



DISTSS

Disability In-Service Training Support Service

**DISTSS Inc
Strategic Development Project
2007**

**DISTSS STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT SUMMARY**

This report was prepared by Mary Burgess – Manager Strategic Development. The strategic development process outlined in this report was guided and informed by the Strategic Development Taskforce. DISTSS would like to thank all members of the Taskforce for their valuable contributions.

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1. SUMMARY

This report details the findings of a six month strategic development data gathering and analysis process, June to December 2006, on learning and development in the disability sector in Victoria, Australia. The project was undertaken by DISTSS, a not-for-profit organisation focused on the learning and development needs of disability sector service organizations and people with a disability.

The report covers key issues and trends in relation to the disability workforce, the views of people with a disability and support providers about the workforce and current training effectiveness in the context of changing service delivery models. The data was gathered through a literature review, two surveys: one of disability sector staff and one of people with a disability, focus groups, interviews, discussion forums, case studies, an industry round table and a strategic development workshop.¹

Key priorities for DISTSS to undertake to develop a strong disability workforce in Victoria were identified during the project. These are:

- Raise the profile, understanding and quality of learning and development in the non-government disability sector in Victoria
- Support the establishment of organisational cultures that value and provide effective learning and development
- Encourage more and better manager, supervisor and governance learning and development opportunities in the sector, including mentoring
- Improve the quality and relevance to the sector of accredited certified training
- Skill support workers to take up an enabling role – to support people with a disability to live the lives they want to live, as reflected in the Victorian State Disability Plan
- Offer people with a disability increased learning and development opportunities to build capacity to manage their own services and support staff, and to offer leadership to others
- Spread examples of good practice, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention of staff

¹ The DISTSS Strategic Directions 2007 Report, including full data report, strategic development workshop report, literature review and surveys is available at <http://www.distss.org.au/>

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

DISTSS is an organisation that has a primary concern with developing and sustaining a skilled workforce in the disability sector in Victoria and supporting the related learning and development needs of people with a disability.

"The primary purpose of DISTSS Inc is to enhance the lives and work participation of people with disabilities. It fulfils this purpose by delivering services directly to people with disabilities and by working with the staff of agencies which provide support services."

DISTSS has the potential to take up a significant number of roles in relation to developing people with a disability, support organisations and their Boards, wider public sector agencies, community organisations and the corporate sector in Victoria in relation to supporting people with a disability to live full lives in their communities. This report is primarily to inform DISTSS decisions about the most useful and effective roles it can take up and develop over the next three years. The DISTSS Strategic Plan is a separate report.

3. CONTEXT

The quality of learning and development available to the disability sector, and the way training is delivered and integrated into service delivery, reflects the impact of a range of interacting factors. These include shifts in government policy and arrangements; the structure and history of various non-government agencies which provide a wide range of disability services; the diverse preferences, needs and requirements of people with a disability; the existing social and political context; and the broad social ethos around how society responds to people with a disability.

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Learning and development is considered to be an integrated approach to knowledge and skills in the 21st century requiring significantly changed organisational capacity to:

- Use knowledge and skill as a primary resource;
- Make paradigm shifts in reduced timeframes;
- Manage with more permeable fuzzy boundaries eg between staff and those receiving services;
- Integrate and coordinate across once-discrete sub-systems and organisational boundaries; and,
- Operate in an international marketplace where people move more frequently, leading to a more diverse workforce, and new ways of doing things that emerge at a faster pace.

Training by contrast is one tool in relation to skilling a workforce in the above context. However employee's ability to learn is greatly enhanced by factors such as:

- Ability to absorb new information;
- Capacity to make links between things and remember;
- Learning skills – taking notes, using computers, understanding English;
- Security as a learner – to not know, take risks;
- Role models – known successful learners;
- Interpersonal relationship skills – capacity for working collaboratively, get information from others, jointly consider problems; and,
- Space to think – ability to concentrate and take the time to learn.

To be truly effective training needs to take place in a context where the above factors are maximised in the organisational culture and within established goals, targets, strategies or plans. Where training is used outside a learning and development context goals are hazy, feedback is weak and intermittent and learning is not applied or valued.²

DISABILITY SERVICE DELIVERY

The current phase of disability services has been described as the “era of community membership”.³ This has been characterised not just by physical presence in the community but by the kinds of support that will engender community connectedness and participation that improves individual quality of life. This has included the emergence of attendant or personal care services that are provided in the home or community setting.

However, current research in Scandinavia suggests there may be a fourth phase emerging in the disability services sector. In 1971, Karl Grunewald⁴, outlined four distinct phases in the way disability services are addressed:

1. *Diagnostic stage* – the focus on the diagnosis and formulation of needs
2. *Specialisation* – as services become specialised, the tendency toward centralisation
3. *Differentiation* – the increasing difficulty of standardization of service delivery and emphasis on individualisation

² L. Field, 'Managing Organisational Learning – From Rhetoric to Reality', Longman, Melbourne, 1995

³ Bradley, Valerie and Knoll, James 1995, “Shifting Paradigms in Services to People with Disabilities”, in Community Rehabilitation Services for People with Disabilities, Orv Karan and Stephen Greenspan (eds), Butterworth-Heinemann, Boston, pp.5-19.

⁴ Bradley, Valerie J and Blaney, Bruce 1996, “Decentralising Service in Three Scandinavian Countries” in *Redefining Family Support: Innovations in Public-Private Partnerships*, George Singer, Laurie Powers and Ardis Olson (eds), Paul H Brookes Publishing Company, Baltimore, pp.333-355.

4. *Decentralisation and integration* – the involvement of people in their own communities helping services to be specialized” (Grunewald, 1971 in Bradley and Blaney, 1996, p.334).

In accordance with the above model, disability services in the US and Australia are in the third phase of differentiation, which reflects the relatively recent move away from the institutional care model towards the delivery of services in the community and an increasing focus on individualisation and person-centred planning approaches. However the current trend in Denmark, Norway and Sweden is reflecting a new direction to service delivery whereby the laws in each country have been changed “to move the control of resources and programs closer to the communities and away from highly centralised national agencies”.⁵

Shifts in government policy, funding and service provision models are driving the change in the way disability services in the community are addressed. For example, the Department of Human Services in Victoria has outlined a holistic approach to all aspects of life for people with disabilities that incorporates “disability supports, health and community services, recreation, education, employment, transport and housing”.⁶ The current trend to providing disability services reflects a whole of person approach, however there are still challenges to be addressed including:

- Enabling disability services to better respond to individual needs;
- Ensuring disability services enable and empower people with a disability to participate actively in the community;
- Valuing carers for the contribution they make in meeting the needs of people with a disability;
- Raising community awareness of disability so that all people with disabilities can be valued and respected for who they are; and
- Creating more opportunities for inclusive education and lifelong learning.⁷

DISTSS HISTORY

DISTSS commenced operation in 1999 as a project of the Victorian Department of Human Services to continue the work of the Non-government Disability Training Unit (NDTU), set up to undertake a major training initiative in the disability sector in Victoria in the early 1990’s. At the end of the life of the initial NDTU, after all disability support agencies had received consulting services and an agency training plan, DHS decided to increase the base funding of each disability support provider by 1.5% for staff training and development, encourage regional training and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Department of Human Services 2002, *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, Victorian Government, Melbourne. P.1

⁷ Adapted from *ibid* p3

development networks of support providers to develop some shared training initiatives, and set up a separate modestly resourced project, the Disability In-service Training and Support Service.

DISTSS core funding was from the Disability Learning and Development Unit (DLDU) of DHS and the DISTSS project was strongly supported by a governance partnership between the Council of Adult Education, ACROD, and VICRAID to manage the DISTSS Project.

The DISTSS Project operated from 1999 to 2005. Its activities included a focus on informing the disability sector about training, conferences, forums, network meetings, and resources. It also undertook projects to support the disability sector in relation to its workforce. Two major products during this stage were the Agency Training Plan Resource Kit, and Ready 4 Work, an induction and orientation kit for the sector. To further support the development of accredited training and a qualified workforce in the disability sector, a project to initiate and support a network and database of workplace assessors and trainers was funded by DLDU.

In January 2005 moves were initiated by the DISTSS partners to make DISTSS an incorporated not for profit organisation. DISTSS became an incorporated body in March 2005 and secured core funding from DHS until July 2007. This funding has now been extended until June 2009. The DISTSS Project governing partnership members became the Board of the new organisation.

Planning for the Future

DISTSS wanted detailed reliable information about current learning and development practice, and its effectiveness. It wanted to look at learning and development practice in Victorian disability support organisations from a range of perspectives, including that of people with a disability – the end users of services, and staff receiving training. Other key questions to explore related to changes in service delivery including:

- How were the directions in the State Disability Plan, outlined above, requiring new ways of thinking by disability support organisations, particularly at senior and middle management levels?
- In what ways was more flexible program delivery in the community requiring a wider range of skills and decision-making capacities for both people with a disability and many direct support staff?
- How was the shift to more one-to-one support in the home and the community meeting the needs people with a disability?

- Levels of workplace injury in the disability sector had been a known Occupational Health and Safety issue, with WorkSafe targeting disability supports as an area for improvements in safe practice, particularly in-home supports. DISTSS wanted to know how this might link to learning and development in the sector, and how the needs of workers for a safe environment were being balanced with the lifestyle choices of people with a disability.

The task was for DISTSS to develop immediate and on-going accurate information and understanding about these and other trends and use this information strategically in determining its future directions.

4. STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

The strategic development project sought to address the following key questions:

The workforce

What is the workforce that supports people with a disability like?

Learning and development provision

What is happening in learning and development for the disability workforce?

Training effectiveness

How good is the training and development provided to the disability workforce?

Support and service models and skills

What is changing about services and supports and does this mean the workforce needs different skills?

Inclusive communities

What is changing about the community, government and business and does this mean the wider workforce needs different skills?

Key issues

What are the most important issues to tackle at the present time to have the best disability workforce possible?

5. METHODOLOGY

The project reviewed an extensive range of reports and studies related to learning and development for the disability workforce. It also engaged with over 900 individuals, both people with a disability and staff at all levels, plus many representing a wide range of organisations in the disability and learning and development sectors in Victoria

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The project was steered by a taskforce of people with a disability and other key sector stakeholders including CEOs of support organisations.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

There was a strong emphasis in the project design and throughout the data gathering and analysis process on working collaboratively with people with a disability. Ensuring the voice of users of disability supports was heard was an important component in understanding what the experience of service delivery is like, particularly during this major transition in support models in Victoria. Secondly understanding what makes for effective learning and development for staff from the perspective of people with a disability seemed important, if there are to be advances in the key directions in the State Disability Plan – people with a disability have in various ways been advocating for such involvement for many years.⁸ Particular challenges DISTSS wanted to understand from the perspective of people with a disability were how well was the system responding to meeting individual needs; and what capacities are needed to empower people with a disability to participate actively in the community?

A SNAPSHOT IN TIME

The project has essentially been a process of developing a snapshot of the experience of learning and development in the disability sector in Victoria at a particular point in time. The intent has been to assist in understanding some of the systemic connections between the state of the wider labour market, workforce characteristics, workforce capacities, learning and development provision and effectiveness, current and emerging support models, and related skill requirements.

In addition to and as a result of the data presented in this summary more questions inevitably arise – these may become the subject of further study by DISTSS.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- Literature Review;

⁸ A Healy, 'Ask Us for a Change: People with disabilities voice their expectations of Training for Support Workers', Attendant Care Coalition Inc, Melbourne, 1993

- Survey of staff in the disability sector;
- Survey of people with a disability;
- Interviews with key informants;
- Focus groups with specific stakeholders;
- Email discussion group; and
- Industry forums

The emphasis has been to address questions to diverse stakeholders by a range of means, to create a process of triangulation that will inform new strategic activities that DISTSS can usefully take up.

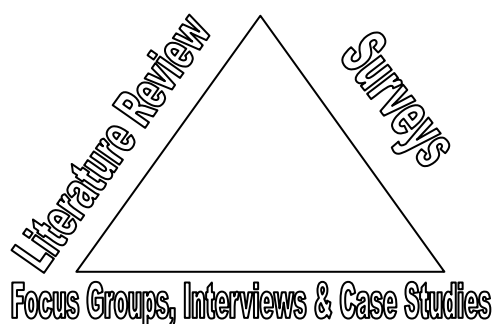


Diagram 1 Triangulation Methodology

Each of the methods has contributed key information that has come together to identify key dynamics and patterns at play.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM EACH DATA METHOD

Literature Review

Some key findings from the Literature Review were:

- A picture of the workforce as predominantly female, many over 45 years of age, less ethnically diverse than the wider community, with much work being part-time or casual and a third to a half having TAFE qualifications and a fifth having no qualifications;
- Disability work is not highly valued as a career choice in a tightening labour market. This leads to the likely prospect of shrinking availability of staff unless concerted action is taken at both national and state level.
- Issues with quantity, consistency and quality of training for this sector have been identified in a number of reports.⁹ They are recommending a number

⁹ See DISTSS 'Workforce Learning and Development: A Literature Review' 2007, and the following reports: M. Cleary, & R. Flynn 'Victorian Disability NGO Workforce Analysis Project' Precision Consulting, 2003; Disability Services Workforce Study, DHS, 2005; Partnering for the Future – The Victorian Industry Development Plan, DHS, 2006; Investigation into Workforce Capacity Issues, Summary Report, prepared by KPMG for National Disability Administrators, 2006; ACROD Limited 'Workforce Management Discussion Paper', ACROD QLD Division, Nov, 2006

of sector-wide initiatives in learning and development to meet the anticipated labour market shortages and the challenges of new support models; and,

- Studies of factors impacting on training effectiveness indicate that the two most important factors are the presence of a leaning culture, and management support for training, evidenced in business plans.

Surveys

Support provider survey

The survey to support providers received 468 responses from across the state and all levels of staff members.

Two key findings were that:

- The majority of respondents believe they have sufficient training to do their jobs effectively, however this needs to be viewed with caution as the sample of the survey was large (n=466) but the response rate was low (7.14%)
- Staff with more qualifications have more access to conferences, workshops and other forms of staff development than staff with no qualifications or Certificate III or IV in disability studies

Survey to people with a disability

There were 129 responses to the survey received in time for analysis. Responses to the 1800 number are also part of these findings.

Two key findings were that:

- People with a disability want to see improvements in staff capacities to focus on meeting the expressed needs of the person they are supporting and doing things 'their' way, and to demonstrate respect and listening skills
- People with a disability want to provide some training to their staff on the job, but do not want to use their own support hours to do this

Focus Groups and Industry forums

Of the 15 focus groups and industry forums there were 75 participants in total. These provided valuable qualitative data and concrete examples to underpin some of the key themes emerging from the literature review and surveys.

Two key findings were:

- The desire by people with a disability to have staff who support their life choices articulated in the above survey was reinforced by support organisation staff in focus groups and industry forums on the Certificate IV in Disability Work. Participants consistently indicated that the course, as

currently designed, has not emphasised important background knowledge, values and attitudes sufficiently

- Research presented at an industry forum into the relationship between staff stress and clients with challenging behaviour is suggesting that stress is more likely to relate to role conflict, ambiguity or overload than challenging behaviour from clients, pointing to a need to focus on wider organisational culture and structure issues to reduce staff stress

Interviews with Key Stakeholders

Twelve individuals with work roles that offered them an overview of the disability sector were approached and they were able to provide insights and observe trends not always apparent from within an agency or service experience. Their comments were largely focused on problematic issues that they see a need to address in relation to learning and development and training effectiveness.

Some key findings were:

- A number of individuals in key positions were dissatisfied with the usefulness to the sector of the nationally accredited Certificate IV in Disability Work. This included concerns about the content and variable quality of delivery by some Registered Training Organisations
- Some experienced observers of the disability sector in Victoria see the principles in the State Disability Plan being taken up by organisations already committed to these directions but not by other agencies. However they also thought that the Department of Human Services had not been leading or strongly requiring implementation of these principles to date
- Individuals with an advocacy view of the sector considered that a significant number of organisations are considered to be more strongly focused on WorkSafe requirements than service delivery, leading to a worrying lack of flexibility in delivering client outcomes

Case studies

Three case studies were undertaken to gain some understanding of how learning and development is defined, funded, and provided by disability support organisations to their staff. The three agencies ranged in size, service types, number of sites, geographic location and approaches to learning and development.

Key findings were:

- Some agencies are beginning to work first to identify (often in collaboration with service users) specific staff skills that are wanted either by service users or within a service team and then targeting training to achieve key outcomes rather than rely on self-selection by staff to attend a calendar of training. Training here is an element in an overall learning culture approach

- Case study agencies commonly see training in the context of wider service delivery goals, learning and development strategies and closely link supervisor and staff training to maximise implementation of skills
- Agencies said they use a mix of accredited and non-accredited training and tend to use 'word of mouth' to build a portfolio of regularly used trainers and preferred Registered Training Organisations

APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

A framework for analysis

Essentially the model used to analyse the data collected for this report is a model that assumes a number of interconnected systems impact on learning and development in the disability sector. The analysis seeks to identify key issues in relation to each of these systems, rather than focus only on the idea that there is one key strategy that will result in a skilled the workforce.

The overriding assumption behind determining key issues to be addressed has been a primary focus on meeting the support needs of people with a disability to live individual fulfilling lives in their community – the essential purpose of the emerging support system paradigm. A second assumption has been that there is a need for sufficient staff who have the necessary skills to work in this way, and thirdly that organisational learning cultures are a major key to workforce effectiveness.

The state of learning and development for this sector needs to be considered in the light of labour market shrinkage, an ageing workforce, national and international shifts in thinking about management models and effective organisational learning practice eg whole-of-career flexible learning strategies rather than instrumental one-off training.

Another major consideration is the fact that the service system in Victoria is in the middle of a paradigm shift in models of support focused on meeting individual needs. Take up of new directions, and the use of learning and development strategies to achieve change will inevitably be variable at such a stage.

Data analysis focused on identifying key issues within the interconnecting systems that DISTSS could usefully address, given its primary focus on learning and development.

Data analysis methods

- Data discussion forums;
- Workshop on DISTSS Organisational Environment; and
- Strategic Directions Workshop.

KEY FINDINGS FROM EACH DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Data Discussion forums

Two discussion forums focused on reporting back some of the emerging findings and asking participants to discuss and provide their own experience of the issues. This was very useful. The forums reinforced the messages in the literature review and identified some of the key linkages necessary to create both effective agency wide learning and development strategies and specific training and its implementation on the job

Two key findings were:

- Training effectiveness was linked to whether managers and supervisors were engaged in identifying learning needs and secondly their knowledge about what direct support staff were learning in formal training. Where these linkages were in place supervisors were more likely to reinforce the key training messages in day-to-day work and supervision
- A greater focus on including people with a disability in designing and delivering training to staff was considered to increase the 'fit' between what people with a disability want from support staff and the values and attitudes staff take up

Workshop on DISTSS Organisational Environment

A workshop was held at the end of the data gathering process with key representatives of major players that DISTSS relates to, either as a potential partner, peer organisation or competitor. The objective was to better understand the environment DISTSS operates in – what is the core business of like organisations, where are the gaps and what useful roles do our potential partners see for DISTSS?

Key findings were:

- There are opportunities for DISTSS to host a group of peak organisations with a focus on learning and development in human services. Such a group could regularly share issues and practice development, and identify gaps and duplications in relation to learning and development in the human services sector
- The emergence of service users, particularly in the mental health area and more recently disability, in shaping learning and development both for themselves and for support staff
- A strong reliance on conferences as a major means to share information, at the same time as there are gaps or limited provision of some other valued forms of learning

Strategic Development Workshop

Members of the DISTSS Strategic Development Taskforce, key stakeholders and Dr Amy Hewitt, a visiting expert in disability workforce issues from the United States, were invited to a workshop to consider and prioritise issues identified through the strategic development data gathering and analysis process. Participants were also asked to prioritise potential future roles for DISTSS in the light of this information.

The top issues identified by workshop participants for DISTSS to focus on were:

- Manager, supervisor and governance learning and development opportunities, including mentoring
- Supporting effective organisational cultures for learning and development effectiveness
- Leadership in relation to the quality of certificate training particularly the Certificate IV, and identifying competencies that are needed by sector, and particular segments of the sector
- Improving the capacity of support workers to meet individual needs and help people with a disability lead the lives they want to live
- Raising both the quality and profile of learning and development in non-government sector, with more focus on messages of the Victorian State Disability Plan
- The need for DISTSS to take up a role to spread examples of good practice, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS

Detailed data to support the following findings will be found in the full report of the DISTSS Strategic Development Project.

THE WORKFORCE

Characteristics

- There are an estimated 8,600 staff employed in accommodation, day program and individualised support services in non-government disability support organisations in Victoria;
- Women account for 75% of the non-government disability workforce with 40% being over the age of 45, but conversely only 25% of clients are female and over 45
- The workforce is fairly stable with 31% of staff in the non-government workforce having between 6 and 15 years of service.

Supply of staff is a major problem for the sector

- The workforce has aged in the last 10 years and higher numbers of people are expected to retire within a decade leaving the sector with a shortage of available workers
- Reports¹⁰ argue that with a tight labour market generally the disability sector is likely to experience significant shortages of available workers sooner than other industries and argue the sector needs to vigorously work to position disability work as a 'career of choice'
- Difficulties in both recruitment and retention are a great concern to managers in the disability sector but this is coupled often with limited expertise in up-to-date human resources and learning and development practice
- There are many casual positions in the disability workforce and while this gives greater choice of staff and flexibility to people with a disability it also creates challenges in relation to access to learning and development for these staff

HR and Management Practices can make a difference

- There are pockets of innovative human resources practice eg a combination of salary packaging and flexible work arrangements coupled with a strong focus on learning and development. Some of these practices are in small rural disability agencies and others in large state-wide organisations. A number of agencies report no difficulty recruiting or retaining staff because of their approach
- A number of reports¹¹ have found limited access to appropriate or sufficient supervision has been a significant driver of job dissatisfaction in the disability sector
- The Karpin Report (1994)¹² identified the need for Australian managers to move from a controlling and directing approach to one where they are enablers of staff and show people skills, strategic thinking, flexibility and capacity to work with a diverse workforce. Reports and feedback in this project suggest these messages have not yet been taken up widely in the disability sector

¹⁰ There is an extensive discussion of the findings of a number of reports in 'Disability Workforce Learning and Development: A Literature Review', DISTSS, 2007

¹¹ *ibid*

People with a Disability have changing expectations of staff

- People with a disability are now expecting that staff who work with them will respect their life choices and support them to achieve their own goals, as espoused in the Victorian State Disability Plan
- People with a disability who participated in the project gave many examples of disability support workers who still assume their role is to manage and direct them rather than support them to live their own lives. A significant number of examples related to HACC local government staff who work in people's homes

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Overall, recent Victorian and national reports concerned with the disability workforce are unanimous in identifying the need to ramp up the capacity of the disability sector to think in terms of learning and development cultures and to provide relevant training and development for the disability workforce to meet the challenges ahead.

Quality is an issue

- A number of reports and stakeholders with an overview of the sector consider that the quality of learning and development available to the non-government sector in Victoria is inconsistent and often of poor quality
- The resources put into learning and development are seen to be insufficient, or focused too heavily on risk management at the expense of other skills needed to support people with a disability
- Organisations are using a wide range of learning and development providers. This includes TAFE RTOs, private RTOs, their own staff, and external trainers and consultants who do not offer accredited training. They report that training providers are variable in quality and they have to choose carefully
- There are considered to be gaps and difficulties in finding quality training in some content areas at a reasonable price to the disability sector, for example leadership development programs

Content is not sufficiently well targeted currently

- The key messages in the State Plan are generally not emphasised in current accredited training provision, particularly Certificate IV

¹² Karpin Committee Report 'Enterprising Nation: Best Practice in Management Education', Commonwealth of Australia 1995

Training is not necessarily well targeted

- Some training is reactive and does not happen within a context of an agency-wide learning and development culture that supports organisational goals. In some situations staff take part in training that is then not usefully linked to or reinforced in day-to-day work
- Learning and development opportunities, paid for by the employer are generally made more available to senior and qualified staff than to less qualified staff who most often work directly with people with a disability
- Reports indicate the provision of induction training is inconsistent, with some staff receiving none. There may be few training opportunities for direct support staff once employed and the level (in terms of complexity) of training can vary greatly

People with a disability want more learning and development opportunities

- The changing models of service provision, with their emphasis on more one-to-one support in the home and the community, requires people with a disability to have the confidence and skills to effectively manage staff
- There are some recent learning and development initiatives designed to provide people with a disability with skills to effectively operate in this changing environment, such as 'Leadership Plus' and 'Becoming the Boss'. These programs emphasise interactive group learning models rather than instrumental training
- Programs that exist are available to very small numbers currently and people with a disability want more of these offerings, particularly to become effective leaders of others with a disability and to manage services and support staff

TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

There are significant differences in perceptions of training effectiveness

- Staff surveyed largely consider they have sufficient skills to do their jobs effectively, but people with a disability report that staff need to change their idea of their role so that services are meeting the person's individual needs, not those defined for the person with a disability by the worker or the support organisation. This needs to be viewed cautiously due to issues with the survey outlined on p12

- Conversely a study of the disability workforce in 2003¹³ found that 24% of staff did not believe they were adequately trained to perform their duties
- Organisational 'protection' is identified by key stakeholders with an overview of the sector as the focus in a number of agencies, with staff training emphasising risk factors rather than how to work with people with a disability
- A proportion of middle management and supervisor level staff are identified as having skill limitations in terms of their understanding of disability service directions and the quality of supervision provided to staff delivering services, with a focus on control and direction of staff rather than support and development

Organisational culture and training delivery need to be consistent

- An organisational culture where day-to-day behaviours and values are consistent with its learning and development messages is a major key to training effectiveness. Key elements include communicative and collaborative environments, systems that enhance and streamline service delivery, opportunities for employees to contribute to decisions about work practices, and partnerships with other organisations to increase learning
- Effectiveness of approaches to learning in the workplace are strongly influenced by whether people get opportunities to practice skills learned, and whether the organisation reinforces values and attitudes imparted in training in day-to-day work. Incentives to learn, and time for learning and development to occur are also important
- People with a disability participating in the consultations and survey want to train staff that work with them in their own homes to ensure their individual ways of doing things are respected. They also want to be actively involved in training support workers generally, to underscore the shift to individualised supports and the role of assisting people to live the lives they want

Problems with accredited training

- The National Disability Administrators Report (2006) notes that the competency framework for disability qualifications is heavily weighted towards skills and knowledge rather than values and attitudes. The report indicates there is a need to identify and include the personal

¹³ ibid Precision Consulting 2003

attributes required for disability work as an integral part of working towards gaining a qualification

- Project participants from a range of perspectives consider the quality of VET Level Certificate training varies considerably between TAFE providers. Some organisations explicitly avoid some providers, but there does not appear to be effective mechanisms currently in place for feedback from the industry to individual RTOs
- Reports, individual interviews and focus groups and forums all articulated concerns about the current Certificate IV. These concerns were particularly in relation to a relevant knowledge and values base and developing effective approaches to working with people with a disability consistent with the State Disability Plan. The overall message was that the Certificate IV is not currently meeting the needs of the sector, nor those of people with a disability

SUPPORT AND SERVICE MODELS

Changing skill requirements

- The service and support model is moving from an emphasis on planning services and managing people to identifying supports for individuals and facilitating personal outcomes
- More staff are expected to support people to take part in activities of their choice in their communities
- Skill requirements are changing with staff needing to be more flexible, communicate effectively with a wider range of people in the community and be creative and able to solve problems collaboratively with people with a disability
- To support these changes managers and supervisors need to be able to provide values leadership, and effective mentoring and guidance to increase staff flexibility and problem solving skills rather than reward rigidly following specific organisational rules

Risk management strategies in conflict with life choices of people with a disability

- Some providers are interpreting OH&S regulations and WorkSafe requirements in literal and inflexible ways
- The impact of some risk management strategies is significantly limiting choices for some people with a disability in relation to services they receive, particularly in their homes
- WorkSafe requirements and inspections have created a strong focus on risk factors in disability work and related training. Some

organisations are implementing these at a cost to client outcomes, particularly some local governments agencies

7. KEY MESSAGES

The major message from the data is that learning and development is part of an overall system where all links in the chain need to be attended to for effective practice, rather than thinking of 'training' as an isolated off-the-job activity. This is particularly clearly outlined in the literature review. However this knowledge is not in common use in the disability sector in Victoria at present, and many of the links are missing for some staff and organisations.

Older styles of service delivery where people with a disability take part in group programs determined by the support organisation or are managed and directed by staff still exist in many places, and staff responding to the staff survey commonly believe they are doing a good job and have appropriate skills. These staff are unlikely to be receiving any feedback from their managers or people with a disability they work with to suggest that they need to make changes.

What is new is that people with a disability are taking up the messages in the Victorian State Disability Plan and are clearly voicing their expectations that support staff and managers need to have different skills and attitudes to work in respectful partnership with them to meet their individual life goals and aspirations.

These expectations of people with a disability are not always currently met; in fact people who participated in this project say they are only seeing support staff with the capacity for respectful collaborative approaches to individual choice about half the time.

This pattern can be traced to the complex interaction of a number of variables. Firstly parts of the sector tend to be in 'catch-up' mode in relation to recruitment, retention, induction and enabling approaches to on-the-job supervision. This in turn can create a vicious cycle of poorly targeted selection, no time for induction, lack of job role clarity, negative feedback from supervisors, and no on-the-job training leading to low job satisfaction and high turn-over, leading to more need to recruit.

The second aspect of the pattern relates to the current transition stage within a major paradigm shift in disability supports, legislation, policy and delivery in Victoria. Many people with a disability are expecting staff to have already made the shift, while many long-standing staff are unaware that expectations are changing and believe that planning and managing services rather than supporting individual aspirations is still their job.

Another important element is that formal training to this sector is not consistently meeting the industry's needs currently. This may be due to a number of factors: the lag time for training content and delivery to become relevant to the new directions in individualised supports; lack of formalised input from people with a disability; inconsistent use of training; and a lack of formal spaces for dialogue between some registered training organisations and the industry.

8. POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS

The issues raised in this report are similar to those faced by the disability sector in the US, New Zealand and the UK, where there are also major strategies underway to address disability workforce issues. The key to a new direction for DISTSS is to take up those issues that it can most usefully address to have an impact. The Strategic Directions Workshop in February identified some priority activities and possible approaches. These are outlined below.

1. Raise the profile, understanding and quality of learning and development in the non-government disability sector in Victoria

Approaches

Build capacity in DISTSS to work on this, focus on developing a strong understanding in the sector of systemic learning and development approaches, rather than instrumental training, and additionally segment the learning and development issues clearly into:

- Pre-service skills, attitudes and knowledge
- Orientation / Induction training to introduce people to employer and organisational expectations, socialise them to the workplace and provide opportunities to get to know people with a disability
- On-going in-service training that is critical to keep both supervisors and workers motivated and their skills relevant to emerging support models
- Up-skilling people who began work in supervision or direct care when service models were different and they now have outdated skills

Promote the importance of ensuring that direct care staff have access to training and are paid for it and disseminate practice examples of effective skilling of casual and part-time staff.

2. Support the establishment of organisational cultures that value and provide effective learning and development

Approaches

Develop or source tools to assess organisational culture, offer technical assistance to build effective organisational cultures, and disseminate examples of effective learning and development practice, from within the sector and the wider work environment.

3. Encourage manager, supervisor and governance learning and development opportunities, including mentoring

Approaches

Develop resources to support effective manager and supervisor skills, undertake projects to build resources for governance training, expose Boards and senior managers to the concepts of mentoring, highlight dissemination of good practice, develop connections with the corporate world to bring innovative practices into the disability sector, develop a mentor bank, offer programs that assist supervisors to become mentors rather than controllers of staff, and develop a range of resources for supervisors.

4. Improve the quality and relevance to the sector of accredited certified training

Approaches

Work with VET providers to ensure quality of training, encourage sector participation in the national review of Certificate IV, provide forums for feedback from people with a disability and the industry to the TAFE sector about the relevance of training, increase disability support organisations' understanding and involvement in shaping accredited training.

5. Skill support workers to take up an enabling role – to support people with a disability to live the lives they want to live, as reflected in the Victorian State Disability Plan.

Approaches

Work with support organisations to increase capacity for collaborative partnerships between staff and clients to reach the intentions in the State Disability Plan, support people with a disability to be more actively involved in defining the skills and attitudes needed in support worker training, raise awareness of this issue with relevant training authorities, develop resources for support workers and people with a disability around values and attitudes,

encourage disability organisations to take a balanced approach to the importance of attitudes and skills.

6. Offer people with a disability increased learning and development opportunities to build capacity to manage their own services and support staff, and to offer leadership to others.

Approaches

Use trained and skilled people with a disability in training, promote the DISTSS database for organisations to source people with a disability who are trainers, encourage RTOs to work with people with a disability as trainers, create increased opportunities for people with a disability to receive training to manage their services.

7. Spread examples of good practice, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention of staff, and key directions in the State Disability Plan.

Approaches

Identify good practice, highlight and describe it in detail, create tools and resources based on these practices, disseminate them widely and champion organisational change.

9. CONCLUSION

This report is a summary of the key findings from a twelve-month examination of learning and development for the disability workforce in Victoria, Australia in 2006. There are few comprehensive studies of this nature available that include the views of people with a disability. This one represents a snapshot at a particularly interesting time because there is currently a major shift in service delivery models in Victoria. This shift can broadly be described as moving away from organisations defining client needs and their responses to them, to one where organisations are to support people in flexible ways to live lives of their own choosing in their own communities.

The key issues to tackle in learning and development for this sector need to be considered firstly in the context of where the disability workforce sits in the wider labour market. Essentially the message is that there is much to be done to get a sufficient workforce, with the relevant skills and there is a particular urgency. This is because currently disability work is not particularly attractive to younger people, there is an aging workforce, many of whom will retire in the next five to ten years and a wider context of a shrinking labour market, with increasing competition from other industries for staff.

The second key issue is that for learning and development to be effective and lead to skilled day-to-day work it needs to take place in organisational cultures that value, support and develop both staff and people with a disability as learners. There is much work to be done for this to be the kind of environment typical of disability support organisations.

Thirdly there is a need to integrate the various learning and development and training initiatives so that there is an overall strategy around the the detailed content and delivery of learning and development for different kinds of work in the sector, consistent with policy directions in the State Disability Plan and emerging support models. This needs to be within the national competency-based accredited system. The other key element in a learning and development strategy is that it needs to reach disability sector staff coherently at different learning entry points eg pre-service, induction, new support model skill development, upskilling for older workers, and career pathways into supervisor and manager roles and higher education.

The findings detailed in this summary are a brief overview of the work carried out during the strategic development project. The basis of the findings and more detail on each of the issues outlined is contained in the DISTSS Strategic Development Project Report. The work of this project will be used to drive the key directions and activities in DISTSS Strategic Plan for the next three years. In essence they are:

- Raise the profile, understanding and quality of learning and development in the non-government disability sector in Victoria
- Support the establishment of organisational cultures that value and provide effective learning and development
- Encourage more and better manager, supervisor and governance learning and development opportunities in the sector, including mentoring
- Improve the quality and relevance to the sector of accredited certified training
- Skill support workers to take up an enabling role – to support people with a disability to live the lives they want to live, as reflected in the Victorian State Disability Plan
- Offer people with a disability increased learning and development opportunities to build capacity to manage their own services and support staff, and to offer leadership to others
- Spread examples of good practice, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention of staff

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