

Friday, 10 August 2018

Sandra McPhee AM,  
Chair  
Employment Service Expert Advisory Panel,  
c/o [ExpertAdvisoryPanel2020@jobs.gov.au](mailto:ExpertAdvisoryPanel2020@jobs.gov.au)

Dear Sandra

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important national conversation about how we can help more Australians into work. It is encouraging to see that the Government recognises the importance of putting the user at the centre of a future model, and the need for targeted local responses rather than a one size fits all approach.

As you would be aware the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) have been funded to scope options and develop a proposal that looks at alternative approaches to job-active in a possible Tasmanian trial. The substance of our contribution to this review process will be in that document, however, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight a few key points in this response to your discussion paper: 'The next generation of employment services'. These comments reflect what TasCOSS raised at the Roundtable with the Expert Advisory Panel in Hobart on 18 June 2018. Our focus here is on addressing the barriers, local approaches, and quality services.

### **Addressing barriers**

TasCOSS's mission is to challenge and change the systems, behaviours and attitudes that create poverty, inequality and exclusion. We believe there is an opportunity in the re-design of employment services in Tasmania to create a system that supports job seekers to become confident participants in our society and economy

To achieve this outcome we need to address the barriers in our systems that contribute to disadvantage. In Tasmania there are currently 4900 people who are long term unemployed, and this is the highest rate as a percentage of the labour force of all jurisdictions (1.9%).

There are many systems barriers, outside the control of individuals, which contribute to long term unemployment. These include a poor performing regional economy and lack of jobs, as well as lack of access to transport, childcare, and other important services to support a range of needs including health, mental illness, alcohol and drug addiction, and literacy support.

A significant personal barrier in Tasmania is an individual's lack of networks. Employers are more likely to recruit through 'word of mouth' rather than advertising and this disadvantages job seekers with smaller networks.

There are also cultural barriers that impact on the wellbeing of those experiencing long term unemployment, including prejudice, stigma and exclusion. While it is difficult to quantify the impact, job seekers have talked about the shame, humiliation and powerlessness they experience being part of the employment services system.

It is vital that a future employment services model understands the complexity of disadvantage and has the capacity to address the systems, personal and cultural barriers faced by long term unemployed people.

We believe this can be achieved at a community level through local governance that are linked to place-based models. It can also be achieved at an individual level through quality service provision.

### **Local approaches**

Tasmania is a regional economy with distinct labour markets in the Hobart, south-east, north, west and north-west. The state's job seekers and employers would be much better served by an employment services model that is tailored to their unique circumstances, rather than a national one-size-fits-all approach.

For a place-based model to be successful it would need to view employment services within a broader community and local economic context. It would be important to hold not just employment, industry and demographic data for the region but also to map the existing community capital. By identifying what supports are available for job seekers and where there are gaps we come up with community or region-wide solutions. For example, in one region we may find an inadequate number of literacy programs is creating a barrier for job seekers, and can make a decision to target funding towards lifting access in that area.

The regional, systemic approach would be best served by strong local governance. Bringing stakeholders together in a decision-making capacity would strengthen the relationships and apply collective power to addressing local unemployment issues. In any local governance approach there needs to be an acknowledgement that not all communities are ready to take on the responsibility that is required. There may need to be investment in skills around collaboration and building strategic relationships.

The youth-focused mental health service, Headspace, is a good example of successful local governance. Communities with the most need for this type of service were identified and a call made for a consortium to form. Together government, non-government organisations, parents and young people mapped out what they wanted the service to look like. Now the consortium has become the board.

Collaborative models such as Headspace help to build collective capabilities in communities and this has broader benefits. We believe that job seekers and employers are better served by collaborative, community or region-wide approaches than by competitive approaches. It would be our preference to see a range of small, local, not-for-profit organisations provide highly targeted, community level services.

### **Quality services**

We welcome the proposal in the discussion paper to separate the compliance function from the employment support function in jobactives. We also welcome the creation of specialist 'enhanced services consultants' to help job seekers overcome complex barriers to employment.

It is important job seekers with complex needs can share their story in confidence to a skilled consultant. We believe face-to-face interaction is vital in this first assessment and cannot be replaced by online assessments. We accept that online technology will be valuable for more confident job seekers but would argue strongly for the initial assessment to be human interaction.

Employment services consultants currently have two bosses and neither of them are the job seekers or employers. They are compelled to prioritise meeting the process requirements of the government and their employer over the needs of their clients. While the separation of the compliance function will go some way to addressing this, if the model is to be truly user-centred, staff would need to be encouraged to prioritise seeking quality outcomes for their clients.

Empowering job seekers to take charge of their own plans and set their own goals is a key part of a future model. This approach is proving to be successful in Transition to Work. Ensuring that job seekers with complex needs are ready to work, by having the appropriate supports around them, will minimise the recruitment risks for employers.

The future employment model needs to be founded on the truth that most Australians want to work. Significant time and money is spent on a system founded on the opposite assumption, around a perception that a majority of people will not 'do the right thing'. Instead, the new system could work on the assumption that people will do the right thing, that they are out of work simply because there aren't enough jobs, and that with some support they will become fully contributing members of our society and economy. Job seekers should gain confidence as a result of their participation in the employment services system, not lose confidence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kym Goodes', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Kym Goodes

CEO, TasCOSS