



Community Development and Justice Committee

Collaborative Approaches in Government

Disability Services Commission

1. Summary

The Disability Services Commission is the State Government agency responsible for advancing opportunities, community participation and quality of life for people with disabilities. The Commission provides a range of direct services and support, coordinates disability access across government and the private sector and funds agencies that provide services to people with disabilities, their families and carers. These external agencies are primarily in the non-government sector.

Funding for the Commission is from both State and Commonwealth governments, through the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA).

The delivery of services for people with disabilities reaches across levels of government, government departments, the non-government and private sectors. Collaboration is essential in order for this to occur effectively.

The Commission is actively engaged in 'joined-up government' activities at various levels. This submission will outline the activities in which the Commission engages with other bodies to deliver services to people with disabilities in Western Australia.

2. Introduction

The Disability Services Commission welcomes the Community Development and Justice Committee inquiry into Collaborative Approaches in Government. For Western Australians with disabilities it is very clear that collaboration between service providers delivers the most effective services.

For disability services, collaboration is therefore not only desirable but necessary. Our submission to this inquiry will outline some of the ways in which the Commission builds fruitful relationships with other governments, departments, the community and the private sector.

We will look at what factors have been enablers and what factors have been barriers to both the establishment of these relationships and the delivery of services through these collaborations.

It is useful to examine the assumptions that are made when we refer to joined-up government and to define what is expected as an outcome from developing linkages.

Ideally, joined-up government should deliver integrated, citizen centred government services. The extent to which this can occur may be proportional

to the structural changes that are made to create the more horizontal structures described. Alternatively, local level partnerships can deliver where higher level partnerships fail. Among the partnerships entered into by the Disability Services Commission it is most commonly local level partnerships that are identified as successful. These are generally developed around specific issues and the collaborative solutions derived are equally issue-specific.

Most of the higher level formal arrangements between the Commission and other government agencies are governed by Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). MOUs, while establishing the formal basis for a collaborative relationship, may also be used to limit the scope of the collaboration. This has positive and negative aspects that will be described further in the submission.

The development of agency specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) also needs to be examined. It may be that KPIs need to include more specific outcomes relating to interagency collaboration. At present, KPIs might provide some disincentives as they may deter agencies from being innovative in collaborative arrangements by directing resources towards collaborative activities at the risk of failing in core business areas.

It cannot be assumed that joined-up government will deliver more services. The goal of joined-up government should be to deliver existing services in a better way with the citizen at the centre. It should be hoped that efficiencies would be by-products of this process but this cannot be the primary goal of joined-up government.

It is in the area of citizen centred services that the Commission has demonstrated success. In a range of initiatives the Disability Services Commission has been able to make significant progress in ensuring that the services delivered to individuals are those most needed (and desired) by the person and their family. It is through the development of these initiatives that the Commission has also been successful in developing links between itself and other agencies.

Regardless of the level of success in creating citizen centred services, service gaps will exist that joined-up initiatives cannot address because the resources necessary to address those gaps may not be available. In this case the proper response is to provide more services to address service gaps. Greater collaboration results in greater effectiveness in delivering these additional services.

It is the goal of the commission to ensure that mainstreaming of service delivery for people with disabilities is a focus across government and is not the sole responsibility of the Disability Services Commission.

Public authorities have been required by the Western Australian *Disability Services Act 1993* to have a Disability Service Plan since 1995. A 2004 amendment to the Act introduced Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). DAIPs are required by all local and State Government authorities and, importantly, by their agents and contractors.

Essentially, DAIPs aim to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunities and choices as the rest of the community. This has been critical in creating an understanding across government that it is a 'service' issue, not a 'disability' issue and that we all have a responsibility to work together to ensure access to services and the community.

This submission will include responses against the first three Terms of Reference with a particular focus on the third as this is an area in which the Commission feels it has had substantial success.

3. Term of Reference (1) Models of partnerships between public (including local government) and private sectors for the development of policy and the delivery of services, with particular emphasis on human service and community development.

The Disability Services Commission is engaged in providing services to people with disabilities and with providing funding to other agencies and the non-government sector to deliver services to people with disabilities.

The most significant and enduring relationships are between the Commission and the non-government sector that is funded by the Commission to provide a substantial proportion of all specialist disability services.

The Commission has a direct relationship with over 120 organisations, including local governments, and the trend over time has been to increase delivery of services through organisations with which we have a relationship, rather than directly by the Commission itself.

Indicative of this is the proportion of funding directed to external service providers. In 1993–94 only 30% of funds were provided to the non-government sector for services, but in 2006–07 the Commission provides around 60% of its total budget to the non-government sector for services. This reflects the provision of sustained growth by successive State Governments to meet demand for disability services rather than a decline Commission provided services.

The Commission has a legislated responsibility to ensure that people with a disability can access government services.

This includes ensuring that every government agency, local government and government contractors have in place Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs). These plans provide the principal link between the Commission and all government agencies and ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are considered in both strategic and operational activities of organisations.

3.1. Key issues

- Many relationships have grown organically and are issues-based. The level of collaboration in this model tends to be high, and highly citizen centred. That is, the collaboration occurs as the result of identified needs and relevant agencies do what is required together to meet that need.
- Formal collaborative arrangements are usually based around an MOU.
- Formal agreements tend to set the framework for collaboration, but the more successful examples have multiple levels of communication.
- Significant collaborations are built around areas of joint interest – for example the relationship between the Commission and the Department for Housing and Works.
- Key outcomes have been based on better responses to needs and more effective communication.

3.2. Discussion

The Commission has established collaborative relationships with a wide range of organisations in efforts to enhance the delivery of services to people with disabilities.

The examples below outline how a well established relationship can support delivery of positive service outcomes for all stakeholders.

Disability Services Commission and the Department of Housing and Works

The Commission has an effective collaborative arrangement with the Department of Housing and Works.

The primary goal of this relationship is to ensure that sufficient housing is made available for people with disabilities and that those houses are appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities. Initially this included the transfer of some assets from the Commission to DHW. The arrangement also includes transfer of funds required to support services.

The framework for the relationship is provided by an MOU but the real strength is built around a good communication strategy. This includes operational level discussions every six weeks and strategic discussion four times a year.

This has ensured that the arrangement has continued regardless of organisational change including structural and personnel changes at all levels.

The outcomes of the arrangement include:

- input into strategic planning for future needs by both agencies into each others planning process resulting in;
- sufficient housing being made available to meet the funded accommodation services.

Tri-State Disability Strategic Framework

'The Northern Territory, South Australian and Western Australian Governments acknowledge and accept their shared obligation to respond to the needs of people with disabilities living in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands of Central Australia'.¹

The Tri-State Disability Strategic Framework was developed in response to the need to provide better disability services to people living in the NPY lands of Central Australia. The agreement identifies three key areas of achievement – and uniquely these represent outcomes for government, service providers and people with disabilities.

For Governments: To work as one, building upon and formalising effective arrangements between governments in order to make better use of resources. The Framework will enable joint planning, development and funding of services between governments, non-government services and communities.

For Providers: Simplified funding and reporting arrangements with government funders acknowledging local systems, protocols and practices that promote effective and efficient use of resources.

For People with Disabilities: Single eligibility criteria promoting easier access to services and the ability to move between jurisdictions without compromising continuity of services.

The principles on which the agreement was established include:

- Working together
- Streamlining services
- Improving access
- Getting better results
- Building on what already exists

The Tri-State agreement has been successful in establishing collaborative service delivery that is responsive to individual needs, the needs of remote communities and the service providers who deliver services to those communities.

The fairly specific focus of the agreement, including the geographic target of the NPY lands helps to ensure the viability of the strategy.

3.3. Conclusions

- Joined-up arrangements should have the capability to survive shifts in organisational structure, and the movement of personnel or their effect must be limited to short term.
- Memorandums of understanding provide a useful framework to initiate a collaborative approach but cannot constitute the entire approach and must be supported by a relationship and at multiple levels between agencies.
- Input into planning processes is useful in sustaining the conditions that permitted the existence of the collaboration.
- Agencies that have identified and built collaborative arrangements should be given administrative flexibility to maximise the benefit from such arrangements – consistent with broader government policy.
- Agreements that have a specific focus or clear area of operations are easier to sustain.

4. 4. Term of Reference (2) the role of relevant legislation, economic instruments (e.g. grants, targets), information, direct intervention, in achieving effective and efficient government services

The Commission is enabled by the *Disability Services Act 1993* (WA). This legislation outlines the principles and establishes the framework that governs the operation of the Commission.

This legislation has been very important in establishing the right of people with disabilities to access the community and government services. In support of this goal, the Commission has provided grants in a number of programs to enhance access and to ensure recognition of the needs of people with disabilities.

The experience of the Commission is that currently the legislative frameworks and models of service in Western Australia are still relatively vertical in application. Attempts to restructure government services appear to have been focussed on specific issues, and where this concentration of effort has been accompanied by either legislative support or performance targets that promote collaboration, positive outcomes can be identified.

It is, however, interesting to note that recent legislative changes have had more horizontal applications. This includes the 2004 amendments to the *Disability Services Act 1993* – particularly clause 5 that gives effect to the Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs).

It is already becoming clear that DAIPs are influencing the approach to service provision across government, and this is perhaps even more apparent at the local government level where the practical application of DAIPs seems to have a more immediate impact in improving access for people with disabilities.

4.1. Key issues

- Legislation has proved a positive approach to ensuring that people with disabilities are able to access government services and the community. This includes the requirement that all State Government agencies and local governments have in place a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP).
- Grants-based collaborations can have very positive outcomes but are usually limited in their duration.

- Targets such as those set through KPIs, while providing some agency direction, can also distract from attempts to build linkages. This is particularly true when the establishment of the relationship draws resources from areas for which there are clear performance requirements.
- Barriers for small service providers exist when they provide services for multiple government agencies. This occurs most commonly in rural and remote areas where service providers must report across a range of accountability frameworks and meet the various quality assurance frameworks.
- As agencies independently refocus their activities according to internally identified requirements, the gaps between services can widen. This is particularly noticeable in the way that agencies determine what services are required – ie is the issue related to disability or other circumstances?

4.2. Discussion

Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs)

The Western Australian *Disability Services Act 1993* requires State Government agencies and local governments to develop and implement a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP). This requirement was the result of a 2004 amendment to ensure that the effect of the plans was as far reaching as possible. DAIPs provide a planned and systematic approach to progressively improve access for people with disabilities.

The DAIPs are aimed to deliver a number of desired outcomes for people with disabilities. These are framed as considerations to be taken into account by agencies and local government and include:

1. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, a public authority.
2. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of a public authority.
3. People with disabilities receive information from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.
4. People with disabilities receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of a public authority as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.

5. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to a public authority.
6. People with disabilities have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by a public authority.

State Government agencies and local governments submit their DAIPs to the Commission and report annually to the Commission and in their own annual report on their progress against the outcomes.

DAIPs are public documents and this transparency has had a positive impact on the quality of DAIPs and helped maintain a focus on practical measures to improve accessibility.

Strong Families

'Strong Families is an interagency case management approach to working with families with complex needs. While the Department for Community Development is the agency responsible for overall implementation, the program is conducted as an interagency initiative in which all of the key stakeholders have a strong sense of ownership.'²

The Disability Services Commission is a stakeholder in the Strong Families Program and sees it as a workable model of collaborative government, but one that has not yet been as effective as it has potential to be – particularly in country areas. It has shown benefits, particularly within the metropolitan area, and the framework for the relationship between agencies has started to deliver outcomes among marginalised and vulnerable groups.

The Commission would identify the main strengths of the Strong Families program as:

- Making sure the stakeholders coordinate actions in consultation with families.
- Develops service arrangements around the needs of the person.
- Delivers positive outcomes at the individual level.

4.3. Conclusions

- Legislative and other enabling instruments need to be considered carefully to ensure they don't stifle innovation in collaboration.

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Department for Communities website – Accessed 4 March, 2008
(<http://www.community.wa.gov.au/DFC/AboutDFC/Initiatives/GordonInquiry/Strong+Families.htm>)

- A strategy of joined-up government needs to identify the natural areas of linkage and ensure that legislation or targets will support the intended collaborative efforts.
- Even at the legislative level, consideration on the impact at the level of the individual is likely to deliver more successful outcomes.

Term of Reference (3) the use of citizen centred services - how different jurisdictions are transforming and integrating government processes around the needs of the citizens to improve service delivery and improve well being.

The Commission, as both a direct service provider and funder of service providers, has a unique understanding of what it means to provide services at an individual level. There is a distinct culture within the Commission of placing the needs of people with disabilities first.

The Commission's response to this Term of Reference will examine its own use of citizen centred planning and service delivery, as this is an area in which the organisation has had considerable success.

The Commission has also been fortunate in some of the long-established relationships it has forged with other government agencies that have enhanced the effectiveness of our service delivery.

Strong government support for the disability sector has also ensured that, across government, the issues of people with disabilities are acknowledged. Ensuring that this translates into services depends on the capacity of all agencies to respond appropriately to the needs of people with disabilities seeking government services.

The Commission's role as principal advocate to government of these needs has resulted in the development of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan requirement, which has been a significant step to ensuring both awareness and responsiveness to the needs of people with disabilities.

This is one of the more horizontal structures that cuts across government and through levels of government (State and Local) and also applies to certain types of relationships outside government. The DAIPs, supported by a legislative framework, represent a significant step in citizen centred responses – albeit to one particular group of citizens.

The unique history and somewhat unusual structure of the Commission have enabled service provision to be focussed on individual needs. The Commission has a governance structure that includes a board with some oversight of Commission business. The board includes people with disabilities, family members of people with disabilities and representatives from the community.

This structure contributes to an approach that historically has always required a focus on the individual. Indeed many of the programs for people with a disability now operating in Western Australia originated in advocacy for just a small number of people with disabilities.

In part this has occurred because it was relatively easy to shift a small government agency in the direction of citizen centred services. In government generally the inertia of government reduces the effectiveness of radical shifts to service delivery. The vertical structures of government, reinforced through the performance reporting framework, can act to reduce the incentive to collaborate, particularly if the collaboration may be seen as putting achievement of key performance criteria at risk.

The Commission is not immune to this administrative malady, but has the benefit of proximity to the disability sector which includes non-government service providers, highly vocal advocacy groups, families, carers and people with disabilities. This proximity helps focus the Commission on responding to the needs of individuals. The process of determining eligibility for funding and allocating that funding (particularly in cases of critical need), helps to emphasise the specific issues faced by individuals.

It is also an immediate and constant reminder of the need for additional resources and a driver for ensuring that existing resources are used as effectively as possible.

Following an extensive review of the disability sector in Western Australia in 2006–07, the Commission has endorsed the Community Living Plan as a strategy for broadening the range of community living options available to people with disabilities. Under the Community Living Plan, the Disability Services Commission, in collaboration with the sector, is exploring and developing new and innovative accommodation support options.

The first stage of the Project has been the development of an information resource containing 'best practice' examples of innovative national and international community living support arrangements. The innovative examples will be analysed to identify alternative pathways for individuals/families to plan and develop community living support arrangements which will enable people with disabilities to live with support in the community. A Community Living Concept Plan will also be developed with a guiding framework for the future.

The second stage of the Project will commence in March 2008 and will involve developing a Community Living Implementation Plan with a 15 year time horizon. This stage will make use of key demographic data resulting from the new State Disability Plan.

This is a significant opportunity to deliver innovative and cost-effective services that are truly person-centred.

Key issues

- The Commission's existence was brought about as a result of an identified need to respond directly to the needs of people with disabilities. 'Citizen centred' is the natural starting point for disability services.
- Remaining citizen centred is not quite as simple.
- Most citizen centred programs started in response to specific needs then grew to accommodate a broader group.
- Occasionally, personalities can determine the success or failure of collaborative approaches. Strategies to ensure 'ownership' of collaborative efforts at an organisational level can ensure sustainability of the effort.
- Citizen centred services cannot be developed and maintained if we are not continually communicating with 'the citizens'.

5.2. Discussion

The Commission has been engaged in a shift from passive recipient welfare to the development of a co-production process where the individual, family or carer participates in the decision making AND the management of service delivery.

This includes the provision of individualised funding through a shared management model, including the capacity for individuals to manage their own funding and select both the services and the service providers of their choice. This allows the individual to purchase the services they determine are most likely to reduce the effect of their disability and increase their access within the community.

Most notable among the Commission's individually focussed service initiatives are the Local Area Coordinators. These people are the key link to the community and the most direct and immediate point of contact. The Local Area Coordination program is unique, although several other Australian jurisdictions have recently adopted the model.

Local Area Coordination

The Disability Services Commission provides Local Area Coordination support in Perth and throughout all regional areas of Western Australia. Local Area Coordinators (LACs) are based in local communities enabling support to be personalised, flexible and responsive. LACs aim to build and maintain effective working relationships with individuals and families in their local area.

The LAC operates as a service coordinator rather than a service provider and, as such, can help the person with a disability and their families/carers to plan, select and receive needed supports and services.

LACs also contribute to building inclusive communities through partnership and collaboration with individuals, families and carers, local organisations and the broader community. The overall aim of Local Area Coordination is to support people with disabilities to live within welcoming and supportive communities.

A 2002 review by the Minister for Disability Services found that the LAC program is highly valued by people with disabilities, their families and their carers, and provides good value for money.

The role of the Local Area Coordinator:

- Build and maintain effective working relationships with individuals, families and their communities.
- Provide accurate and timely information. Assist individuals, families and communities to access information through a variety of means.
- Provide individuals and families with support and practical assistance to clarify their goals, strengths and needs.
- Promote self-advocacy. Provide advocacy support and access to independent advocacy when required.
- Contribute to building inclusive communities through partnership and collaboration with individuals and families, local organisations and the broader community.
- Assist individuals and families to utilise personal and local community networks to develop practical solutions to meet their goals and needs.
- Assist individuals and families to access the supports and services they need to pursue their identified goals and needs.

Roebourne Engagement Project

The Roebourne Engagement Project was commenced to increase the engagement of Aboriginal people with a disability and their families to Local Area Coordination and to link families with mainstream support and early intervention programs.

The engagement of Aboriginal people living in Roebourne into mainstream services has historically been very low. Current statistics indicate that only nine people are participating in local therapy services, although the Centre for Inclusive Schooling has 28 students registered for support.

The engagement project sets out to link Commission management and LACs with school, project officers, health services, families and individuals in ensure that people with disabilities are able to access the services they need.

Autism Early Intervention Program

Western Australia is one of the few Australian states that provides early intervention services for children with Autism through the disability sector.

The Commission's Early Intervention services are delivered both direct from the Commission and through funded service providers such as the Autism Association. The services involve direct contact with families to develop the best approach within the available funding including the creation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs). These plans are initiated by the Commission but identify the collaborative effort required to meet the needs of the individual.

Microboards

Throughout Australia there are a number of innovative models of accommodation support that provide quality and cost effective community living in alternate formats to the traditional models of accommodation support. One such model that has recently been funded in Western Australia is microboards.

Microboards have successfully operated in Canada for the past 20 years including Canada's remote areas. Microboards enable a small group of family and friends to incorporate in order to provide the administrative and service framework for one person with a disability. This has been developed by Western Australia based on the Vela Microboard concept.

The concept identifies three critical components:

- The process must be focused on the dreams and wishes of the person for whom the board is being created.
- All microboard members must be in a close, voluntary, and committed relationship with the person for whom the board is being created.
- These close relationships are the foundation of the board and must be honoured above all other activities.³

The value of the microboard lies in the ability of the board and the person with a disability to have the level of control over their services required to help them become a participating member of the community rather than the passive recipient of welfare.

Microboards operate on the following principles:

1. Microboard members must have a personal relationship with the person for whom the board is created.
2. All people are assumed to have the capacity for self-determination and this capacity will be acknowledged and respected and demonstrated in all the dealings of the microboard.
3. All decisions made by a microboard will demonstrate regard for the person's safety, comfort and dignity.
4. The more complex a person's needs are, the more important it is that the services are customised and individualised to support those needs.
5. All microboard members will conduct their board business in the spirit of mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration.
6. All services developed and/or contracted are based on the person's needs, not availability of services.
7. Microboards will only negotiate contracts with people and/or agencies able to demonstrate a concrete ability to provide services as identified by the microboard. These services will be person centered and customised to meet the individual's needs.
8. The staff that work for or with the person through their microboard are not 'attached' to the buildings in which the person lives, works, volunteers or recreates. They work for the person, not an agency or business.⁴

Microboards are one of several models of community living that have been successfully operating in Australia and overseas. Others include circles of support, neighbourhood networks, mobile/flexible attendant care, and co-resident schemes/arrangements. The Commission considers that these models provide an excellent opportunity to deliver citizen centred services.

³ Accessed online at the Vela Microboard website on 12 March, 2008
(http://www.microboard.org/what_is_vela.htm)

⁴ Accessed online at the Vela Microboard website on 12 March, 2008
(<http://www.microboard.org/velaprinciples.htm>)

5.3. Conclusion

- The Commission considers that citizen centred services provide the best opportunity to develop collaborative approaches in government.
- Service collaboration must be focussed, with clear outcomes.
- The primary aim should be service quality and effectiveness.
- Value-for-money should be a natural result of improved effectiveness, but not necessarily a primary objective.
- Agreements that support collaborative agreements should be flexible enough to withstand normal organisational changes within individual stakeholder groups.

6. Term of Reference (4) any other relevant issue.

The Commission has no further issues to raise.

7. Conclusions

- The Disability Services Commission acknowledges that while there have been difficulties in implementing collaborative approaches to government, the principles on which the approach is based are highly desirable.
- In particular there is a need to focus on citizen centred services. In the experience of the Commission, this approach is not only desirable but essential.
- Collaborative approaches cannot be used successfully to address under-resourcing. Under-resourcing may in fact be a barrier to successful collaborative approaches.
- Other barriers include the structural frameworks for agreements that can be used to limit participation if the focus shifts from the people to whom services are being provided to the resource requirements of the stakeholders.
- Legislation that acts horizontally across government can have a positive effect but care must be taken to ensure that the requirements of the legislation do not adversely impact on the delivery of services to the community.

- Collaborative approaches that encourage the development of links at all levels between participating agencies are more likely to be sustainable and successful. This includes strong communication channels and input into strategic and operational planning – or at the very least communication on strategic and operational intent.
- Collaborative approaches achieve the best outcomes when targeted at an issue important to all stakeholders and championed as such within the organisations involved.

31 March 2008