

# Choices and Connections

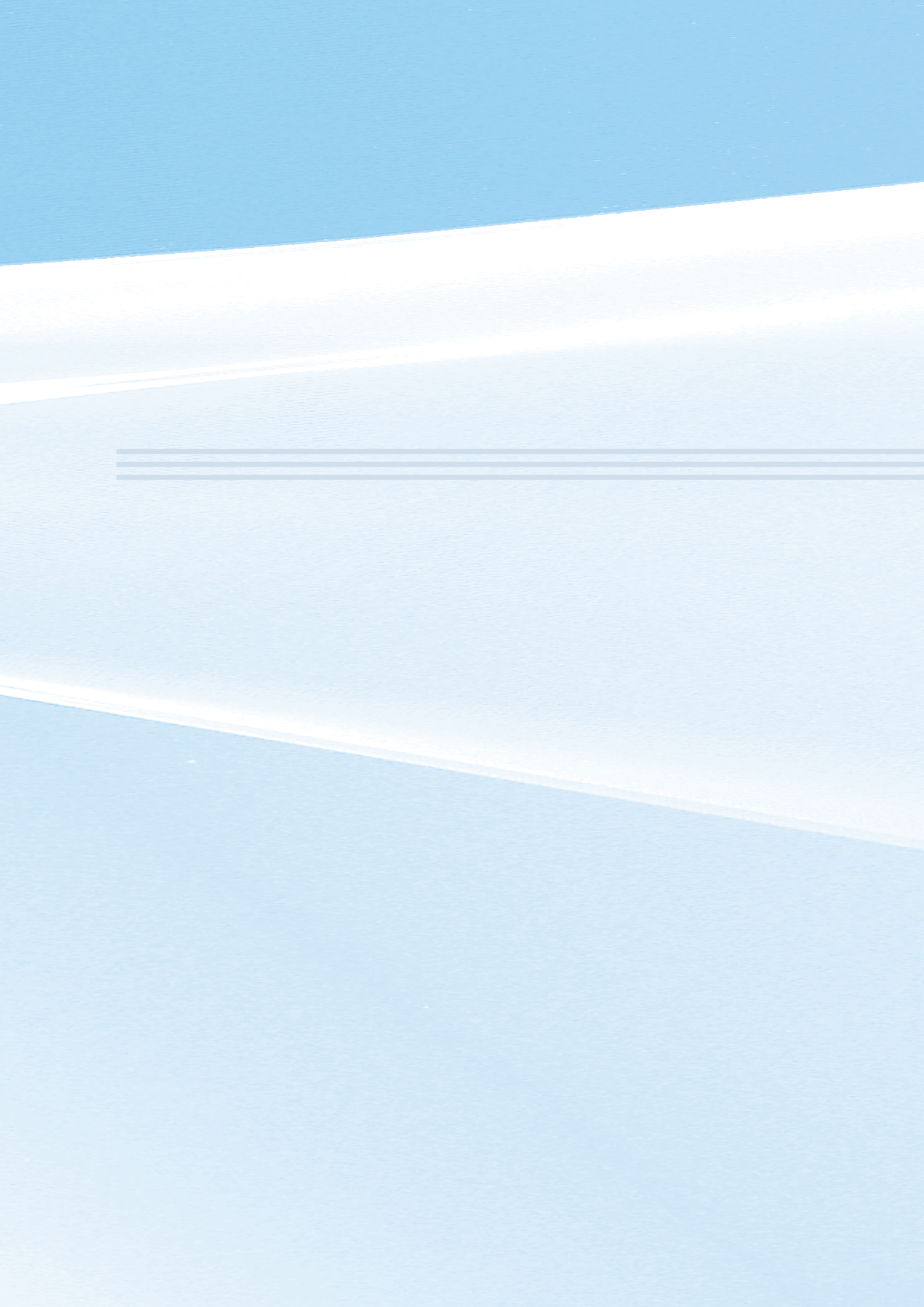
The Better Pathways Service Approach for  
Young People with Disabilities



SOCIAL INCLUSION BOARD JUNE 2009



Government  
of South Australia



## Acknowledgements

The Social Inclusion Board would like to acknowledge the contribution of all those involved in the consultations, with particular thanks to the young people and their families for sharing their personal stories.

## Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult Community Education
ADE	Australian Disability Enterprises
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CARA	Community Accommodation and Respite Agency
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
D-START	Disability Support, Training and Resource Tool
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and associated providers
DEN	Disability Employment Network
DFC	Department for Families and Communities including the service unit – Disability SA
DFEEST	Department for Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
DH	Department of Health
DHS	Department of Human Services
DSP	Disability Support Pension
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FLO	Flexible Learning Option
ICANs	Innovative Community Action Networks
I&CES	Independent Schools and Catholic Education sectors
ISC	Industry Skills Council
JCA	Job Services Australia
LRC	Learning Resource Centre
NCVER	National Centre on Vocational Education Research
NDSA	National Disability Services Agreement
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RTO	Registered Training Organisations
SSO	Student Services Officer
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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## A message from Mike Rann

The State Government is committed to ensuring that young South Australians with disabilities receive opportunities to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

That is why I asked our Social Inclusion Board to examine how these young people are faring under the current system, and how successful they are in making the transition when they leave school.

I also asked the Board to look at the employment and social opportunities available for these young people, and to work out how the Government can help them to reach their full potential - an aspiration that we all share.

Following 10 months of consultation with more than 750 young people and their families, peak bodies, advocates and agencies, the Board found that while the current system is working for many, for some it is not.

Around 1520 South Australians aged from 20-24 live on a Disability Support Pension, but are not connected to any developmental activity.

This represents a significant number of young people who are not reaching their full potential, nor taking a full and active role in our society.

The Board identified a number of key transition points, such as when young people move from primary to secondary school, and from children's services to adult services.

These life changes can create heightened anxiety among young people with disabilities, and can result in them missing out on opportunities and services.

The Board also found a number of young people who have indicators of diagnosable disability are currently going undetected in the school system.

We want to ensure young people with disabilities are diagnosed and supported in a timely manner, and that those opportunities continue once they have left school.

We need to bridge the gaps between services and the agencies that provide them, in order to give young people with disabilities a brighter future.

We want very much for our service approach to be pro-active rather than reactive in dealing with these aspiring and valuable young members of our community.

Led by Monsignor Cappelletti, the Social Inclusion Board has looked closely at the information that this study has gathered in order to identify those in need of help, the most appropriate type of help they require, and how it can best be delivered.

The result of this research is Choices and Connections – The Better Pathways Service Approach for Young People with Disabilities.

Its 19 recommendations provide a blueprint for a comprehensive, joint approach that enables greater participation.

Our responsibility is to take a new approach that supports these young people in their development, and provides them with the skills to participate in specialist or open employment, where possible.

It is about capacity building for everyone, and I thank Monsignor Cappelletti and the Social Inclusion Board for their work on this important reference.



**Mike Rann**

Premier of South Australia  
Minister for Social Inclusion

## Foreword from the Commissioner and Chair of the Board, Monsignor David Cappo

Disability often leads to social disadvantage, isolation and un-met needs for young people who don't quite fit within the current system of service delivery and, as a consequence, fall through the gaps.

This Report from the Social Inclusion Board shows that with the right support at the right time, there is no reason why every young person with a disability cannot live a dignified, fulfilling life and, where possible, participate in and contribute to our society – a desire constantly expressed during our research.

After months of listening to young people with a disability, their families and carers, it is clear that no matter what their circumstances, they want opportunities to develop skills and aspire to a level of physical and financial independence. These needs are un-met for many, and the purpose of this initiative is to find an approach that would work to meet those needs and to capture the young people that we know are falling through the gaps.

In particular, Aboriginal people, young people who leave school early, those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or live in a regional area, are at greatest risk of not reaching their full potential.

We found that disability type also impacted on the opportunities available to young people, with those suffering psychiatric illness and chronic health conditions unlikely to have access to any disability services. The large number of young people suffering from these types of disability presents a policy challenge for government.

There is also the challenge of bringing together agencies at every level of government to implement a person-centred approach that aims to capture every young person with a disability identified as “at risk” of not successfully moving from school to an activity they can realistically expect to pursue.

Significant investment from the Australian Government and industry is needed to ensure not just the support of young people with a disability during school and tertiary study, but the opportunity to put the skills they acquire to use.

These are the challenges we have to face if we are to improve the lives of young people with a disability and their families and carers who also bear the emotional, social and financial cost of system shortcomings.

I want to thank the young people who shared their stories with us providing valuable insight to the issues they and, their families and carers face. I also thank the non-government organisations and government agencies and their staff who have worked at the coalface in disability and allowed site visits and interviews, as

well as everyone who provided submissions in response to the discussion paper or participated in surveys. Without this involvement, the Board could not have identified what needs to be done.

The solutions provided in the Better Pathways approach aim to assess at a young age a person's capacity to learn, and take them – holding their hand when necessary – down a pathway that will maximise their chance at engaging with the community. That process needs to start at the transition from primary to secondary school, and needs to consider the future from the young person's perspective.

Better Pathways provides for pro-active, individualised and flexible supports – not just for those young people with a disability who may eventually be able to work, but also for those unlikely to ever work, but who are entitled to be the best they can be and to take their place in society as best they can.

With this objective in mind, I submit the Report Choices and Connections: The Better Pathways Service Approach for Young People with Disabilities to the Government of South Australia for consideration.



**Monsignor David Cappo AO**

Commissioner for Social Inclusion  
Chair, Social Inclusion Board

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## Executive Summary

The South Australian Premier, The Hon. Mike Rann, sought advice from the Social Inclusion Board on new and effective ways to support young people with a disability to transition to the post-school environment.

The Social Inclusion Board has scoped the issues relating to the successful transition of young people with disabilities to the post-school environment. It has actively listened to what young people with a disability and their families have had to say about their experiences in working through key transition milestones. The key transition points, of moving from primary school to high school, moving from children's services to adult services, and ultimately working through the options that might be available to them after school, are the cause of great anxiety to them all.

The Board has analysed all of the relevant data to quantify the client group and reviewed the current service systems and client pathways. The Board has identified the young people with a disability that are 'at risk' of not making a transition from school to activities that would maximise their social and employability potential.

The Board has published its findings under separate cover, *Post-school Pathways – how 'it is' and how 'it works' for young people with disabilities*.

In summary, it is clear that:

- the current service approaches are not appropriate or relevant to young Aboriginal people;
- once 'in the system', young people with a disability tended to fare better than young people who disengaged without finishing school or those whose development potential didn't strictly 'fit'; and
- links to developmental, social and community-based activities for young people with special needs (e.g. ongoing health needs, behavioural challenges, episodic exceptional needs) are not formal or predictable and there are few programs available to cater to their needs. This represents a significant service gap in the current system.

The Board has concluded that the young people with a disability who are most 'at risk' of not making a transition from school to activities are those who don't 'fit' anywhere in the current system who are:

- likely to be early school leavers, estimated to be 350 each year;
- studying although not able to move onto employment, estimated to be 250 each year;
- unemployed, temporarily ill or injured and not engaged in learning or employment, estimated to be 550 each year, with an estimated 1,960 young people aged 20 to 24 in this situation today;



- receiving a Disability Support Pension but not connected to any developmental activity, estimated to be 1,520 aged 20 to 24 years in this situation today; and
- receiving the Newstart allowance and have done so for a considerable time, estimated to be 2,819 aged 20 to 24 years.

The risk increases if they are a young Aboriginal person, a young person who has been or is currently under the Guardianship of the Minister, if they come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD), or if they live in a regional area with limited opportunities or service options.

The Board was alerted to the early intervention and assessment programs at primary school level, the innovative State School to Work Transition Program, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) to Work Program and the commitment and successes of Disability Employment Networks (DENs), all currently impacted by limited resources or 'capping'. These successful programs are currently under funding consideration or reform focused on demand and should be viewed as exemplars of philosophy and practice that should be more widely available in the school and post-school environments.

The Board identified weaknesses in the service system as follows:

- there is no systematic **re-assessment process** in Year 9 of secondary school to commence a formal engagement with adult services to assist with the development of, and action to, support the young person as they transition to post-school pathways;
- there are unacceptable numbers of young people with a disability leaving **school** by age 16 with reliance on time-limited specially funded programs to tackle school retention for this group;
- there is no 'safety net' for young people disengaging from State services who are eligible for national education, training, employment and support programs;
- there are limited **Day Options** opportunities that do not currently place an emphasis on development that will lead to vocational outcomes;
- there is very little evidence, if any, of people successfully transitioning into **open employment** from Day Options or from Disability Enterprises despite funded transitioning incentives;
- there is too narrow a scope of work roles undertaken in **specialist disability employment within Australian Disability Enterprises** and the duality of focus in maintaining commercial viability constrains the way services are run;
- there is a disproportionate number of young people with a disability who are not completing higher-level qualifications in **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**; and
- there is a lack of assistive technologies, universal design, flexible assessments and e-learning technologies in **tertiary study** and **workplace** settings.

Community development strategies and service innovations that are designed to strengthen community learning programs have worked well for some young people with a disability. There is uncertainty however about the sustainability of funding for such programs and, despite their success, there are limited places available for young people with a disability.

This report, *Choices and Connections*, is the culmination of the Board's work focusing on what needs to happen to improve the chances of young people with a disability participating socially and economically into the future.

The Board has considered the impact of the current financial economic crisis on the scope for change in the post-school environment. The Board believes that, even given current economic circumstances, it is timely for a vision to be articulated and promoted that will ensure young people with disabilities are not further disadvantaged or channelled into narrow pre-determined futures. It is still possible to ensure a 'joined-up' service approach that transcends the State-funded service system. The aim is to instigate systems change today that will ultimately prepare and build the capacity of young people with disabilities so that they are well positioned to take up jobs as and when the economic climate improves.

The Board has developed a new service approach entitled *Better Pathways* that it believes should be implemented for every young person identified as being 'at risk'. The approach is aimed at early assessment of the young person's capacity to learn so that an individual plan can be developed that will lead them down realistic post-school pathways. It provides them with 'someone' who can support them in achieving their plan and navigating the post-school environment. It mandates service collaboration between schools, disability and health services, and further education and training agencies with extra effort and longer lead times being granted to young people with special needs. The new approach will bring service providers together to:

- assist young people with disabilities to develop realistic plans for their life after school (incorporating assessments of their capacity to learn);
- bridge service supports between agencies and sectors;
- fill service gaps;
- identify and resolve key transition issues around individuals; and
- connect them to the appropriate aspirational pathways.

The 'coming together' of client management into a single pathway for young people with disabilities that anticipates their holistic support needs is crucial. Commencing this approach at the point of transition to secondary school is suggested as the best means to ensure adequate pre-planning occurs for each young person with a disability. The pre-planning also needs to pre-empt a relationship with key programs funded by the Australian Government.

Assessment processes need to be expanded to explore the pathways that are appropriate to the young person beyond school that align to their job capabilities. Adult Service Coordinators need to be linked in at this crucial stage rather than delaying their involvement when entry to the post-school environment is imminent. It is at this point that the key services in a young person's life need to converge for those most 'at risk', whether their responsibility is linked to school or beyond school. A sense of priority needs to prevail to ensure that appropriate effort is made to assist this group of young people to plan a future that is realistic for them as early as possible.

This approach requires the people who offer services to young people with disabilities to view their services from the young person's perspective. Service staff will need to see the young person for what they can do in the future and to inspire each and every one as to what they could become. The approach will build individualised and flexible supports around them and ensure their education or workplace settings of choice are adequately supported to sustain their participation. It needs to recognise when young people are in crisis and provide timely crisis respite and support to enable them to get 'back on track'. It will forge investment in developmental services to address the needs of young people who are unlikely to work in the short-term or long-term. It will trial a renewed assessment approach to identify the 'at risk' cohort that has gone undetected but who have borderline indicators of disability and will trial the consumer-directed funding package initiative.

At the system level, service collaboration needs to occur across and between agencies at all levels of Government. The Australian Government Departments of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Department of Human Services - Centrelink and Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), need to be engaged to capitalise on the Australian Government's relationships with tertiary and vocational education and training providers, employers, enterprises and industry. The aim is to foster inclusion of young people with a disability in all of these settings by developing pre-emptive relationships that will provide an avenue towards key training and employment programs funded by these agencies. State Government agencies need to work with these agencies to ensure local initiatives are relevant and effective.

More specifically, the Board is mindful of the demand driven focus of the Australian Employment Services reforms and the State's evolving investment in the School to Work program. The Board views them as tangible steps forward that will benefit young people with a disability in the future. The Board believes however that further work is still needed to broaden the scope of the service system in enabling young people with a disability to achieve even more diverse and higher aspirations than the majority do today. The Board is suggesting an expansion of the specialist disability employment work roles provided by Australian Disability Enterprises that align to the job roles and skill sets being sought by industry. It prescribes the achievement of vocational outcomes by individuals participating in these programs. It seeks further investment in effective service innovations and

infrastructure. It aims to instigate dialogue with the Industry Skills Councils and the South Australian Industry Skills Board to explore realistic work roles that could be undertaken by young people with disabilities. It seeks commitment from employers to honour their corporate social responsibility by setting targets for diversity in the workforce. Employers are encouraged to include people with disabilities, not in the context of a welfare approach, but rather an approach that is based on the valuable economic contribution that they can and do make.

The Board has made an overarching recommendation to implement the *Better Pathways* approach in South Australia along with supporting recommendations relating to the system levels. The service collaborators nominated have all given their commitment and support to the Board's belief that setting the vision now will lead to a re-orientation of service systems to build the capacity of young people with a disability, giving them every opportunity to participate as and when the opportunities present.

No matter what pathway a young person with a disability chooses, the focus in the future will be on working with them early to build their capabilities, increase choices and maintain connections that could ultimately lead them through one or many pathways in life. The *Better Pathways* approach is designed to give every young person with a disability a chance at securing good vocational and developmental outcomes through conscious service collaboration effort, commitment and accountability.

## **The Board's recommendations are:**

### **Recommendation 1**

That the *Better Pathways* approach be endorsed and implemented in South Australia for all young people with disabilities identified as 'at risk' of not making a successful transition from school.

### **Recommendation 2**

That the Disability Support Training and Resource Tool (D-START) field-testing currently underway in DFC be adapted to include young people with disabilities in Year 9 to ensure it can add value to the assessment of an individual's employability skills as well as their learning potential.

### **Recommendation 3**

That the *Better Pathways* approach to transition planning is consistently integrated into the joined-up approach between State and Australian Government funded services to ensure young people with disabilities no longer 'miss out' due to their special needs.

### **Recommendation 4**

That the Australian and State Governments stipulate that all funded NGOs collaborate in the spirit of the *Better Pathways* approach for all young people with disabilities that are considered to be 'at risk' of not securing or sustaining good outcomes in the post-school environment.

### **Recommendation 5**

That the *Better Pathways* approach be implemented with a particular focus on Aboriginal young people with a disability.

### **Recommendation 6**

That the Australian Government commits to extend the *Better Pathways* approach over time to young people aged 15 to 24 years who:

- are currently not engaged in learning or employment; or
- have been in receipt of the Newstart Allowance for a considerable time.

### **Recommendation 7**

That the aspiration of the *Better Pathways* approach focuses on development and progression.

### **Recommendation 8**

That multi-disciplinary developmental alternatives be developed to meet the particular needs of some young people and, in particular, those who are unlikely to be able to work.



### **Recommendation 9**

That greater effort is given to provide government public sector employment opportunities to young people with disabilities.

### **Recommendation 10**

That strategies be developed to foster the 'motivational' capacity of all workers in the State and national education, disability, training and employment sectors that come into contact with young people with disabilities, to reinforce a belief that they can achieve and enjoy social and economic participation.

### **Recommendation 11**

That the State and Australian Government jointly devise and implement strategies to maximise the opportunity for young people with disabilities to be positioned for employment in industries demanding labour and skills.

### **Recommendation 12**

That proven and effective retention and transition service innovations for young people with disabilities be expanded to allow flexible modes of learning whilst taking into account young people's differing needs, diversity of cultures, families and the opportunities that exist regionally.

### **Recommendation 13**

That strategies be developed and implemented to build the capacity of families, friends and Pathways Coordinators to act as 'champions' for young people with a disability.

### **Recommendation 14**

That priority and culturally appropriate indigenous responses and advice be provided to Pathways Coordinators, education providers and employers that concern entry to, participation in, or sustaining connections with education or work place settings.

### **Recommendation 15**

That the Australian Government re-orient its policy to further empower young people with a disability in the post-school environment.

### **Recommendation 16**

That local strategies be developed that align to the Bridging Pathways (revised blueprint) and the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

### **Recommendation 17**

That the Australian Qualifications Training Framework and the Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework registration and accreditation processes be used to monitor the accessibility and completion rates of young people with disabilities in education (VET and Tertiary) and training.

### **Recommendation 18**

That the State and Australian Government collaborate in the development of a Performance Reporting and Evaluation Framework that profiles the outcomes achieved for young people with disabilities.

### **Recommendation 19**

That the State and Australian Government commission research into the actual movement between Day Options, Specialist Disability Employment Programs and Open Employment.

*Throughout this report the term:*

*'Aboriginal' is used to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia*

*'Vocational' outcomes or plans relate broadly to employment or education/training that could lead to employment, community service (ie volunteering), etc. – it is not limited to the Vocational Education and Training pathway in the context of DFEEST and DEEWR language*

*The Executive Summary is available in accessible formats on the social inclusion website - <http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov.au/page.php?id=27>*

*If problems arise in accessing the document please contact the Social Inclusion Unit by phone (08) 8226 2456.*

## 1. Introduction

The South Australian Premier, The Hon. Mike Rann, sought advice from the Social Inclusion Board on new and effective ways to support young people with a disability to transition to the post-school environment.

The Social Inclusion Board has scoped the issues relating to the successful transition of young people with disabilities to the post-school environment. It has actively listened to what young people with a disability and their families have had to say about their experiences in working through key transition milestones.

The Board has analysed all of the relevant data to quantify the client group and reviewed the current service systems and client pathways. The Board has identified the young people with a disability that are 'at risk' of not making a transition from school to activities that would maximise their social and employability potential. Many of them that don't 'fit' anywhere in the current system are:

- likely to be early school leavers, estimated to be 350 each year;
- studying although not able to move onto employment, estimated to be 250 each year;
- unemployed, temporarily ill or injured and not engaged in learning or employment, estimated to be 550 each year, with an estimated 1,960 young people aged 20 to 24 in this situation today;
- receiving a Disability Support Pension but not connected to any developmental activity, estimated to be 1,520 aged 20 to 24 years in this situation today; and
- receiving the Newstart allowance and have done so for a considerable time, estimated to be 2,819 aged 20 to 24 years.

The Board has published its findings under separate cover, *Post-school Pathways – how 'it is' and how 'it works' for young people with disabilities*.

The Board has considered the impact of the current financial economic crisis on the scope for change in the post-school environment. The Board believes that, even given current economic circumstances, it is timely for a vision to be articulated and promoted that will ensure young people with disabilities are not further disadvantaged. It is still possible to ensure a 'joined-up' service approach that transcends the State-funded service system. The aim is to instigate systems change today that will ultimately prepare and build the capacity of young people with disabilities so that they are well positioned to take up jobs as and when the economic climate improves.

Despite the current service system, and individualised client management approaches within each of the relevant service organisations, the Social Inclusion Board concluded that the key service streams are not 'as one' in assisting young people with disabilities. This impedes the opportunities to maximise their potential and to link them to an appropriate

post-school pathway. A number of young people with disabilities are not able to fully participate socially or economically because the service system is not united in maximising the outcomes for each and every one of them.

A joined-up approach is required, with professionals working 'as one' and bridging the client management approaches across organisational boundaries.

The Board recommends a new approach to the case management of young people with a disability aged 15 to 24 years who are 'at risk'. This Social Inclusion approach is designed to ensure they aspire to viable pathways, that they remain connected to services, and that they are actively engaged in developmental activities or employment. The Board also is highlighting several key areas for service improvement that are incidental to the client pathway(s).

The Board also recommends the adoption of a collaborative service commitment at the State and National levels that demonstrates shared accountability in achieving good vocational and developmental outcomes for young people with disabilities. The development of pre-emptive relationships between young people with a disability and key post-school training and employment programs funded by the Australian Government, will serve as a 'safety net' so that young people do not become 'lost' to the service system because they have left school early or perceive they have 'nowhere to go'.

This report focuses on the way forward and what needs to happen to better support young people with a disability to transition to the post-school environment.

## 2. Assessment – New Developments

### 2.1 Support Training and Resource Tool (START)

It is important to rethink the way we assess people's capacity to learn and participate. The Board learnt of the Disability Support, Training and Resources Tool (D-START) assessment methodology that is currently being field tested with adult clients presenting to the Department for Families and Communities' (DFC) service unit Disability SA. The model, developed by the University of Adelaide, has several scales but those of particular interest in assessing the development needs of young people with a disability are as follows:

- Learning Style and Motivation Support;
- Behaviour;
- Support for Daily Living Skills; and
- Influential Factors - Personal and Environmental

These elements also incorporate development of an Individual Training Plan informed by the assessment of an individual's learning style and what motivates him or her to learn. The tool identifies people with the potential to increase independence and community participation.

D-START represents a holistic approach in considering a person's needs but with the added dimension of how they can progress and learn. The above named elements have been adapted and badged as a Support Training and Resource Tool (START) for the purpose of testing it with young people in Year 9 at a range of State and Independent Schools. The testing is being progressed in 2008/9. The testing will confirm whether the tool can identify young people with a disability (diagnosed and/or borderline indicators for diagnosis) who require on-going support and whether it can add value to the assessment of an individual's learning potential, thereby informing development and career plans.

The University of Adelaide researchers, Dr. Neil Kirby and Ms Roma Guscia, will be providing a final report on the outcomes of the testing with the Year 9 students to the Social Inclusion Board in due course. Full validation of the tool will be subject to a re-assessment of young people included in the first round of field testing when they are in Year 11.

### 2.2 Job Capacity Assessment (JCA)

The Job Capacity Assessment Program is administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS). The program provides a comprehensive work capacity assessment, combining referral to employment and related support services (such as literacy and numeracy training), with assessment of work capacity for income support purposes (i.e. Disability Support Pension, partial capacity to work and exemptions from activity-testing due to medical conditions lasting more than 13 weeks).



A number of young people with disabilities who drop out of school early, become 'lost' to the parts of the service system that would normally link them to this type of program.

People are referred to the program if:

- they are applying for the Disability Support Pension or undergoing a medical review of Disability Support Pension;
- they are on Newstart or Youth Allowance and applying for an activity test exemption of more than 13 weeks due to illness;
- they register directly with an employment service provider;
- they inform Centrelink or their employment service provider of a medical condition or disability that affects their work capacity and/or employment service needs;
- they have a significant change of circumstances, such as new medical evidence;
- the Jobseeker Classification Instrument administered by Centrelink shows that they have significant barriers to work; and/or
- DEEWR policy and program settings determine referrals and eligibility criteria for income support, activity test exemptions and referral to DEEWR funded employment services (*currently 83.1% of people who have a JCA are referred to a DEEWR employment service*).

The Board has identified that young people who drop out of school early do not have the knowledge or the means to gain access to this program.

The reality is that the post-school environment is complex and multi-faceted. It comprises a range of agencies that rely on people seeking them out and coming to them. For the young people that are the subject of this reference, it is crucial that they are afforded pre-emptive support networks, particularly between State and national service agencies. In acknowledging that young people with disabilities have special needs, specialised approaches need to be taken to ensure ongoing support from the service system, regardless of whether it comes directly from the State Government or the Australian Government's areas of responsibility.

A number of young people miss out altogether or, if they do become engaged in one program, tend to 'drop out' of the service system when the program finishes. There is no monitoring and tracking of young people in the transition beyond school, especially between individual structured employment or training programs. Access to mainstream structured employment programs is not yet routine for young people with a disability.

A 'safety net' needs to be engineered for young people to ensure a pre-emptive relationship with key programs funded by the Australian Government. The relationship needs to be initiated whilst the young person is at school so that if they leave school early, they already have a connection with the post-school sector that they can call on that will help them access the next appropriate pathway open to them post-school. The State

School to Work Transition Program is a link with the post-school sector for 100 young people in their last year of school. The merits of this program should be considered not only in terms of greater access by more young people with a disability, but also in affording access earlier in secondary school life.

The Job Capacity Assessment appears to be a vehicle that could establish an assured connection. Access to this assessment (or a variation thereof) at Year 9 by students with a disability who are 'at risk' of not successfully transitioning post-school will provide the young people and their parents/ carers with a legitimate pathway into post-school programs funded by the Australian Government should they need to enter them sooner rather than later.

## 2.3 Linked pre-emptive transition programs

The State School to Work Transition Program is a collaboration led by Personnel Employment involving the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), Public, Independent and Catholic schools and Federal, State and local governments.

By engaging young people with disabilities before they leave school, providing them with a vision to move into open employment or further education and the training they need to achieve this, the transition is much smoother and more successful. An expanded State School to Work Transition Program would enable an aspirational approach for young people with a disability to ensure they can each try open employment as a first experience rather than institutional, congregate care options such as Day Options and Disability Enterprises.

Within the first year of completing the Disability Transition Program, 50 per cent of students find employment and 30 per cent go on to further study.

Those who enter the workforce find positions in diverse fields including retail, hospitality, administration, construction, horticulture, manufacturing and local, state and federal governments.

Other programs of this type have been funded through the generosity of Phoenix Society Inc. and Bedford Industries wherein a high proportion of students continue with employment at the agencies and several have transcended to open employment.

The Board considers these initiatives exemplars of emerging practice that have been developed through persistent negotiation with Government to 'stretch the boundaries' and to provide services differently. Rather than continuing as pilots or relying on agency fundraising these initiatives need to be funded within the mainstream service system.

## 3. Strengthening the service system

### 3.1 Innovative trials involving young people with a disability

The Social Inclusion Board is increasingly of the view that direct funding of organisations over an individualised approach is no longer valid and does not fit with the international and national innovations identified by the Board. Consumer-directed funding models can provide opportunities for people to purchase services that directly meet their social, developmental, and vocational needs. This approach would ensure that funds are utilised to target young people in the process of transition, as there are fluctuations in the number of young people exiting school in any one year.

The Board is recommending a more people-centred system, as it has with all of its references. A trial of consumer-directed funding packages involving young people with a disability would be timely, as this would allow young people, their families or nominated advocates to purchase services that relate to their goals and circumstances.

### 3.2 Empowering Support

Clearly, there is also a significant need to improve support and information overall for young people with disabilities and their parents, but especially information on transition services and post-school pathway opportunities. Ready access to clear, comprehensive and current information will support some parents in their role as advocate. Where parents do not have the confidence or capacity to support young people in their career planning or transition, 'someone' should be made available to undertake this vital role.

### 3.3 Schools

The school environments need to be improved to consistently reflect:

- adequate teacher expertise to address young people's learning styles, understand the young person's community and personal support networks, their disability characteristics and the impact of their cultural background on their relationship with learning;
- student and parent/carer authorisation for staff to speak with particular agencies in the course of transition planning;
- access to disability and health expertise and post-school advice to inform young people's Learning Plans (or similar negotiated curriculum plans) in order to align on-the-ground supports with learning goals;
- supports applied to individuals, not systems, to allow for flexible learning options; and
- zero tolerance to bullying and harassment with effective mechanisms to address incidents when and where they occur.

## 3.4 Day Options and Specialist Disability Employment Programs

Many young people with a disability can achieve at a much higher level than is anticipated from their schooling experiences. The assumption should be that the young person will transition to open employment, and program design and delivery at school should be based upon this assumption.

For some young people who require a staged or structured development pathway, or those who are unlikely to work, viable developmental activities need to be made available. These programs still need to inspire the individual to progress and possibly achieve beyond their own expectations. Some young people who require longer lead times to develop 'employability', occupational and technical skills, do generally qualify for Day Options or Disability Employment Programs provided by Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE). In some cases, both these service types are provided by the same organisations with the emphasis on funding and program management not aspirational pathways. These options should be promoted as steps towards helping each individual to meet their potential which, for a number, could result in long-term vocational outcomes. Day Options placements should be flexible for the 15 to 24 year old age group, based on the assumption that it may not be long-term, to give increased incentive for progression to other vocational options. It is recognised that there will be some who will be most suited to this option alone, but the orientation of 'flow through' to more developmental options should be made stronger. It has been suggested to the Board that building in a time-frame with independent review for extension would reinforce this.

Day Options' staff should be adequately trained to inspire young people to achieve and have the capacity to provide effective developmental approaches to skill development. Day Option workers have little or no formal learning experience to draw from. Disability staff in regional areas require more support than the distance-learning program currently offered.

The newly re-named Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) environment could be more dynamic and pro-active in paving the way for young people with disabilities to engage in the economic prosperity of South Australia. The current scope of specialist disability employment has evolved from a production and manufacturing base, with some enhancements coming from local investment by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), (now known as Australian Disability Enterprises) funded to provide specialist disability employment placements. The scope of work roles undertaken in specialist disability employment needs to be expanded to enable young people with disabilities to develop the skills required by growth industries. New infrastructure is required to support new work roles and a broader range of Australian Disability Enterprises or employers need to be funded in the future. Open employment 'place and train' approaches should be made available by employers and industry, not in the context of a welfare approach, but rather an approach that is based on the valuable economic contribution that people with a disability can and do make.

The Social Inclusion Board would like the Australian Government to consider re-instating ongoing access for young people with a disability to both open and specialist disability employment concurrently, through the new National Disability Services Agreement (NDSA) funded services with a close independent monitoring mechanism to ensure the emphasis on funding is not at the expense of the individual's developmental outcomes.

Contingency plans need to be factored into all planning for young people aged 15 to 24 years. The potential for issues encountered in specialist disability employment to emerge in other transitions between pathways is real. This is a key area where the 'coming together' of the key sectors in the case management approach for young people with disabilities who are 'at risk' should enable reasonable allowances and concessions to be made.

### 3.5 Service Gaps – Young People with Special Needs

Links to developmental, social and community-based activities for young people with special needs, (e.g. ongoing health needs, behavioural challenges, episodic exceptional needs), are not formal or predictable and there are few programs available to cater for these needs. This represents a significant service gap in the current system. As a result, young people will not develop to their full potential and can regress in their skill development and physical agility over time. This lack of a 'joined-up approach' can place their health, well-being and independent living skills at risk, particularly as their parents/carers get older and have a reduced capacity to care for them. In the longer term, people in this category may require high cost interventions proportionate to the level of inactivity or lack of support. New developmental alternatives are required for this client group.

### 3.6 Education and Training Environments

The problems with making a successful movement from school to tertiary institutions or the VET sector may be related to poor monitoring of adjustments made, or poor access to the right advice. For those young people who do secure opportunities in education and training, they find that the structure of the learning environment and limited planning for universally designed delivery and assessment methodologies present barriers in enabling them to achieve in these settings.

Given our insights into the population and the diversity of needs, a general desire for better integration of employment services and pathways is needed. The VET to Work Transition Program is an example where such integration is currently benefiting people with a disability, albeit on a limited scale. The Program is still a pilot and has been extended to 2009. Expansion of the program into Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia is subject to bids under the National Innovation Funding.



The Board considers it timely for collaboration between State Government and Australian Government Agencies (through DEEWR) to work with tertiary education providers and VET training providers to enhance the opportunities for more young people with a disability to engage in tertiary study and vocational education and training more effectively.

### 3.7 Expanding Service Innovations

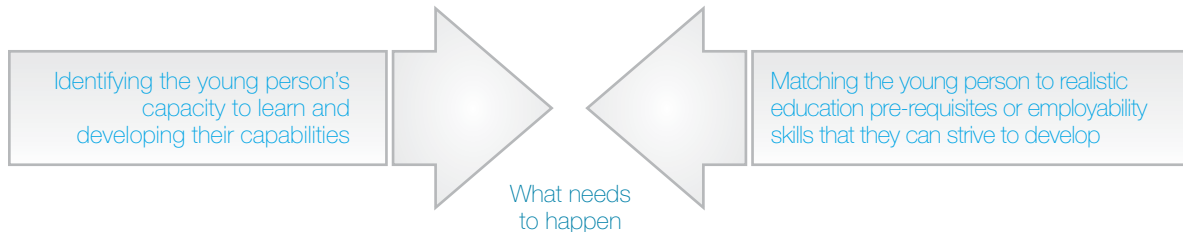
Community development strategies and service innovations, that are designed to strengthen community learning programs, have been emerging to address the specific needs of disadvantaged client groups. A range of these programs have been effective in fostering opportunities through: local councils, Adult Community Education providers, Futures Connect regions, Local Community Partnerships, ICANS and Regional Development Boards. However, there is no certainty regarding ongoing funding of such programs, despite the achievement of good outcomes for people accessing the programs. It is becoming evident that a lot more young people could benefit from these programs if the number of funded places is increased.

Further work needs to be undertaken to strengthen links between employers and mental health services. Preliminary planning has been undertaken by the Mental Health Unit which has examined specialist disability employment programs in other jurisdictions. It is clear that a partnership approach to service delivery between mental health services and employment providers has the potential to realise significant benefits, not only in paving the way for people with mental illness to be recruited into jobs, but in keeping them employed.

### 3.8 Performance Measurement

At the national level, work is currently underway to move beyond the National Minimum Data Set of disability service users. The aim is to develop a national performance reporting framework, under the National Disability Services Agreement (NDSA), that introduces outcome measures relating to social and economic participation. South Australia will be required to report on these measures by the year 2012. For young people with disabilities, a number of government and non-government agencies will be required to share responsibility for the ultimate social and economic outcomes achieved.

## 4. Better Pathways Approach – Client Level



The Board's key recommendation is designed to create a new joined-up service approach that leads to better pathways. The *Better Pathways* approach is described in this section.

The *Better Pathways* approach is designed to ensure that all young people 'at risk' receive the appropriate level of support to match their individual needs. The Board became aware that, once 'in the system', young people with a disability tend to fare reasonably better than young people who dis-engage without finishing school, or those whose development potential doesn't strictly 'fit', i.e. they are in-eligible for the supported options at one end of the spectrum, but require more support than that which is on offer through open education, training or employment options. If we don't support the programs already working in this way, (i.e. School to Work and VET to Work Transition Programs), then we will increase the 'at risk' cohort.

The Board's analysis confirmed that young people are dis-engaging with the service system because there are no current options that suit, and/or they require developmental alternatives that do not exist. Effort diminishes over time for the young people who don't easily 'fit' into the system.

It is recommended that the new approach be implemented for all young people with a disability who are 'at risk' and/or, don't 'fit' anywhere in the current system. These young people are:

- likely to be early school leavers;
- studying although not able to move onto employment;
- unemployed, temporarily ill or injured and not engaging in learning or employment;
- receiving a Disability Support Pension but not connected to any developmental activity; and
- receiving the Newstart allowance and have done so for a considerable time.

Priority will be given to those who are a young Aboriginal person, a young person who has been or is currently under the Guardianship of the Minister, from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD), and/or living in a regional area with limited opportunities or service options.

Pre-planning is crucial to enable young people with a disability to have the best chance at securing successful outcomes after school. They need assistance to explore their aspirations for life after school and they need support to identify realistic options that suit them. Transitional and vocational planning needs to occur sooner rather than later, and should offer a stepped approach that starts as early as year 9. The pre-planning also needs to pre-empt a relationship with key programs funded by the Australian Government.

The *Better Pathways Approach* will operate as follows:

- Year 9—identify resources, the support required, and develop a personal learning plan that will build and measure skill development;
- Year 10 and 11—personal learning plan in place that incorporates career planning and living skills, provide a taste of post-school/out of school options and/or facilitate early access to vocational education and training (VET) or higher education, if it fits with the individual's aspirations and capabilities; and
- Year 12 or comparable senior secondary qualification—integrate links and access to post-school opportunities, establish a hand-over ahead of and at the commencement of transition from school to a designated post-school transition coordinator<sup>1</sup>; at the point of a change of service, at age 18 and/or, at a shift from VET or higher education to employment.

The 'coming together' of client management into a joined-up pathway for young people with disabilities, that commences at the point of transition to secondary school, is recommended as the best means to ensure adequate pre-planning occurs for each young person with a disability. This means that professionals from the young person's school, disability services and health services need to be brought together with further education and training professionals to work in teams at various stages in the young person's school years. The team will assist them to devise and achieve individual career plans.

The new approach will be underpinned by the following principles:

- young people are empowered to maximise their potential and steer their own journey through the use of flexible funding models;
- individualised client-centred services are offered which are consistent with consideration of the realities of young peoples' learning journey and overall wellbeing;
- opportunities are available for young people to tap into one or more services at a time and move back and forth as their journey evolves; and
- a strong focus on young people who have been identified as 'at risk' exists, with priority access to planning, service responses, re-assessments and viable developmental activities, within agencies and across jurisdictions.

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1. Handover to a designated post-school transition coordinator will be necessary at start of last year at school unless the Pathways Coordinators are one and the same across both the school and post-school environments (subject to funding continuity in the Commonwealth post-school sector)

It is recommended that a Pathways Co-ordinator be assigned to work with each young person with a disability identified as 'at risk' to ensure that:

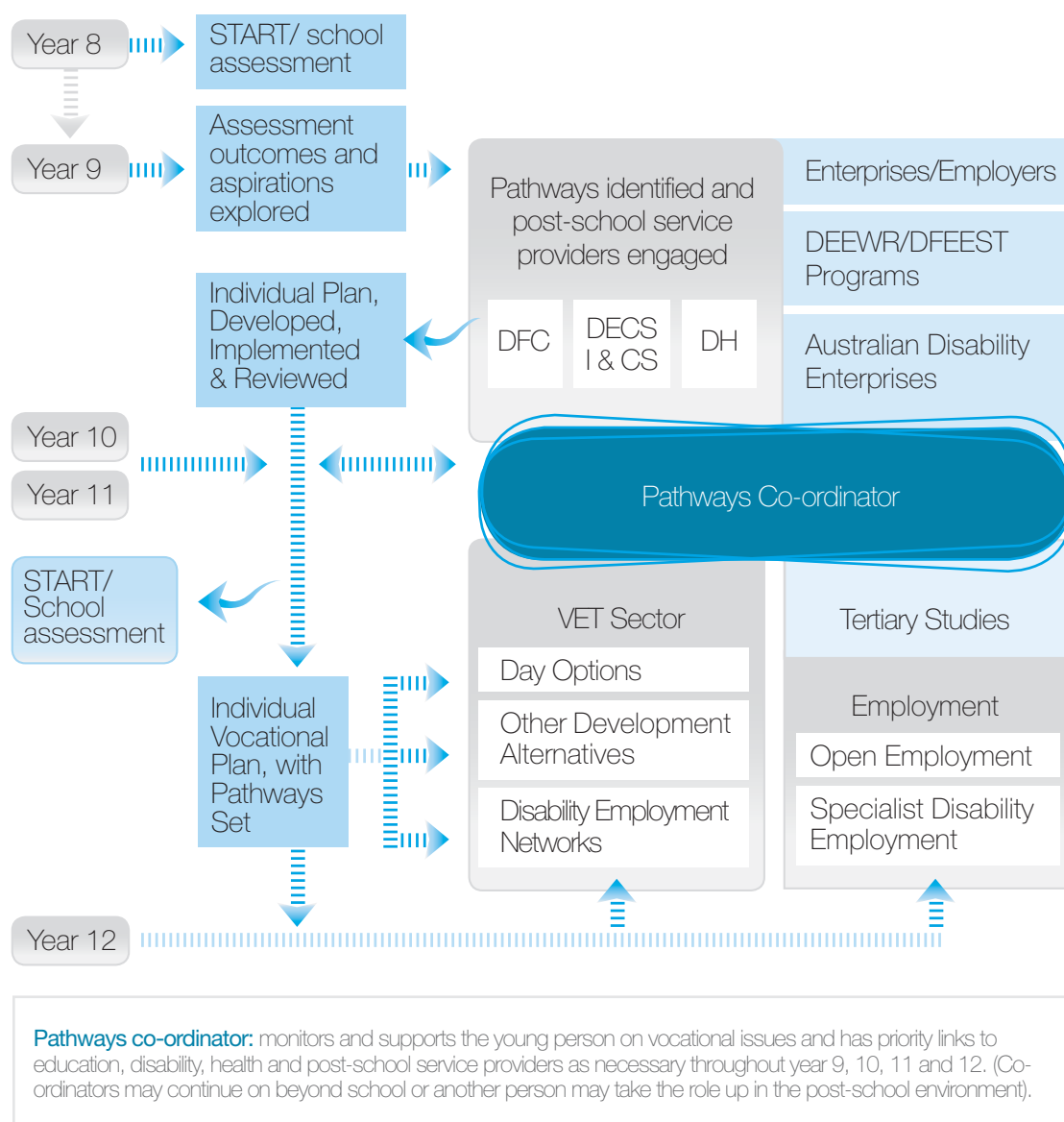
- the agency professionals meet at various stages in the young person's school life or at the specific request of the young person;
- assessments of the young person's capabilities are used to inform the young person's vocational planning;
- personal learning plans are reviewed at the end of Years 8 and 9 and reviewed at least every 6 months in Years 10,11 and 12;
- re-assessments occur in Year 11 or as needed when plans are due for review;
- the young person has access to the latest post-school information and connections for support throughout Year 10 and 11;
- the young person has regular contact, coaching and support that focuses on their life after school;
- the young person is empowered to navigate and learn about the post-school environment to their level of capability; and
- career-oriented tasks are undertaken on behalf of the young person as necessary.

The Pathways Co-ordinator is not expected to take on 'case management' of the young person as distinct from the existing service structures; rather, they become the key support person for the individual on developmental and vocational plans whilst at school. The Pathways Co-ordinator, (or a designated Transition Coordinator in a post-school program), continues as the key support for the young person in the post-school environment, to assist them to progress further or to sustain their engagement in the post-school environment. It is expected that the Pathways Co-ordinator may need to initiate the 'coming together' of the relevant agency professionals where the young person is not progressing as planned, or issues emerge that could hinder achievement of the overall plan.

Pathways Co-ordinators could include a key person in the young person's life, a professional or care worker from within the service system, another young person with a disability that has realised successful outcomes post-school, or a volunteer from the general community.

An overview of the *Better Pathways* approach is depicted in Figure 1 on the next page.

**Figure 1: Better Pathways Approach – Client Management**

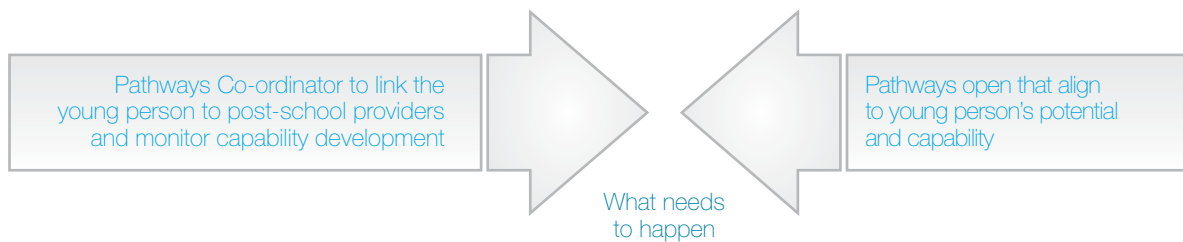


The elements of the *Better Pathways* approach will focus on building capabilities, increasing choices and maintaining connections across the areas of schooling, community activity, education, training and employment.

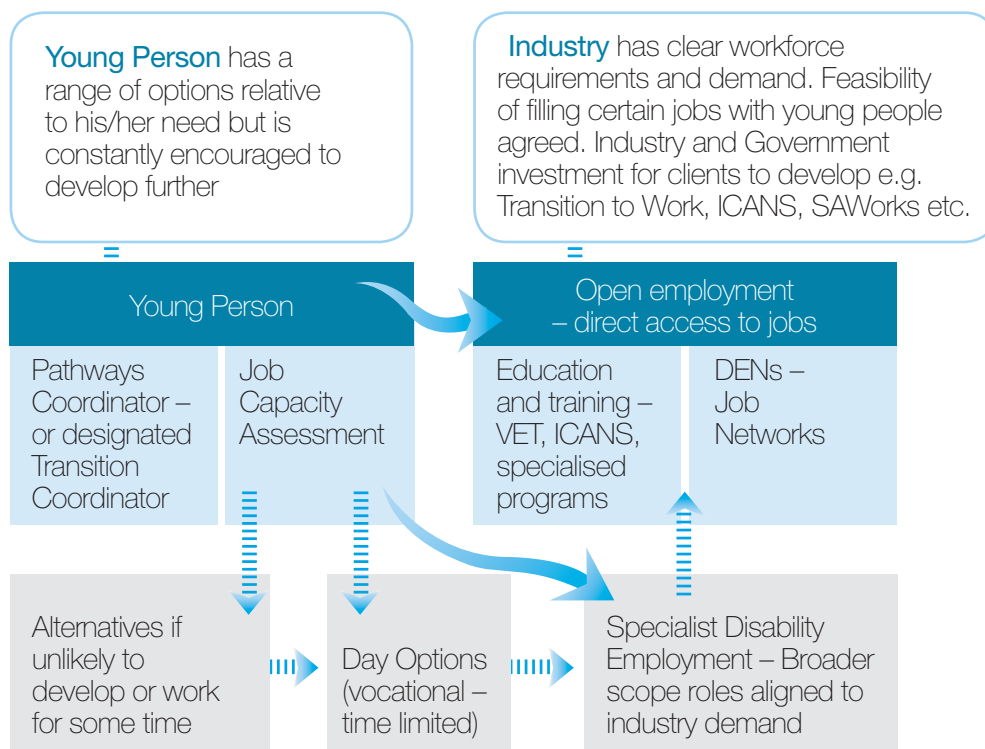
Under the *Better Pathways* approach, young people who are unlikely to work will be provided with viable developmental activities. Service innovation will need to be instigated by State Government agencies to develop new programs for this client group. The programs will inspire the individual to progress and possibly achieve beyond their own expectations. Young people who qualify for Day Options or Specialist Disability Employment Programs will have individual plans that set vocational outcome goals. Day Options placements will be time-limited for the 15 to 24 year old age group that is supported by a Pathways Co-ordinator to give the much needed incentive for progression to other vocational options.



## 5. Better Pathways Approach – System Levels



The creation of a new and better system will involve distinct roles in the context of a service collaboration commitment that will require partnerships between State Government Agencies and Australian Government Agencies. In every instance, timely responses to the needs of the young person with a disability and/or their Pathways Co-ordinator will be necessary. An overview of the *Better Pathways* approach at the system levels is depicted in Figure 2 below:



If the approach in Figure 2 is adopted, it will mean that for every young person, there will be:

- pre-emptive job capacity assessments coupled with early assessment of his/her capacity to learn (using START) so that an individual plan can be developed that will lead them down realistic post-school pathways;
- 'someone' assigned who can support them in achieving their plan and navigating the post-school environment;
- service collaboration between schools, disability and health services and further education and training agencies; and
- extra effort and longer lead times being granted to help him/her progress whilst supporting them with their special needs.

## 5.1 State Government Agencies

The **Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)** and the **Independent Schools and Catholic Education sectors (I&CES)** have a role in instigating the individual post-school planning process for transition from school well before the last year the young person is in school, and at least by Year 9. The Board aspires for the three school sectors to work collaboratively with other state government agencies, the Pathways Co-ordinator and the young person whilst the individual is attending school. Their professionals should bring the most up-to-date assessments and records of achievement to the process, and recommend milestones for re-assessment.

The **Department for Families and Communities (DFC)** works with DECS and I&CES advising on the individual's personal support needs in the planning process. The Board aspires for DFC input to be enhanced by including each individual's most up-to-date Support, Training and Resources Tool (START) assessment in the process. DFC has a role in ensuring a holistic plan that addresses all life domains for each individual. It is the Board's recommendation that this approach is taken earlier rather than later in the young person's secondary school life.

DFC should develop further its role in ensuring a range of community-based development options are available through education providers, employers and enterprises that are actively developing new programs, or making reasonable adjustments to accommodate young people with disabilities. The Board aspires for DFC to expand its role in developing services that will be available to education providers, employers and enterprises to provide ready advice and support to pave the way for, and maintain connections with young people with disabilities. DFC also should facilitate access to specialised information and advice about the post-school environment for parents as they work through the planning for transition of their son or daughter to the post-school environment. DFC should leverage off existing Australian Government programs rather than develop further State programs.

DFC has an emerging role (under the National Disability Services Agreement - NDSA) in reporting on social and economic participation outcomes achieved for people with a disability.

The **Department of Health (DH)** is responsible for ensuring continuity of service in supporting young people with a psychiatric illness or on-going health needs, whether they are in hospital, in the home, in education, or work place settings. The Board seeks DH participation in the individual planning processes for young people with these on-going needs. The Board aspires for DH to further develop its role in providing information and advice to sustain the involvement of young people in education and work place settings.

The **Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST)** focuses on getting people into learning and ultimately into work. It works with the Australian Government Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the vocational education and training (VET) sector and DFC to increase the

capacity and skills of people to deliver an employment outcome. DFEEST also has a role in ensuring the quality of training organisations seeking registration under the VET system. The Board believes that DFEEST is well placed to enhance the links between young people with disabilities and traineeships or graduate programs as has been demonstrated by the current VET to Work Transition Pilot Program.

## 5.2 Australian Government Agencies

The **Department of Human Services** (DHS) has a role in administering job capacity assessments for people who have significant barriers to work. Assessments are provided by Centrelink, Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services Australia (CRS), Health Services Australia Limited and a range of other providers contracted by DHS. Young people with a diagnosed disability who leave school early have ready access to this program by referral via Disability Employment Networks (DENs). Access is not readily available to the cohort of young people with borderline indicators for diagnosis. Job capacity assessments initiate a formal relationship with the post-school environment and with pathways to the various education, training and employment programs funded by the Australian Government. The Board's aim is to pre-empt a relationship with the national service system for young people with a disability whilst they are in school so that, if and when they do leave school, they already have a connection that will link them to the appropriate post-school supports they might need. The Board seeks to engineer this approach in collaboration with DHS by negotiating access to job capacity assessments (or a variation thereof) for young people with a disability, (preferably whilst they are in Year 9), who are 'at risk' of not making a successful transition post-school.

**Centrelink** is the Australian Government Statutory Agency that provides assistance to people to enable them to become self-sufficient and supports those in need. This agency is under the umbrella of DHS. Centrelink's role in supporting young people with a disability varies depending on the financial circumstances of their parents/carers. Centrelink is keen to research new and effective ways of providing customer services to young people with a disability and ensuring they are aware of the services they are entitled to, as and when required. The Board's aim is to ensure that young people with disabilities are fully informed and aware of the services they can access from Centrelink, especially where the parents/carers have had an ongoing relationship with the agency throughout the young person's childhood (eg. carer allowance, family assistance, etc.).

The **Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations** (DEEWR) has a role in "creating a vocational education and training system that leads world's best practice in achieving equitable outcomes for people with a disability" (*Revised blueprint "Bridging Pathways"*). DEEWR also ensures the quality of tertiary education through specifications under the Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework

accreditation. Hence, DEEWR is already working to 'open the door', improve the learning experience and achieve employment and lifelong learning outcomes for people with a disability. The Board perceives that partnering opportunities with them abound.

DEEWR is also working to create a transparent system that achieves meaningful outcomes for people with a disability. The Board's aim is to explore opportunities to develop alternatives to work for those who do not have the capacity to become employed. The Board aspires to do this with DEEWR, and to negotiate for resources to be made available for workplace adjustments that are necessary to support people with special needs in workplace, education and training settings.

The Board believes it is timely to partner with DEEWR in the development of a performance reporting and evaluation framework, given the shared focus on 'outcomes' achieved. This could facilitate access to the technical expertise available with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

DEEWR works to identify and alleviate barriers to the inclusion of young people with disabilities in education and employment. The recent reforms of Employment Services clearly demonstrate this commitment. In continuing this role the Board considers DEEWR to be well placed to devise stronger incentives for Job Networks (now referred to as Job Services Australia (JSA) and Disability Employment Networks (DENs)) to achieve the best outcomes for their clients with a disability (diagnosed and/or borderline indicators for diagnosis). DEEWR also is in a position to identify examples of good practice and give incentive for them to be replicated across the nation.

The Board aspires for the **Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs** (FaHCSIA) to support the screening of school leavers away from specialist disability employment so that their potential and capacity for open employment can be explored as a first step. This vision of open employment for job seekers is coupled with a new focus on throughput in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs). The Board encourages FaHCSIA to expand the scope of ADEs to create a broader range of options for young people with disabilities, and to access demand driven DEN services that partner the person with a disability as they endeavour to gain and maintain employment. This would enable them to develop 'employability', occupational and hard technical skills, that could open pathways to the vocational education training (VET) system to become job ready for the industries with demand. The Board would like FaHCSIA to invest in new infrastructure to support new work roles and to broaden the range of funded ADEs in the future.

The Board perceives that FaHCSIA is in a prime position to connect people with disabilities to employment by working with industry. FaHCSIA could influence the responsiveness of a broad range of work place settings to the needs of people with a disability, and could stipulate the requirement for a vocational outcomes focus for all young people aged 15-24 years who access ADEs. This approach would foster a culture of progressive development from fully specialist disability employment options to 'ready' open employment settings.

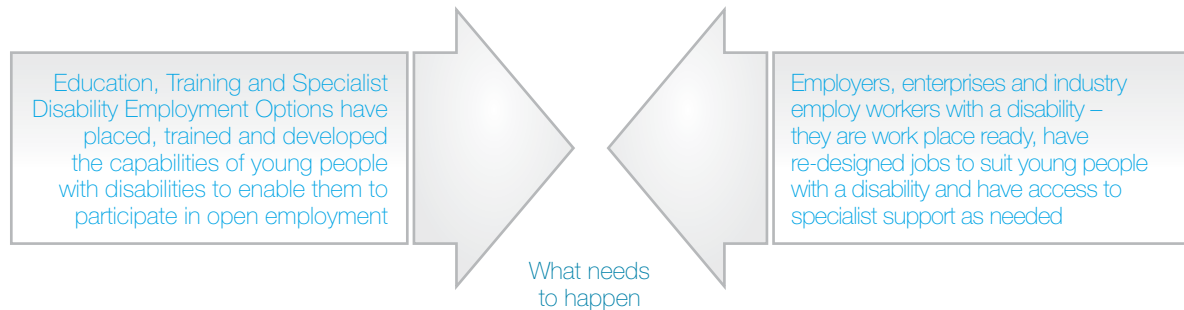
FaHCSIA has a role in collaborating with DEEWR in implementing strategies to improve the interface between young people with disabilities and the employer, enterprise and industry sectors. The Board aims to harness local strategies for young people with a disability by instigating dialogue with both agencies in this regard.

### 5.3 Employers

The Board believes that all employers have a corporate social responsibility to be inclusive of people with disabilities. They can, and should, take the initiative to explore employment opportunities within their industry, enterprises or businesses that may be suited to young people with disabilities. This may involve job redesign or a re-orientation of existing work roles. The Board is mindful of the policy shifts across Government that have paved the way for greater representation of people with disabilities in the public sector workforce. However, this progress needs to be sustainable and further accelerated to realise shifts in the recruitment policy and practice of the private sector.

Employers can be assured that there are no added risks or added costs (including workers compensation) associated with employing, training or supporting a person with a disability and that these employees can contribute effectively to productivity. Apart from the dialogue that the Board recommends should occur between Australian and State Government agencies, the Board believes that employers need to commit to workforce targets that will increase the diversity of the workforce, including people with disabilities. All employers need to be made aware of, and have ready access to, the support available from DEN employment support workers.

## 6. State and National Collaboration



### 6.1 Education and Training Environments

Strategies to engage and support a diverse range of learners need to be the norm and not the exception if the tertiary sector is to play its role in building the capability of young people with a disability.

Increasing access to education and training will do little however, unless it is matched to the individual's skill development needs. Training needs to be related to 'employability', and occupational and technical skills prescribed for the industries in demand of work ready recruits, e.g. the construction, property, engineering, defence and mining industries. The aim is to increase a young person's potential for job matching to work in growth industries.

Partnerships with disability agencies that have the expertise to provide information and advice about reasonable adjustments in education and workplace settings are crucial. Community 'not for profit registered training organisations' (RTOs) and Adult Community Education (ACE) providers play an important role in increasing the engagement of young people with a disability. They provide valuable pathway links between school and higher levels of tertiary study, and primarily operate at the flexible engagement end of the VET market<sup>2</sup>. Open employment outcomes are most likely where links between training providers and DEN providers are effectively maintained.

The nexus between education and training environments, and employers, enterprises and industry, is the most critical if opportunities are to be made available for young people with disabilities to engage in the post-school environment.

The Board has identified that the opportunities available today, though limited, are the result of 'championing' for specific programs within the service system at various times in the past.

The nature of 'championing' today is geared towards integration and inclusion which means that funding is generally used to foster changes in practice and to make reasonable adjustments to cater for young people with disabilities.

2. Bardon, B; CWGA Research, 2006, Community Education and National Reform; Discussion Paper, Report prepared for DEST.



The two key lead agencies, DEEWR and FaHCSIA, are best placed to:

- champion the participation of young people with disabilities through Industry Skills Councils and RTOs;
- allocate funding to initiatives that demonstrate successful outcomes for young people with disabilities (i.e. completion of training, attainment of skills or employment) – expand School to Work and VET to Work Transition Programs; and
- initiate dialogue with Industry Skills Councils to explore the feasibility of job re-design or the identification of work roles that would suit young people with a disability across a range of industries with demand for labour.

The agencies each have a responsibility to ensure that the continuum from education and training to employment offers reasonable development pathways with adequate support at key transition points. As funders of education, training and specialist disability employment agencies, they can stipulate in funding agreements that performance will be measured in terms of 'outcomes' for young people with disabilities accessing programs.

State Government Agencies (DFC, DH & DFEEST) need to work with the South Australian Industry Skills Boards, the Training and Skills Commission, DEEWR and FaHCSIA to ensure local knowledge and expertise is considered in such developments and initiatives. They also have a role in providing feedback on the quality of the opportunities afforded to young people with disabilities, their experiences (positive or negative), and to highlight successful practice that could be translated to other education and training providers or employers, enterprises or industry.

The Board is of the view that without leadership from DEEWR and FaHCSIA the cross-road between young people with disabilities and social and economic participation will continue to be a major divide.

## 6.2 Enterprise and Employer Readiness

The *Better Pathways* approach will deliver optimum outcomes for young people with disabilities where education connects with real employment opportunities.

Service providers who apply the *Better Pathways* approach will build young people's skills within the environment in which they wish to work. This approach will require employers through the Industry Skills Councils to identify and participate equally in the development of young people's skills for their industry sector. The service sectors need to engage with employers to demonstrate how young people with a disability can be matched against the range of qualities that, in their view, constitute a good employee. Many employers are unaware of how to support people with disabilities in the work place and even fewer are aware of how to develop their potential. This approach will require disability employment specialists (including DENs) to advise on the structure of jobs, wages, forms of employment and work place adjustments (physical and cultural) to suit all parties.

The Australian Government sets the policy and strategies for employment, training and education, as well as the nexus with income supports. The Australian Government contributes funding to Vocational Education and Training and Job Services Australia. A key interface for young people with disabilities are the Disability Employment Networks.

Considering that jobs requiring higher skill levels expect to account for two thirds of all new jobs by 2010, it will be important for DFEEST, in partnership with TAFE and RTOs, to prepare young people for demand areas. This collaborative approach will also require employers to be 'on board' from the start, to identify current job vacancies and to be clear about the skills required for these roles.

There is a need to consider the range of additional supports that will be required to meet the needs of young people with a disability, such as assistive technologies, e-learning and adjustments to replicate the level of support available in schools. Commonwealth employment specialist services must be actively involved to negotiate on-job supports, improve work arrangements and promote the development and use of skills in decent jobs<sup>3</sup>.

Consideration also should be given to job sampling, job shadowing, rotation and job sharing, as strategies to increase access to a diverse number of roles in the South Australian public sector.

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3. Buchanan, J., NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, 2006, From Skill Shortages to Decent Work, The Role of Better Ecosystems, New South Wales.

## 7. Incidental System Improvements

The Social Inclusion Board has identified several opportunities for improvement that are incidental to the client management process, that would enhance the opportunities for young people with a disability, namely:

- ensuring that all young people with a disability are encouraged to consider their career aspirations in their last year of primary school and that their primary school teachers provide information and advice to the young person's secondary school as a matter of course;
- requesting the Australian Government to reinstate ongoing access for young people with a disability to both open and specialist disability employment concurrently through the NDSA funded services with a close independent monitoring mechanism to ensure the emphasis on funding is not at the expense of the individual's developmental outcomes;
- strengthening the whole of government public sector employment policy and action under South Australia's Strategic Plan and the Promoting Independence Plan with a focus on young people with a disability (*Target 6.22 People with disabilities – double the number of people with disabilities employed by 2014*); and
- developing a performance and evaluation framework for South Australia that focuses on the profile of young people with disabilities and the transition outcomes beyond school, from the perspectives of social and economic participation.

## 8. Conclusions

The Board has concluded that young people with a disability most 'at risk' of not making a transition from school to activities are those who are:

- likely to be early school leavers;
- studying although not able to move onto employment;
- unemployed, temporarily ill or injured and not engaging in learning or employment;
- receiving a Disability Support Pension who are not connected to developmental activity; and
- receiving the Newstart allowance and have done so for a considerable time.

The risk increases if they are a young Aboriginal person, a young person who has been or is currently under the Guardianship of the Minister, if they come from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD), or if they live in a regional area with limited opportunities or service options.

The Board is mindful of the current financial climate but believes it is timely to press on in ensuring more effective and pro-active supports are in place to give every young person with a disability the opportunity to transition successfully to the post-school environment. The Board is optimistic that building the capacity of young people with a disability today will give them every chance to succeed in the future when the financial crisis subsides.

The Board has developed a new service approach entitled *Better Pathways* that it believes should be implemented for every young person with a disability identified as being 'at risk'. The approach is aimed at early assessment of the young person's capacity to learn, so that an individual plan can be developed that will lead them down realistic post-school pathways. It provides them with 'someone' who can support them in achieving their plan and navigating the post-school environment. It mandates service collaboration between schools, disability and health services, and further education and training agencies with extra effort and longer lead times being granted to young people with special needs. It recommends a more systematic approach, engaging adult services and pre-empting relationships with post-school programs earlier, to ensure young people with special needs receive the appropriate supports as they transition to post-school pathways.

At the state level, there is the need to forge investment in developmental services to address the needs of young people who are unlikely to work in the short-term or long-term. There is the opportunity to foster innovation by trialling a renewed assessment approach and the consumer-directed funding initiative.

At the national level, service collaboration needs to occur across and between agencies at all levels of Government. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs need to be engaged to capitalise on the Australian Government's relationships

with tertiary and vocational education and training providers, employers, enterprises and industry. The aim is to foster inclusion of young people with a disability in all of these settings. State Government agencies need to work with these agencies to ensure local initiatives are relevant and effective.

The Board is seeking investment from the Australian Government and industry to expand specialist disability employment work roles, pave the way for employer and enterprise readiness to employ young people with disabilities, and to commit funding for assistive technologies, universal design, flexible assessments and e-learning in tertiary study environments and workplace settings. It prescribes the achievement of vocational outcomes by individuals participating in developmental or supported post-school programs. It seeks further investment in effective service innovations and infrastructure. It aims to instigate dialogue with the Industry Skills Councils and South Australian Industry Skills Board to explore realistic work roles for young people with disabilities.

The Board has made an overarching recommendation to implement the *Better Pathways* approach in South Australia along with supporting recommendations relating to the systems level. South Australia can only achieve so much within its sphere of influence. Through pro-action on the part of the South Australian Government, greater opportunities for young people with a disability are sure to eventuate from joined-up dialogue, early access to specialised assessment; investment, and performance measurement with the Australian Government.

No matter what pathway a young person with a disability chooses, the focus in the future will be on working with them early to build their capabilities, increase choices and maintain connections that could ultimately lead them through one or perhaps many different pathways in life. The *Better Pathways* approach is designed to give every young person with a disability a chance at securing good vocational and developmental outcomes, through conscious service collaboration effort, commitment and accountability.

## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1 Pro-active planning and support at the client level

The Board has come to understand the many challenges young people with disabilities face in making the transition to post-school options. There is an unacceptable number that have not made a successful transition in the past. The Board has concluded that a new pro-active holistic service approach is needed. Service collaboration between schools, disability and health services, and further education and training agencies needs to be strengthened with extra effort and longer lead times being granted to young people with special needs. The approach needs to ensure early assessment of the young person's potential job capabilities and capacity to learn, with pro-active planning that will take them down realistic post-school pathways. It requires a more systematic approach in engaging adult services earlier to ensure young people with special needs receive the appropriate social, adaptive and behaviour management supports as they transition to post-school pathways.

The Board also acknowledges the need to forge investment in developmental services to address the needs of young people who are unlikely to work in the short-term or long-term.

South Australia's effort in increasing the number of people with a disability employed in the public sector should be more opportune for the 15 to 24 year old group than it is today.

The range of national and state service collaborators under the *Better Pathways* approach include:

- Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)
- Department for Families and Communities (DFC) including the service units – Disability SA and Families SA
- Department of Health (DH) (*where young person has psychiatric illness or ongoing health needs*)
- Independent Schools and Catholic Education sectors (I&CES)
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
- Centrelink
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and associated providers (DEEWR)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Department for Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST)
- Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs)
- Disability Employment Networks (DENs)
- Job Services Australia (JCA)



- Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) and South Australian Industry Skills Board
- Employers/Enterprises/Industry
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)
- All State Government Agencies
- Social Inclusion Board
- Australian Government
- Volunteer Sector

### Recommendation 1

That the *Better Pathways* approach be endorsed and implemented in South Australia for all young people with disabilities identified as 'at risk' of not making a successful transition from school.

We will have achieved this when:

- the 'coming together' of client management occurs on entry of a young person with a disability to secondary school;
- the development of personal learning plans (including a career plan) occurs by at least Year 9, that take account of all recent assessment outcomes;
- a Pathways Coordinator is assigned to provide mentoring, coaching and advocacy support to the young person on an ongoing basis from Year 9;
- the parents' role and responsibilities in supporting the young person in the transition to the post-school environment is clarified and they are supported by DECS, DH and DFC service staff; and
- a collaborative service commitment from the disability, health, education, training and employment sectors at both the State and National levels is clearly demonstrated.

### Recommendation 2

That the Disability Support Training and Resource Tool (D-START) field-testing currently underway in DFC be adapted to include young people with disabilities in Year 9 to ensure it can add value to the assessment of an individual's employability skills as well as their learning potential.

We will have achieved this when:

- validation of the tool is confirmed following re-assessment of the Year 9 cohort who participated in the field-testing i.e. when they reach Year 11.

### Recommendation 3

That the *Better Pathways* approach to transition planning is consistently integrated into the joined-up approach between State and Australian Government funded services to ensure young people with disabilities no longer 'miss out' due to their special needs.

We will have achieved this when the following elements are provided or occur on behalf of young people with a disability:

#### Individuals should have:

- pro-active career planning and support wherein the individual's potential, support needs and capabilities are fully explored during the individual planning and transition process
- access to specialised intervention and training programs that will enable them to interact effectively with their environment, i.e. relating to people's feelings, sensory integration and executive functioning
- considered all of the options that are relative to their potential inspiring them as to what they could become
- support to address transportation issues, access information, assistive technologies and communication aids
- continuity of services in the course of transition
- support to enable them to demonstrate employability skills in a range of work place settings
- significantly lengthened and targeted transition processes when a change in their circumstances occurs
- adequate support to maintain their quality of life throughout periods of illness
- information provided about the potential effect of drugs and alcohol on their condition.

#### What should occur on their behalf:

- a focus on progression to education and work place settings with adequate support rather than the Disability Support Pension pathway
- pro-active implementation of special provisions, relative to their need, to enable them to undertake Vocational Education and Training
- flexibility in providing unique solutions, relative to need, in education or workplace settings
- a collaborative response for the design of an integrated system that can respond to their behavioural and mental health needs
- professional school-based counsellors are available to work in partnership with specialist mental health services, education providers and employers
- engagement of employers and industry to promote the right perceptions of people with 'visible' disabilities as potential employees
- education of employers and industry as to the atypical behaviour inherent to some young people with disabilities, and appropriate adjustments that enable them to continue productively in work place settings
- pathways to developmental alternatives where individuals do not have the capacity to work
- special provisions if they are engaged in education and employment to sustain their involvement
- due consideration for all forms of income support, other than the Disability Support Pension in the first instance, to maximise their potential to progress to supported or open employment
- on-going monitoring and support once individuals secure training or employment.

We will have achieved this when young people with a disability experience an approach that is:

- person-centred and aspirational in nature;
- inclusive of DFC Support, Training and Resources Tool (START) and job capacity assessment outcomes in relation to training capabilities;
- attached to individualised supports;
- inclusive of advice from post-school service providers;
- reviewed and aligned to accountability measures; and
- inclusive of families in the development and implementation.

#### Recommendation 4

That the Australian and State Governments stipulate that all funded NGOs collaborate in the spirit of the *Better Pathways* approach for all young people with disabilities that are considered to be 'at risk' of not securing or sustaining good outcomes in the post-school environment.

We will have achieved this when we see:

- Funding and Service Agreements/Contracts that reflect the *Better Pathways* Charter; and
- State and Australian Government purchasing frameworks stipulate representation of young people with a disability in contractor workforces, i.e. purchases under the Federal Government Economic Stimulus Package.

#### Recommendation 5

That the *Better Pathways* approach be implemented with a particular focus on Aboriginal young people with a disability.

We will have achieved this when Aboriginal young people with a disability experience an approach that ensures:

- responsive and respectful services that recognise the unique service needs and aspirations of young Aboriginal people and the diversity within Aboriginal families and communities;
- more Aboriginal workers are employed who have local cultural understanding and access to networks; and
- Aboriginal families and Kinship carers are supported to re-enforce the importance of young people sustaining connections to education and work place settings.

### Recommendation 6

That the Australian Government commits to extend the *Better Pathways* approach over time to young people aged 15 to 24 years who:

- are currently not engaged in learning or employment; or
- have been in receipt of the Newstart Allowance for a considerable time.

We will have achieved this when young people with a disability who leave school early or who do not successfully transition post-school have regular access to:

- Pathways Coordinators or a variation of this role (mentor; advocate and coach).

### Recommendation 7

That the aspiration of the *Better Pathways* approach focuses on development and progression.

We will have achieved this when young people with a disability experience an approach that ensures:

- young people who require longer lead times for developing employability skills who generally qualify for Day Options or Specialist Disability Employment Programs are motivated to consider them as steps towards longer term vocational outcomes;
- Day Options placements for the 15-24 year old age group will be flexible with an orientation of 'flow through' to more developmental options to give increased incentive for progression to other vocational options (e.g. 3-5 years);
- Day Options staff are adequately trained to inspire young people to achieve and have the capacity to provide effective developmental approaches to skill development;
- consumer-directed funding trials involving young people with disabilities are conducted to support their development in the post-school environment; and
- young people have access to more innovative training models (e.g. traineeships/group training model).

### Recommendation 8

That multi-disciplinary developmental alternatives be developed to meet the particular needs of some young people and, in particular, those who are unlikely to be able to work.

We will have achieved this when young people with particular needs have access to:

- alternatives to work that link to developmental, social and community-based activities.

### Recommendation 9

That greater effort is given to provide government public sector employment opportunities to young people with disabilities.

We will have achieved this when young people with disabilities are:

- more visible and represented in greater numbers in the public sector.

### Recommendation 10

That strategies be developed to foster the 'motivational' capacity of all workers in the State and national education, disability, training and employment sectors that come into contact with young people with disabilities, to reinforce a belief that they can achieve and enjoy social and economic participation.

We will have achieved this when we see:

- workers in State and national education, disability, training and employment sectors actively coaching and encouraging young people with disabilities to strive for social and economic participation.

## 9.2 System Levels

Closer collaboration across all levels of Government and with the non- Government sector is required to ensure young people with disabilities do not leave school early with nowhere to go, or disengage from the service system having to fend for themselves. No young person with special needs should become 'lost' to the service system because they don't 'fit' or can't find their way to key post-school programs. Given the connections that schools provide to young people with disabilities, it is the responsibility of the service system to ensure that the connections are maintained with the appropriate services beyond school. This leads to the need for a joined-up approach with distinct roles in partnership between South Australian Government and Australian Government agencies under the *Better Pathways* approach. Pre-emptive relationships need to be forged between young people and their parents/carers with key programs administered by Australian Government agencies.

### 9.2.1 National and State Collaboration

To maximise the opportunities for young people with disabilities to engage in any or all of the post-school environments, the South Australian Government has been advocating on their behalf at the national level. The Australian Government has lead responsibility

for the funding, quality and quantity of employment services for people with disabilities. It has the attention of employers, enterprises and industry, and leads nation-wide policy on education and training. The South Australian Government has welcomed positive and productive dialogue with the Australian Government on shared objectives for the social inclusion of young people with disabilities, opportunities for investment and innovation, funding for workplace, education and training adjustments and a shared performance reporting framework.

### **Recommendation 11**

That the State and Australian Government jointly devise and implement strategies to maximise the opportunity for young people with disabilities to be positioned for employment in industries demanding labour and skills.

*We will have achieved this when:*

- scoping has occurred that considers the capacity of young people with a disability to develop employability skills prescribed for industries in demand of work-ready recruits, e.g. construction, green jobs, property, engineering, defence and mining;
- young people with a disability have developed clusters of employability, occupational and technical skills that can be used over a range of similar industries in demand of work-ready recruits; and
- the potential to resource programs such as SA Works to work with broader groups of young people with disabilities has been explored.

### **Recommendation 12**

That proven and effective retention and transition service innovations for young people with disabilities be expanded to allow flexible modes of learning whilst taking into account young people's differing needs, diversity of cultures, families and the opportunities that exist regionally.

*We will have achieved this when:*

- young people have access to an expanded State School to Work Transition Program; and
- young people with psychological illness have access to clinical and non-clinical support when they experience crisis episodes to ensure their employment is sustainable.



## 9.2.2 Empowering Support

Support and information provided to young people with disabilities and their parents about transition services and post-school pathway opportunities needs to be better co-ordinated and accessible to all. Ready access to clear, comprehensive and current information will enable more parents or friends to act as an advocate for young people with disabilities. Where parents do not have the confidence or capacity to support young people in their career planning or transition, a Pathways Coordinator should undertake this vital role.

### Recommendation 13

That strategies be developed and implemented to build the capacity of families, friends and Pathways Coordinators to act as 'champions' for young people with a disability.

We will have achieved this when friends, family and Pathways Coordinators have:

- ready access to specialised and current information and advice about the post-school environment.

### Recommendation 14

That priority and culturally appropriate indigenous responses and advice be provided to Pathways Coordinators, education providers and employers that concern entry to, participation in, or sustaining connections with education or work place settings.

## 9.2.3 A focus on outcomes

All young people need encouragement to develop and grow. They need positive reinforcement of their achievements with the motivation to keep setting new challenges for themselves. Young people with disabilities have the right to the same encouragement and support as their peers. Their potential could be maximised where the service approach coaches them for further development.

### Recommendation 15

That the Australian Government re-orient its policy to further empower young people with a disability in the post-school environment.

We will have achieved this when young people with a disability have:

- access to job capacity assessments (or a variation thereof) whilst attending Year 9 secondary school;
- ongoing access to both open and specialist disability employment concurrently (young people aged 15 to 24 years);
- access to funding for assistive technologies, e-learning and workplace adjustments;
- greater choice in work roles in the Specialist Disability Employment environment due to further investment in infrastructure in Australian Disability Enterprises;
- been progressing and achieving in the VET system; and
- gained employment in the industries with labour and skills demand.

## 9.2.4 National Policy Opportunities

### Recommendation 16

That local strategies be developed that align to the Bridging Pathways (revised blueprint) and the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

We will have achieved this when we see:

- re-structuring of learning environments, universally designed delivery and flexible assessment methodologies;
- expanding e-learning opportunities;
- 'not for profit' Registered Training Organisations and Adult Community Education providers opening pathways for young people with disabilities; and
- VET linkages and considerations in individual transition planning, i.e. RTOs, enterprises and industry.

### **Recommendation 17**

That the Australian Qualifications Training Framework and the Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework registration and accreditation processes be used to monitor the accessibility and completion rates of young people with disabilities in education (VET and Tertiary) and training.

### **Recommendation 18**

That the State and Australian Government collaborate in the development of a Performance Reporting and Evaluation Framework that profiles the outcomes achieved for young people with disabilities.

*We will have achieved this when we see:*

- consistent eligibility and outcome measures in State funded disability programs and Commonwealth employment programs; and
- clear and consistent definitions of terms related to State education, Commonwealth employment and training provision.

### **Recommendation 19**

That the State and Australian Government commission research into the actual movement between Day Options, Specialist Disability Employment Programs and Open Employment.

