



Making employment services work better for disadvantaged families

**The Benevolent Society's response to the
*Employment Services – building on
success: Issues paper***

Contact:

Anne Hollonds

Chief Executive Officer

T: 9339 8000

E: Anne.Hollonds@benevolent.org.au

The Benevolent Society

Level 1, 188 Oxford St

PO Box 171

Paddington NSW 2021

www.benevolent.org.au

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Recommendations.....	4
3.	About The Benevolent Society	5
4.	Background	5
	Long-term unemployment	5
	Family joblessness	6
	Barriers to employment faced by jobless families	7
5.	Meeting the needs of disadvantaged job seekers.....	8
	One size does not fit all – the need for a more individualised approach.....	8
	Identifying multiple and complex needs in job seekers	10
	Pre-employment support for job-readiness.....	11
	Casual employment and long-term employment outcomes	13
	Child care	13
6.	Strong and collaborative partnerships	13
	Collaboration between JSAs	15
	Other initiatives	15
7.	Concluding comments	16

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Employment Services – building on success Issues Paper*.

As an organisation that has worked with vulnerable individuals, children and families for almost 200 years, The Benevolent Society applauds the Government's commitment to improving outcomes for Australian job seekers. We especially commend the Government's recognition of the vocational and non-vocational barriers to workforce participation and the need for stronger partnerships and coordination between employment services and community organisations providing other services, such as child and family services.

Our submission focuses on the following two main themes:

- Meeting the needs of disadvantaged job seekers; and
- Strong and collaborative partnerships.

2. Recommendations

The Benevolent Society recommends that:

1. a system of flexible and realistic participation requirements, appropriate to individual circumstances, be implemented for highly disadvantaged unemployed people, rather than the current 'one-size fits all' model.
2. Centrelink and Job Services Australia (JSA) staff receive comprehensive training about the multiple and complex difficulties faced by highly disadvantaged unemployed people to enable them to work with this group in an understanding and sensitive manner. Such training should include how to identify complex and multiple problems that can act as barriers to employment such as domestic violence, mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse; as well as where and how to refer individuals to support services.
3. there be greater investment in programs and services that teach life skills such as building self-esteem, establishing regular routines, and basic literacy and numeracy, to highly disadvantaged unemployed people.
4. JSAs connect job seekers with secure, quality jobs with advancement prospects, rather than short-term and low paid casual positions.
5. Centrelink and JSAs be required to provide information about the availability of relevant support and assistance, such as the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) child care fee assistance, to job seekers to encourage greater participation in vocational training.
6. the Australian Government mandate collaboration between employment and other support services such as health, housing, child and family and other social support services, to address multiple barriers to employment amongst highly disadvantaged individuals and families, and that adequate funding be provided for this purpose.
7. the model of JSAs be reviewed and restructured to require collaboration between individual JSAs.
8. current 'jobless family projects' be evaluated to determine which specific components generate success and how they can be delivered in a cost effective manner. Research is also needed into

examples of best practice where successful collaboration between child and family services and job service providers has been achieved.

9. the JSA system be reformed to make it more responsive to the needs of individual job seekers and employers. Providers should receive at least as much funding to provide work experience and training for long-term unemployed people as they do for people unemployed for shorter periods.

3. About The Benevolent Society

Snapshot

- The Benevolent Society has nearly 900 staff and over 700 volunteers who, in 2011/12, directly helped 61,000 people in New South Wales and Queensland.
- We support people across the lifespan – delivering services for children and families, older people, women and people with mental illness, and through community development and social leadership programs.
- We deliver services from 64 locations with support from local, state and federal government, businesses, community partners, trusts and foundations.
- Our revenue in 2011/12 was \$84 million, with 81.4% of our income from government sources.
- The Benevolent Society is a company limited by guarantee with an independent Board.

The Benevolent Society is Australia's first charity. We're a not-for-profit and non religious organisation and we've helped individuals, families and communities achieve positive change for 200 years. We educate, support and advocate for personal and societal change, to create a fair society where everybody thrives. The Benevolent Society helps the most vulnerable people in society, and supports people from all backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We believe that building stronger communities will lead to a fairer Australia.

4. Background

Long-term unemployment

We know that the majority of people who become unemployed have little difficulty finding work again, with more than a quarter finding alternative employment within a period of four weeks¹. The median duration of unemployment is 14 weeks, and 80% of unemployed people commence a new job within one year.

However, approximately 19% of unemployed people are classified as 'long-term unemployed'; that is, they have been unemployed for more than a year, and approximately 10% are considered to be 'very long-term

¹ ABS (2013) [Job Search Experience Australia, July 2012](#), Catalogue No. 6222.0

unemployed', having been unemployed for two years or more². Those who are unemployed for more than a year find it increasingly difficult to find work and are 50% more likely to remain unemployed for a further year³.

Our submission focuses on how to improve the employment outcomes of highly disadvantaged, long-term unemployed people and jobless families who are less well served by the current system.

Family joblessness

The Benevolent Society is particularly concerned about joblessness among families and the associated negative impact on their children. By 'family joblessness' we are referring to families with dependent children under 16 years where no adult family member has had reported income from employment in the previous 12 months. While Australia has a high overall level of employment compared to other OECD countries, it also has one of the highest levels of joblessness among families with children⁴. In 2007, close to 15% of Australian children lived in a household where no one was working, compared with an 8.7% average across the OECD. In February 2011, there were 255,000 jobless families in Australia⁵. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are three times as likely to be living in a jobless family as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Nearly three quarters of jobless families are sole parents. Compared to families in general, jobless families are more likely to have children under five years and to have more than one child. They are also more likely to be headed by parent who is under 30 years, and whose highest level of education is year ten high school or below.

Family joblessness that persists for two years or more is of particular concern, not only because of the impact on the unemployed adults, but because of the potential negative impact on children of growing up in poverty. These negative effects include higher rates of poor health and disability and lower educational attainment. Persistent family joblessness also raises the risk that the children will themselves grow up to be jobless⁶.

Lack of paid employment is the most important cause of child poverty. One in six children – that is 575,000 children – live in poverty in Australia⁷. Encouraging economic participation and supporting people into secure, reasonably paid jobs is a critical step in breaking the cycle of poverty.

² ABS (2013) [Job Search Experience Australia, July 2012](#), Catalogue No. 6222.0

³ ACOSS (2012) ['Help to get paid work? \\$500 a year is not enough!'](#), Factsheet: Employment Participation

⁴ Whiteford, Peter. (2009) [Family Joblessness in Australia](#), paper commissioned by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

⁵ DEEWR (2011) [Building Australia's Future Workforce, Better Futures for Jobless Families](#), Budget Fact Sheet 2011-12

⁶ Wren, Toni. (2011) *Our clients are your clients - bringing services together to tackle family joblessness*, Background Paper, The Benevolent Society, www.benevolent.org.au

⁷ ACOSS (2012) [Poverty in Australia](#), ACOSS Paper 194

Barriers to employment faced by jobless families

Many long-term unemployed people face multiple barriers to employment. The Australian Social Inclusion Board categorises barriers to work for jobless families into external and internal factors. External, or structural, factors include:

- tax and transfer systems that may provide a disincentive to employment (income support, and other support such as health care and travel concessions, is withdrawn as recipients enter paid work);
- lack of affordable child care;
- lack of affordable transport to education or employment;
- work places not suitable for combining with child caring role; and
- lack of internet/computer access.

The internal, or individual, factors include:

- health problems (mental and physical);
- disability;
- poor education, literacy, and numeracy skills;
- children with health or behavioural problems;
- domestic violence (ongoing and/or while escaping and re-establishing a new household); and
- housing instability/homelessness.

In 2011 The Benevolent Society commissioned a report to examine the barriers to employment for jobless families and opportunities to better promote pathways to employment among parents in jobless families. The report was based on a review of relevant literature and government reports, and interviews with key industry experts, job services providers and staff within The Benevolent Society. A copy of the report, *Our clients are your clients: bringing services together to tackle family joblessness*, and a summary, *Family joblessness and pathways to employment*, are **attached** to this submission as Appendices 1 and 2.

The Benevolent Society works with long-term unemployed people who are amongst the most vulnerable people in the community and who typically experience several or the barriers identified by the Social Inclusion Board. Some face entrenched intergenerational disadvantage, and many have complex personal issues.

We work with families who lack parenting skills and struggle to cope with raising their children; families affected by domestic violence and/or substance abuse; individuals affected by past trauma, mental illnesses or disabilities; and people with limited education, low levels of literacy, no vocational training and few work skills. We also work with people who, for various reasons, struggle to cope with activities of daily living that most people do not need to think twice about, such as personal hygiene, shopping, cooking, cleaning and transporting children to school. The majority of these families are jobless and rely on income support as their main source of income.

Achieving sustainable and long-term outcomes for this minority group of unemployed people is the greatest challenge facing job service providers. Given the complexity of the issues they face, they typically require intensive, individually tailored, and sometimes prolonged, assistance.

5. Meeting the needs of disadvantaged job seekers

One size does not fit all – the need for a more individualised approach

It is clear that the current system does not work well for disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people. As at June 2012, positive outcomes were recorded for fewer than half of all stream 4 job seekers (the most disadvantaged job seekers), and for fewer than a third of stream 4 job seekers who were out of work for three years or more⁸.

The current JSA system operates on a 'one size fits all' approach that assumes every person who is unemployed is either job-ready or need only attend some vocational and/or job search training in order to be able to find employment. However many of the barriers to employment mentioned above, such as domestic violence, will not be alleviated by training. The current system is not equipped to respond sufficiently to individual circumstances.

Our experience is that there is currently too big a gap between the capacity of the most disadvantaged, unemployed people and the expectations of Centrelink and Job Services Australia (JSA) providers.

The inflexibility of the system also does not allow individual circumstances to be taken into account when determining participation requirements. For many people we work with, rather than helping them obtain employment, the participation requirements are an added and overwhelming burden that acts as a further barrier to employment.

The difficulties caused by the rigidity of the system are illustrated by this case study:

Ella and Milly

Ella (32) and her daughter Milly (8) fled a domestic violence situation after the local police recommended that Ella leave town as they could not guarantee her safety. Ella and Milly left with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and moved in with Ella's parents 200km away. Ella was forced to abandon her employment in order to move her daughter and herself to safety.

Unfortunately, Ella's sister and her two children were already living with Ella's parents in a Department of Housing property, and the Department refused to allow Ella and Milly to live there as well due to overcrowding. The Department relocated Ella and Milly to a hotel for three weeks until they were offered a temporary (3 month) place in a women's shelter. Despite informing Centrelink of her situation – that she was a victim of domestic violence, homeless, emotionally distressed and caring for a child affected by domestic violence – Centrelink still required Ella to meet the full participation requirements by searching for a certain number of jobs per week. Ella was not able to meet all of the requirements and her income support payments were cancelled.

Ella subsequently attended Centrelink with a Benevolent Society caseworker for support and advocacy, to explain her situation. Although her payments were reinstated she was informed that she still had to meet full participation requirements despite her difficult circumstances. In this instance, even the Centrelink customer service officer acknowledged

⁸ DEEWR (2012) [Labour Market Assistance Outcomes, June 2012](#)

the flaws in the system, apologising to Ella ‘for the system’ and saying ‘look, just fill the diary in with ads from seek.com, we don’t check up on them’.

Ella and Milly are still not in stable housing and, until Ella has worked through her immediate issues of homelessness and emotional trauma, it is unrealistic to expect her to meet the participation requirements or to obtain and maintain employment.

In the case of Ella and Milly, it is clear that Ella needed to resolve her housing and safety issues before she could realistically obtain employment, yet the inflexibility of the system did not allow her to do this.

We are aware of situations in which Benevolent Society clients with complex needs have their income support payments suspended for non-compliance but they do not understand why. Suspending a person’s payment does not help them overcome barriers to employment, it simply pushes them further into poverty and creates additional stressors, such as not being able to feed their families and pay bills, mental distress and the risk of homelessness. Suspension of payment impedes rather than enhances people’s capacity to search for work, as their immediate financial challenges must be resolved first.

This is illustrated by the following case study:

Nadia’s story

Nadia is a single mother of two children receiving parenting support from The Benevolent Society. She has never been in the workforce. Nadia is now on Newstart Allowance but has difficulty meeting the participation requirements as she has no qualifications or work experience and does not know where to start. She says she has not found her Job Services Australia agency to be helpful or supportive.

Nadia does not drive. Public transport is limited in her area and expensive for someone on Newstart. She also lacks general living skills such as keeping her home clean and preparing nutritious meals for her family. One of her sons has entered his teens and now exhibits challenging behaviours, which Nadia has difficulty coping with.

Nadia’s Newstart Allowance was recently suspended because she failed to satisfy participation requirements to look for work. The suspension caused significant financial difficulty for the family, adding to already extremely stressful circumstances. The suspension had no effect on Nadia’s job search activities, and served only to place the family in greater financial difficulty and emotional distress.

In the above case study, Nadia would have benefitted from a more flexible system, with less onerous participation requirements, that provided greater, targeted support.

Vocational training

While we applaud the Government’s goal to halve the proportion of Australians aged 20-64 without qualifications at Certificate III level and above, and to double the number of higher level qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) between 2009 and 2020⁹, it is our experience that for highly disadvantaged groups vocational training alone does not necessarily translate into employment. This in turn can negatively affect people’s already low self-esteem and ability to find work.

⁹ DEEWR (2012) [Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance \(JETCCFA\)](#), Fact Sheet

We acknowledge that, in general, further education and training improves employment outcomes. However the assumption that, for highly disadvantaged individuals, education and training will lead to employment fails to acknowledge that many also require intensive and holistic assistance before they will be ready for training or employment.

As mentioned above, people from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with the requirements of mainstream education and vocational training. Many will require intensive support while undertaking training. For some, training that is more practical rather than classroom based may be more suitable¹⁰. The following case study demonstrates how, for people with high needs, vocational training without support fails to achieve the intended objective:

Cheryl's story

Cheryl was keen to work and wanted to undertake training to help her get a job in the beauty industry. Cheryl had experienced multiple disadvantage including trauma and abuse while growing up in foster care. She did not complete school as she had learning difficulties that were not addressed, resulting in poor literacy and low self-esteem. Cheryl wanted to do a course at a private college but was unable to afford the \$2,000 fee. She engaged with a JSA provider who enrolled her in a TAFE course. Unfortunately, Cheryl did not feel able to disclose her learning difficulty and so was not provided with any educational support after she began studying. She was unable to cope with the more academic requirements of the course and dropped out after a few weeks.

Recommendation 1

The Benevolent Society recommends that a system of flexible and realistic participation requirements, appropriate to individual circumstances, be implemented for highly disadvantaged unemployed people, rather than the current 'one-size fits all' model.

Identifying multiple and complex needs in job seekers

It is essential that staff of Centrelink and JSA agencies are equipped to identify the complexities of people's circumstances and to respond appropriately.

The experience of our staff who attend Centrelink with clients, to advocate on their behalf, is that Centrelink staff do not always appear to be adequately trained to appropriately respond to unemployed people with complex needs.

Our experience is that such clients will often not disclose in Centrelink interviews issues such as domestic violence, mental illness, or homelessness (many people who 'couch surf' do not recognise themselves as experiencing secondary homelessness), and are usually unaware that disclosing these issues could result in them receiving additional assistance. In some instances, the limited time available for interviews also results in non-disclosure by clients¹¹. As a result, many job seekers are placed into streams 1 or 2 (least disadvantaged) when streams 3 or 4 would be more suitable.

¹⁰ ACOSS (2007) [The Role of Further Education and Training in Welfare to Work Policies](#), ACOSS Paper 146; Barnett, K & Spoehr J (2008), *Complex not simple, the vocational education and training pathway from welfare to work*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

¹¹ ACOSS (2012) [Towards more efficient and responsive employment services](#), submission to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA), ACOSS Paper 184

Many of the unemployed people we work with report great difficulty dealing with Centrelink and JSAs. They find the participation requirements difficult to understand and some have told us that they felt staff did not understand their situations and were not helpful. Some have described Centrelink customer service officers to us as ‘rude’, and ‘judgemental’.

Such experiences and perceptions discourage people from disclosing their personal issues. These clients then experience stress and anxiety about meeting Centrelink’s or job service providers’ requirements as they feel that they are unrealistic and impossible for them to comply with.

Recommendation 2

The Benevolent Society recommends that Centrelink and Job Services Australia (JSA) staff receive comprehensive training about the multiple and complex difficulties faced by highly disadvantaged unemployed people to enable them to work with this group in an understanding and sensitive manner. Such training should include how to identify complex and multiple problems that can act as barriers to employment such as domestic violence, mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse; as well as where and how to refer individuals to support services.

Pre-employment support for job-readiness

Job-readiness is a concept that means different things to different people. Under the current JSA model it is assumed that vocational education and training will equip a person with the skills to perform a particular type of job and that they will then be job-ready.

However, from an employer’s perspective, a job-ready person may not necessarily need to have specific skills. But they do need to have a general understanding of the responsibilities and obligations involved in employment and how to behave appropriately at work. Those who come from backgrounds of entrenched intergenerational disadvantage may not have this knowledge.

As pointed out in the issues paper, few employers utilise the services of JSA providers and most are reluctant to hire long-term unemployed people because of concerns about work ethic, reliability and motivation.

Recently Mr Phillip Butler, director of Textor Technologies, gave a presentation to the National Place Based Advisory Group in Bankstown, NSW, in which he advised that employers need people who are work ready – not in the sense that they are trained in specific skills – but that they have a practical understanding of:

- the culture of the Australian work place and work ethic;
- getting to and from the work place;
- punctuality;
- workplace manners;
- the role of a supervisor and taking direction;
- basic office skills that are not industry or role specific such as basic telephone and computer skills;
- English language and literacy skills; and
- how to handle workplace conflict.

These are skills that seem to be overlooked by the current employment services system, possibly because they are considered so basic that it is assumed that everyone has them.

Many disadvantaged families live in 'chaotic' households with few basic routines. The Benevolent Society's child and family workers assist such families by helping them to establish routines such as wake up/breakfast/get dressed/leave time to take children to school/housework during day/leave time to pick children up from school/homework time/dinner time and bed time for children. These routines are necessary for families to function and for there to be any possibility of a family member undertaking vocational training or gaining employment.

Our experience is also that many mothers in jobless families lack the self-esteem necessary to compete successfully in the labour market.

The following is an example of an initiative to address self-esteem run by The Benevolent Society:

A pilot program

The Benevolent Society ran an eight week pilot program with unemployed women who we were also supporting through our child and family services. It focused on some of the underlying barriers and psychological factors faced by participants and aimed to build their confidence and self-esteem.

The program was aimed at people who were not yet 'job-ready' but who were prepared to consider looking for work at some time in the future. The program covered topics such as stress management, conflict resolution, communication skills (especially for when dealing with government agencies) and steps that participants would need to take to become job-ready. It provided individual counselling sessions and linked participants to Dressed for Success which enabled them to get two sets of suitable work outfits each.

Feedback from the program participants indicated that the majority felt more 'job-ready' than before, were more confident about being able to get a job and had a better idea of what type of jobs would be suitable for them. They also reported that the one-on-one support was extremely helpful. Some reported that, at the beginning of the course, they couldn't imagine that they would be able to juggle both work and motherhood, but by the end of the course they were able to see how they could make it work and were more motivated to look for work. At the time of writing, two of the seven participants, who had not previously been looking for work, are now actively looking for work, and a third has already secured employment.

Unfortunately, most disadvantaged jobseekers do not have access to this important 'pre-employment' support and training. This is because the main focus of employment services is on achieving short term employment outcomes rather than on intensive, long-term work with individuals to prepare them for sustainable and meaningful employment¹².

Recommendation 3

The Benevolent Society recommends that there be greater investment in programs and services that teach life skills such as building self-esteem, establishing regular routines, and basic literacy and numeracy, to highly disadvantaged unemployed people.

¹² ACOSS (2012) [Towards more efficient and responsive employment services](#), submission to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA), ACOSS Paper 184

Casual employment and long-term employment outcomes

It is important that unemployed people be connected to quality jobs with genuine prospects of advancement and skills development. While casual employment is widely accepted as a 'stepping stone' to long-term employment, in many instances casual employment only provides short-term employment in unskilled and low paid positions, and does not lead to long-term, secure or meaningful employment¹³.

Recommendation 4

The Benevolent Society recommends that JSAs connect job seekers with secure, quality jobs with advancement prospects, rather than short-term and low paid casual positions.

Child care

As mentioned above, almost three-quarters of jobless families are headed by sole parents. A significant barrier for these parents is finding available and affordable child care that will enable them to study or work.

The Benevolent Society commends the Government on the additional funding of \$225.1 million over four years announced in the 2012/13 budget for the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA), which is available to parents receiving income support, mostly sole parents, while they work, study or train to enter or re-enter the workforce.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lack of awareness among job seekers with young children of the availability of JETCCFA.

Recommendation 5

The Benevolent Society recommends that Centrelink and JSAs be required to provide information about the availability of relevant support and assistance, such as the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) child care fee assistance, to job seekers to encourage greater participation in vocational training.

6. Strong and collaborative partnerships

The Benevolent Society supports the Government's determination, in the next round of employment service arrangements, to require partnerships with a wide range of other organisations to bridge the disconnect between employment services and other complementary services and better meet the needs of job seekers. The Benevolent Society suggests that such partnerships be mandated.

There appears to be a high degree of cross-over between jobless families and the clients of child and family services. Among clients of child and family services there is a high prevalence of factors associated with family joblessness such as domestic violence, social isolation, low educational attainment and housing instability.

¹³ Wren, Toni. (2011) *Our clients are your clients - bringing services together to tackle family joblessness*, Background Paper, The Benevolent Society, www.benevolent.org.au

We also know that some of the families living in the ten socio-economically disadvantaged areas where the Government is trialling the *Better Futures, Local Solutions* initiatives, are also clients of child and family services in those areas.

This overlap provides many opportunities for child and family services to better support jobless families into employment – both indirectly through tackling identified barriers and vulnerabilities such as domestic violence or lack of ‘life skills’, and directly by more actively linking clients to job services and training providers.

To date, job service providers and child and family services have tended to operate independently, most likely as result of being funded from different tiers of government or departments. There has not been strong recognition of the overlap of client groups and the opportunities for collaboration to better assist these families.

Some child and family services can and do work collaboratively with projects that offer integrated employment services to jobless families.

An example of a collaborative project that offers integrated services to jobless families is the Local Employment and Access Project (LEAP), currently operating in Wyong, NSW. Using a place-based approach to supporting families with multiple complex barriers, the LEAP program focuses on facilitating a more accessible service system, building on existing strengths. LEAP brings individualised services and supports to people at a local level, whilst also addressing barriers such as social isolation by creating a more connected community. In essence, the project is both service and community driven.

The project works directly with jobless families to identify underlying barriers to employment in a non-threatening way and to provide access to essential services and support. The project is place-based and utilises service linkages and partnerships with specialised and tailored services.

While we do not yet have evaluation findings for this program, our child and family service in Wyong report that this program has resulted in improvements in the way in which Centrelink interacts with and supports jobless families in the area.

There is considerable scope for greater integration and better linkages between the two types of services in order to better address the needs of these families and promote seamless service delivery.

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) suggests that supplementary funding for this purpose could improve the incentive and scope for collaboration between JSAs and other support services such as health, housing and social support services to support deeply disadvantaged job seekers:

*Supplementary funding could improve the incentive and scope for ... integration of employment and other support services for deeply disadvantaged job seekers such as health, housing and social support services. It is clear that mainstream services have not worked well for many job seekers with multiple barriers to employment. Case conferencing and team based approaches to service delivery in which employment, health, housing and other local services collaborate closely are rare on the ground, and these arrangements usually operate in an ad hoc way outside program guidelines and funding arrangements ...*¹⁴

¹⁴ ACOSS (2012) [Towards more efficient and responsive employment services](#), submission to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA), ACOSS Paper 184, p.27

Recommendation 6

The Benevolent Society recommends that the Australian Government mandate collaboration between employment and other support services such as health, housing, child and family and other social support services, to address multiple barriers to employment amongst highly disadvantaged individuals and families, and that adequate funding be provided for this purpose.

However, we do not endorse a model whereby a single organisation provides all types of support. In this we are guided by ACOSS, which states:

While it may be worth experimenting with 'wrap around' service models in which a single provider offers the full range of additional employment, health, housing and other intensive supports needed by people with multiple disadvantages, or brokers the provision of those services among local providers, the risk with these more centralised or 'hub and spoke' models is a loss of the benefits of specialisation and clear lines of accountability to help individuals achieve clear outcomes. If separate programs and services (outside the scope of mainstream employment, health, housing and other programs) were established for this purpose, it would be a challenge to integrate these with the various mainstream programs. Yet this would be essential because the same individuals would typically be clients of a number of programs at the same time, while others would move between the new program and mainstream programs at different points in time¹⁵.

Collaboration between JSAs

As The Benevolent Society is not a JSA we are not in a position report on collaboration between individual JSAs. However, our observation is that the competition between JSAs associated with the current funding system, can be detrimental to job seekers.

For example, we have heard of instances where one JSA has a client who could potentially be matched with an employer on the database of another JSA, but the two JSAs refuse to co-operate to do so. We understand that this occurs because if JSA1 refers the client to JSA2, it will lose the payment attached to the job seeker in favour of JSA2. Similarly, JSA2 will not provide details of the employer on its database to JSA1 so that it can refer its own clients to the employer without competition from JSA1.

We refer the Department to the submission by ACOSS to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA) (copy **attached** as Appendix 3), which proposes suggestions for structural and funding reform to ensure better collaboration between JSAs.

Recommendation 7

The Benevolent Society recommends that the model of JSAs be reviewed and restructured to require collaboration between individual JSAs.

Other initiatives

We commend the Government on funding a number of local initiatives targeting disadvantaged job seekers such as *Better Futures*, *Local Solutions* and the *Family Centred Employment Projects*.

¹⁵ ACOSS (2012) [Towards more efficient and responsive employment services](#), submission to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA), ACOSS Paper 184, p.29

While the Family Centred Employment Projects have not yet been evaluated, some trends have emerged, in relation to disadvantaged jobseekers, which should be reflected in future service models and arrangements:

- Caseloads need to be low, no more than 15-20 families, in order to address the complex and multiple barriers to employment.
- Engagement needs to occur through ‘soft entry points’ such as the local church, rather than through mainstream JSA providers who struggle to engage successfully with such families.
- It is necessary to address the issues in the whole family, not just the unemployed adult, as family issues may act as powerful barriers to employment.
- Social isolation is a significant barrier to employment.
- A long term commitment is needed as it takes time to build trust between service providers and with clients.
- The pathway to employment tends not to be linear, but rather is stop-start with additional supports needed along the way.
- The quality of vocational education and training is inconsistent and some employers do not recognise Certificate III courses delivered by some providers.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families require specialist services¹⁶.

Recommendation 8

The Benevolent Society recommends that current ‘jobless family projects’ be evaluated to determine which specific components generate success and how they can be delivered in a cost effective manner. Research is also needed into examples of best practice where successful collaboration between child and family services and job service providers has been achieved.

7. Concluding comments

In conclusion, we make the following recommendation:

Recommendation 9

The Benevolent Society recommends that the JSA system be reformed to make it more responsive to the needs of individual job seekers and employers. Providers should receive at least as much funding to provide work experience and training for long-term unemployed people as they do for people unemployed for shorter periods.

¹⁶ Wren, Toni. (2011) *Our clients are your clients - bringing services together to tackle family joblessness*, Background Paper, The Benevolent Society, www.benevolent.org.au