thank you, Karen.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thank you. Bye.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Bye bye.

So, we might just have a short break and I will invite our next presenter Ian Montague, from National Disability Services to join us shortly, thank you.