



From Protection to Productivity

An Evaluation of the Transition to Work Program

Ageing, Disability and Home Care
Department of Family and Community Services NSW
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Family &
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the findings of the 2009 evaluation of the Transition to Work (TTW) Program. The TTW program is one of two post school programs for young people with a disability implemented by Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Service NSW in 2005 to replace the previous post school Adult Training Learning and Support (ATLAS) Program.

TTW is a two year program which achieves employment for young people with a disability. The purpose of the program is to provide young people with disability with the skills development, vocational preparation, and support they need to transition from year twelve to sustainable employment.

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to examine the results that have been achieved for participants in the TTW Program so far, and to identify the critical factors for success, barriers that limit the achievement of intended results, and any opportunities for further program development.

The primary data sources for the evaluation included:

- A literature review
- A series of case studies
- An analysis of the outcome data provided by ADHC
- The views of service providers, as gathered through a series of workshops
- The views of service users, their parents and/or carers gathered through a series of workshops, and
- Interviews with other key informants.

Service User Profile Summary

Since its implementation in 2005, 2771 service users have entered the TTW program. Outcome data is available only for those 1153 service users who have completed their two year program. This dataset forms the basis of this evaluation.

The 1153 TTW service users are drawn from the following cohorts:

- Ex-ATLAS service users: 289
- 2004 school leavers (commencing TTW in 2005): 462
- 2005 school leavers (commencing TTW in 2006): 402

They comprise 649 males (56.3%), 501 females (43.5%), and 3 unknown (0.3%).

A total of 54 TTW participants (4.68%) are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) origin, 58 (5.03%) were born in a country other than Australia, and 91 (7.89%) primarily speak a language other than English.

The profile of TTW users according to primary disability type is as follows:

Primary Disability	Total	Percentage
Acquired brain injury	21	1.8%
Asperger's Syndrome	2	0.2%
Autism	86	7.1%
Cerebral palsy	13	1.1%
Deaf blind	1	0.1%
Epilepsy	18	1.6%
Hearing impairment	12	1.0%
Intellectual	729	63.2%
Muscular dystrophy	1	0.1%
Neurofibromatosis	1	0.1%
Physical	93	8.1%
Psychiatric	21	1.8%
Specific Learning/ADHD	12	1.0%
Speech	5	0.4%
Spina bifida	2	0.2%
Spinal Cord Injury	1	0.1%
Unknown	105	9.1%
Visual impairment	30	2.6%
Total	1153	100%

Key Evaluation Findings

The Literature

The evaluation found that the TTW program, as specified in the program guidelines, is consistent with the literature on best practice. There is a very close correspondence between what the literature recommends as effective practice in career and transition initiatives for young people with disabilities, and the principles upon which the TTW program is founded.

A number of key ingredients for successful transition recur in the literature, including the importance of:

- offering opportunities for real work experience and work placements;
- designing a job to suit the individual;
- an awareness and accommodation of employer needs;
- a service perspective in regards to meeting the needs of employers;
- individualised programs, planning and services;

- flexibility in service provision;
- instruction in life skills to support work skills; and
- integrated support from a number of organisations and/or sectors.

Program Implementation

The evaluators reached the following conclusions in response to the research question:

“To what extent has the TTW program been implemented as intended”?

TTW is a well-designed initiative

In relation to the features of current best practice in transition services, the evaluation found that the TTW program is a very well designed initiative. A number of factors were found to contribute to the program’s success, including its:

- focus on employment outcomes;
- emphasis upon the provision of training in a work environment;
- person-centred nature;
- responsiveness to changing work needs;
- focus upon building effective partnerships between stakeholders in the transition process (schools, parents, employers, etc.);
- emphasis upon culturally competent services; and
- responsiveness to the needs of people living in rural and remote areas.

Through its attention to these principles, the TTW program in many instances was seen to create effective bridges that assist young people to move from school to employment, or in some cases, further education. Parents, service providers and young people reported that the transitions being made by young people would be unlikely to occur without the supports available through the TTW program.

There is wide variation in the way TTW services are delivered

The evaluation found wide variation in service provision across various components of service delivery, which include:

- the extent of individualised learning;
- where learning occurs (i.e. centre-based, workplace-based, community-based);
- the nature of skills developed (generic life skills versus vocationally specific skills);
- the extent and nature of provider linkages with labour market networks;
- the orientation of service providers toward achieving employment outcomes;
- frequency and duration of program (days/hours per week, timing of exiting the program);

- extent/closeness of relationships with the schools sector; and
- familiarity with/approach to Aboriginal service users and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Broadly, it was found that delivery of services could be categorised into three areas of focus:

1. Service providers who were committed to achieving employment outcomes for young people. Their service models were outwardly focused and structured to provide young people with work-based, experiential learning opportunities, in both supported and open employment settings.
2. Service providers who considered that their focus within TTW was to prepare young people for independent lives, which might incorporate employment, but were not required to deliver an actual employment outcome. They considered that their responsibilities were met when a service user was ready to make the transition to a DEN service.
3. A small number of service providers, including some services that appeared less well equipped to facilitate work placements, who were of the view that the expectation of an employment outcome was excessively prescriptive and potentially at odds with their organisational philosophy. In these instances service provision was more likely to be focused on Community Participation type activities.

The evaluation found that satisfactory outcomes from the viewpoint of service users and families were most consistent with the delivery focus of the first category of service providers.

Work experience opportunities and workplace training are critical to an effective TTW program

The provision of work experience opportunities and training in actual workplaces consistently correlated with favourable program outcomes. While some providers reported difficulty in securing work experience placements that enabled training to take place in actual workplaces, it was also found that where TTW provider staff understood the local labour market, were confident and proactive in approaching employers, and were able to tailor 'jobs' to suit the needs of the young person, service users had much greater exposure to carefully constructed work experiences, and were more likely to achieve employment outcomes.

The level of personalisation of services varies across different providers

All service providers espoused the importance of person-centred, highly individualised service provision. However, the commitment, capability and capacity of organisations to deliver personalised services varied according to location, client cohort size, and staffing levels and models of delivery. Service models ranged from programs that offered 1:1 support for each client's unique program, through to services delivered primarily through classroom and work setting-based group activities. The development of an individual transition plan for each service user was the most commonly used mechanism to give effect to this important principle of the TTW program.

There were differing views on how the program responds to the changing work needs of service users

While on the whole the program was seen as responsive to the changing needs/preferences of service users, some service users and providers commented that two years was not enough time to effectively meet each person's needs, while others suggested the program needed to be as short and sharp as possible to avoid fostering the stigma associated with long-term unemployment.

There was also wide variance in the extent to which service users were encouraged to transition to work if they were considered work ready before the completion of their two-year entitlement. Some providers had a clearly structured program that young people proceeded through in a time-sequenced way, while others had a more variable menu of options and activities to accommodate the different learning trajectories of individuals.

Satisfied parents spoke highly of the responsiveness of service providers to young people's developmental needs. The transition planning process, and the ongoing review of work experience placements were seen as important factors in the success of TTW in responding to the changing needs of service users.

Teaching independent living skills was found to be an important part of the TTW program, but the vocational application of this was not always clearly established

Independent living skills nominated as important to good program outcomes included: travel training, money management and budgeting, time management, personal hygiene and presentation skills, and self-care activities such as shopping, cooking and exercise. However, in some cases the vocational orientation of such learning was not always readily apparent, particularly in the case of providers that did not have a strong focus upon employment outcomes and workplace-based learning.

The evaluation uncovered mixed views and inconclusive findings as to the cultural competency of TTW services being delivered

Providers reported a varying capacity to cater for cultural differences. Most considered that their person-centred approaches adequately catered for service users from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Some providers expressed concerns about the underrepresentation of young Aboriginal people, but this was generally attributed to poor school retention rates, or the difficulty in establishing effective connections with Aboriginal communities.

A number of strategies were suggested by providers to deal with this issue, including:

- creating better linkages between Aboriginal Education Officers and transition teachers in the schooling section and TTW providers;
- becoming embedded in local Indigenous Communities by participating in ongoing rather than sporadic ways;
- employing Indigenous staff to create inroads into Aboriginal communities and to enhance cultural awareness within TTW service agencies; and
- ensuring that young people at risk of dropping out of school are identified and directed to TTW service providers, who invest in becoming part of the network of alternative education and training service providers that cater to at-risk youth.

The outcomes data did not provide any reason to be concerned about the cultural competence or culturally appropriate performance of service providers. Outcomes for both CALD and ATSI service users are in line with the broader TTW population, and there is no evidence that services to CALD or ATSI service users are any better or worse than those extended to all service users.

However, observations gained from the client workshops suggested that there were general communication issues relating to the way in which transition teachers and service providers represented the program to parents and families and the way in which this representation was understood by service users. In the case of the few CALD families who attended the workshops, it seems as though these communication issues were exacerbated, and that agreement or shared understanding as to the purpose of the program was not always reached.

A number of challenges were identified in relation to delivering services in regional, rural and remote areas

Some service users perceived that there is a limited choice of service providers in some regional and remote areas. On the other hand, there was concern amongst some providers that the recent expansion of the number of

service providers may threaten the viability of existing providers given the limited client base in such areas. With the increased number of service providers in 2010, it will be important that the impact on all service providers is closely monitored.

Transport issues, difficulty in finding work experience placements and jobs, as well as difficulties in finding and retaining skilled staff were also identified as issues in regional and remote areas.

The outcome data also demonstrated that there are minor variations in outcomes between metro and regional areas. Specifically, regional areas have 2% more exits to "unknown", 4% more exits to CP, and 5% less outcomes to employment.

Effective partnerships between service user, parent/carer and provider are of key importance to an effective TTW service

A key design feature of TTW is its emphasis upon the tripartite relationship between service user, parent/carer and provider. Providers unanimously confirmed the importance of engaging with parents, although in some instances the over engagement of parents was seen as a barrier to effective program delivery.

Where the process of transitioning from school to the TTW program had been carefully and sensitively managed, and service users and their parents had been kept well informed throughout the transition process (including the assessment process), the likelihood of better outcomes appeared to increase.

The extent to which providers are able to incorporate effective parental engagement strategies into their program delivery is a critical factor of success, and also, of client/parent satisfaction.

There is considerable variance in the way individual transition planning is implemented across different providers

Individual Transition Plans were found to be an important feature of most TTW services. Once again, however, there was wide variation in the extent to which plans informed the developmental career and transition needs of each young person, and the extent to which they were designed to fit, or were shaped by the 'tried and tested' service provision model of the provider.

Opportunities were identified for improvements to the structure and mechanisms of TTW funding

It was broadly recognised that TTW is well funded, but some providers reported concern regarding the cost effectiveness of the current TTW administrative and funding mechanisms. Certain program inflexibilities, such as its fixed duration, the restrictions on the number of hours that service users can spend in paid employment and uncertainty about which program outcomes were valued, meant that in some cases providers perceived that optimal value was not being realised from the application of TTW funding.

Some service providers felt that the way in which young people were assessed for TTW meant that many service users were unsuitable for the program, and therefore unable to achieve an outcome and likely to be transferred into the Community Participation program. Some saw this as an ineffective use of program funds.

Flexibility in program delivery needs to be balanced with a need for greater consistency in service provision

The program guidelines for the TTW program clearly need to allow sufficient flexibility for service providers to respond to the differing needs and capabilities of service users, and the geographical and labour market context in which their programs operate.

However, variations in service provision seem to arise as much from differing interpretations of the requirements of the program, beliefs about the legitimate place of employment in the lives of the people with disability, and the knowledge and skills of providers, as they do from responsiveness to individual need. There is therefore a need to strengthen the program guidelines to ensure a common understanding of the purpose of the program and consistency of service provision across the state.

There is a need for greater clarity regarding data categories and greater accountability for reporting of outcomes

The evaluation found that there was considerable variation in the ways providers applied data reporting categories. This suggests a need to more clearly define outcome categories in the program guidelines to ensure greater clarity and accountability amongst providers. From an evaluative point of view, the difficulty of correlating reported data against the Key Result Areas of the program guidelines made it difficult to comment definitively on program outcomes.

Given the confusion reported by service providers regarding these important definitional issues, it is important that ADHC ensure that the amended data categories are thoroughly understood by all service providers and that data returns are audited for accuracy from time to time.

The Achievement of Results

The evaluation considered:

To what extent has the program been successful in getting results for young people across the Key Result Areas?

The TTW program guidelines indicate that the success of the TTW program will be measured by the extent to which young people with a disability:

1. Move to open or supported employment at the end of their program or their course of study.

2. Perform satisfying and meaningful work consistent with their employment goals.
3. Develop the skills and qualifications necessary for the transition to sustainable employment.
4. Sustain their work and training commitments.
5. Who are Aboriginal or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have fair access to support and achieve job outcomes comparable to other young people in the program¹.

The Views of Service Users, Parents and Carers

In consulting with service users and their families, the evaluation found that in many cases the program was delivering well on its intended outcomes. Many parents believe good employment outcomes would almost certainly not have been achieved without the strategic interventions of the TTW program.

Service users and families felt that the key benefit of the TTW program was that it gave young people with disability the extra time, support, skills and experience they needed to be able to become ready for work and to become active, contributing members of the community. Even where parents felt that their son/daughter had not received quality service from a particular service provider, they were in no doubt about the overall value and importance of the TTW program.

Service users and their families also identified a number of areas for improvement, in relation to:

- communication/rapport between providers and service users/families;
- the role of schools in providing information and access to providers;
- the availability of adequate work experience opportunities;
- the definition of the program's ultimate purpose/ideal outcome;
- the dilution, in some cases, of the program's vocational focus;
- confusion over the difference between TTW and Community Participation programs;
- uncertainty regarding the nature of the assessment process; and
- the need for more flexibility in program duration and delivery.

¹ Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Transition to Work Program Guidelines (2008), p.9

The Views of Service Providers

It was almost universally acknowledged by service providers that without a program such as TTW, transitioning from school to open or supported employment would not be a viable option for many TTW service users. Most service providers saw the program as delivering an essential transitional service that supported young people whose chances of securing employment would otherwise be extremely unlikely and remote.

Many of the reasons cited by service providers for the various successes of the program were similar to those cited by service users, parents and carers:

- its focus upon vocational outcomes;
- its allowance of time and space for the maturation of service users;
- its ability to customise, and be flexibly adapted around the client and their aspirations;
- its ability to effectively upskill service users over 2 years to an employable standard;
- its raising of service users' self-confidence and self-esteem; and
- its ability to achieve sustainable and meaningful employment outcomes for service users.

Most service providers, therefore, expressed certainty that the TTW program fills an important service gap. It was seen to provide essential assistance for individuals that require additional support to become work ready.

As is the case with many state-wide or national initiatives, there is some variation in the extent to which the implementation is in strict alignment with the program principles, i.e. the extent to which different service models:

- focus on employment outcomes;
- provide training in a work environment;
- are person-centred;
- are responsive to changing work needs;
- build effective partnerships between all stakeholders in the transition process (schools, parents, employers, etc.);
- focus on building independence;
- are culturally competent;
- are responsive to the needs of people living in rural and remote areas;
- are delivered in partnership; and
- are cost effective.

Outcomes Data

As stated previously, 1,153 young people have completed their two year TTW program since the program was implemented in 2005. This section summarises the findings of the outcomes of these young people in relation to the Key Result Areas of the program.

Key Result Area One

The first Key Result Area is that young people move to open or supported employment at the end of their program or course of study.

There are three recorded outcomes in the dataset that are consistent with this goal. These are:

- Exit to Employment – Other
- Exit to Employment – Open
- Exit to Employment – Supported.

It is the case that just under 49% of TTW service users (48.74%) have achieved outcomes that meet Key Result Area one. Given that the program is intended to assist people with moderate to high support needs, who may not otherwise achieve employment, TTW's performance at a 49% employment outcome rate is an outstanding result. However, it should be borne in mind that, according to the data collection categories used, "exit to employment" may not necessarily entail the securing of an actual paid job, but might simply denote referral to a DEN for job placement. Nevertheless, transition to an employment agency as "work ready" is also a positive outcome for many service users.

Key Result Area Two

Key Result Area Two states that young people will perform satisfying and meaningful work consistent with their employment goals.

The existing outcome data does not allow any assessment of performance against this objective of satisfying and meaningful work. However, young people (and their parents) who had secured work were generally satisfied with the outcomes of the program.

Key Result Area Three

Key Result Area Three states that young people will develop the skills and qualifications necessary for the transition to sustainable employment.

49% of persons completing TTW are exiting to an employment outcome (taking into account the broad definition of "employment" used in the data collection process). They have, therefore, successfully developed the skills and qualifications for a transition to employment. However, it is not known to

what extent they have the skills and qualifications required for “*sustainable*” employment.

An examination of “sustainability” (if we presume sustainability to mean retention in employment) would require longitudinal outcome data from TTW participants. Such data does not currently exist, and would be a valuable addition to the TTW monitoring and evaluation framework.

Key Result Area Four

Key Result Area Four states that young people will sustain their work and training commitments. While the existing data collection does not enable measurement of this outcome, qualitative data suggests that the programs offered by service providers place a strong emphasis on developing the necessary resilience in young people so that they have the ongoing capacity to manage their working lives.

Key Result Area Five

Key Result Area Five states that people from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will have fair access to support and will achieve comparable outcomes.

According to the indications of existing data, it is possible to conclude that this goal is being met. ATSI service users and CALD service users are achieving outcomes comparable to other TTW service users.

Particularly, we highlight that 49% of all participants exit to an employment outcome, while 50% of ATSI participants achieve the same outcome. It is rare for any human services organisation to achieve equitable outcomes for Aboriginal participants, due to the entrenched impact of social disadvantage. Aboriginal people do not achieve equitable outcomes in regard to educational performance, employment performance, health status, nor community and individual wellbeing. That TTW does achieve equivalent outcomes is a considerable achievement.

Another criteria for KRA Five is that outcomes for CALD service users are also *comparable* to those achieved by mainstream service users. Measuring CALD status is inherently imprecise, and can only be roughly estimated from the available outcome data. However, the existing information does appear to indicate that CALD users are achieving outcomes that are *comparable* to outcomes for other client groups.

Critical Success Factors

Informants to this evaluation nominated a number of critical success factors in achieving an employment placement, including the following: ,

- Young people need extensive exposure to diverse workplace settings in order to expand their occupational horizons, to gain vocational experience and to further develop vocational skills and aptitudes.

- Providers need strong, professional links with employer networks in order to design work experience placements and to locate and/or create ongoing work roles. In some situations this can be achieved through partnering with a DEN provider. However, TTW staff will still require a strong awareness of the contemporary labour market and the needs of employers.
- Employers need deep confidence in the capacity of the service provider to provide appropriate support to the employer, the young person and their colleagues.
- A strong, balanced and inclusive relationship needs to exist between the young person, their parents/carers, and the service provider in order to achieve the goal of finding and keeping a job.
- Partnership and close integration with a DEN has a *positive* impact on achieving employment outcomes.
- Partnership and close integration with a CP program has a *negative* impact on achieving employment outcomes.

It was less commonly suggested that it was critical to have the skills to redesign and create jobs to fit the skills and dispositions of a young person seeking employment. The literature, however, stresses the importance of designing the job for the individual, rather than squeezing them into an existing vacancy. A small number of service providers do actively follow a “job design” approach, but this was a less common approach.

Recommendations

The 18 recommendations below address the specified research question:

How can the program be improved to better meet the needs of the target group, within the available resources?

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the strengths and achievements of the TTW program be recognised, celebrated, widely promoted and maintained.

The TTW program provides a much-needed opportunity for young people with disabilities to develop and apply work readiness skills in a supported environment that recognises their specific needs. The program is achieving outcomes that often exceed the expectations of many people, particularly service users, families and employers, and even in those cases where service users or their parents were dissatisfied with the services received, they were in no doubt about the need for the program. In principle, the TTW program provides an effective mechanism for young people with disabilities to move from the protected world of school to the productive adult world of work, and its achievements should be more widely acknowledged and promoted.

Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the required outcomes (and related definitions) of the TTW program be further clarified to ensure that ambiguities in defined outcomes are eliminated.

While Key Result Areas of the TTW program have been determined, some of the KRAs are difficult to define with exactitude. For example, it is difficult to determine what constitutes satisfying and meaningful work, or what constitutes sustainable employment. Greater definition around the ideal outcomes of the program, in terms of what is considered a “good” outcome, and what is meant by “sustainable” and “meaningful” work could be helpful in creating more consistency across the sector. These areas of “greyness” result in differing and sometimes conflicting perspectives on what constitutes a successful outcome between individual service providers, service users and their families.

Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that the current monitoring and data collection systems be continuously reviewed and that periodic audits be conducted to ensure the quality of data being provided by service providers. It is further recommended that these activities be brought together to create an effective TTW Management Information System (MIS) as part of the overall ADHC MIS.

Our analysis of existing data sets has shown that the current systems of data collection and monitoring could be further improved to enable a more systematic analysis and evaluation of the program's achievements. It is recommended that the current monitoring and data collection systems be reviewed and that periodic audits be conducted to assure the quality of the data being provided by service providers.

Recommendation 4:

It is recommended that ADHC review its TTW communication strategy to further strengthen the message that the primary purpose of the TTW program is to achieve employment outcomes for young people with disabilities. It should not be acceptable for funded service providers to argue against the proposition that the primary purpose of TTW is to facilitate the transition of young people from school to sustainable employment.

Our research has shown that there is considerable diversity among service providers and client/families in their conceptualisation and understanding of the aims of the TTW program. The vocational orientation of service providers, and their sense of connectedness to the labour market were inconsistent, and for some providers achieving employment outcomes is not as central an objective, and as central a measure of service quality, as it should be in an employment program. It is therefore critical that providers are well-informed and supported to achieve these outcomes.

Recommendation 5:

It is recommended that the TTW program encourage, nurture and assist service providers adopt service delivery models that strongly reflect the evidence-based best practice principles that informed the design of the program.

This evaluation demonstrates that organisations with a strong vocational orientation are better placed to achieve outcomes in line with the objectives of the TTW program. These organisations generally have more productive relationships with employers, employ staff with job placement expertise, focus to a greater extent on work-based training and experience (and do so often from the commencement of the client's program), focus on skills development directly related to work skills, and the development of these skills within real or simulated work environments. They tend to be more business-oriented in their approach, which is reflected, in part, in the systems and processes they implement to run their own businesses. They also tend to focus on the achievement of sustainable employment outcomes for all of their service users as the primary measure of their success. They recognise the significant role they play in the career and transition pathways of the young people they serve, and should be the model for a preferred provider type for the TTW program.

Recommendation 6:

It is recommended that the TTW program is conceptualised, not only within a disability framework, but also within a career and transition framework. The program makes an important contribution to the State's broader Career and Transition Strategy. This should form part of the ongoing discussions between ADHC and the Department of Education and Training, which has responsibility for implementation in NSW of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

The views of service providers could be placed along a continuum that at one end comprises those who clearly see the TTW program as a transition to employment program for a particular client group - young people with disability. Those at the other end of the continuum conceptualise the program first and foremost as a 'disability' program, the outcomes of which may or may not include transition to employment.

Reconceptualising the TTW program as part of a broader network of career and transition support providers would enhance the program's vocational focus by shifting it away from the narrow focus upon "disability".

Recommendation 7:

It is recommended that the process of approving service providers include a weighting of selection criteria that reflect the need for appropriately skilled staff and an organisational culture that has a strong focus on achieving employment outcomes for young people with disability.

As with most programs, a key factor in the significantly different outcomes achieved by different service providers relates to the internal capacity of the provider, particularly in relation to the skills of program staff members in the areas of program/business management, career development and job placement. Other factors relate to the capacity of the organisation overall to deliver a well-managed, quality service.

We recommend that the following factors have a significant place in the criteria for any future assessment of TTW service provider status:

- The experience level and professional qualifications of TTW program staff in the areas of program management, career development, work placement, human resource management, and disability support in an employment context.
- The capacity of, and the methodologies used by, the organisation to develop and maintain effective relationships with employers.
- The organisation's conceptual approach to the TTW program (i.e. its concept of the program is primarily a work-related versus disability-related program).
- Its proven track record (where appropriate) of successfully placing people with disabilities in meaningful, sustained employment.
- Its ability to generate and take advantage of economies of scale.

Recommendation 8:

It is recommended that any ADHC-sponsored professional development activities for 2010 focus strongly on building the labour market capacity of service providers, and their awareness of evidence based practice in transition to employment programs for persons with disability, in order to assist service users to secure and maintain work.

As per recommendation 7 above, given the critical importance of provider suitability and quality to delivering quality outcomes, professional development activities that build the labour market, career development and employment placement capacity and expertise of providers would be an effective means of enhancing the consistency of service provision and outcomes across the state.

Recommendation 9:

It is recommended that the outcomes achieved from the TTW program by service providers be highlighted and published in a "TTW Scorecard" for each service provider in the current ADHC publication "Transition to Work Information Books – Choosing a Service Provider". This scorecard must be simple, concise, and accessible to users. It is also recommended that this more accessible presentation of outcomes data be adapted for use on the ADHC website.

The outcomes currently being achieved by service users of the TTW program vary across service providers. While ADHC publishes outcome data for each service provider on the ADHC website, not all parents are aware that this facility exists, and many find it quite difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data in its current form.

There is a need for information that demonstrates clearly and simply and in a user-friendly manner, the baseline performance of TTW provision as a whole, alongside the individual achievements of specific service providers. This information should be added to each individual provider section in the current ADHC publication. This would:

1. give young people and their parents/families a clear yardstick to use in deciding on an appropriate service provider;
2. provide renewed focus on the achievement of tangible outcomes rather than on process and methodology;
3. make the system and those delivering the program more accountable; and
4. encourage providers to improve their outcomes as part of their promotional strategy for service users and their parents.

Recommendation 10:

It is recommended that the number of service providers delivering the TTW program be reviewed to ensure that each provider has the capacity and economy of scale to deliver an effective program. This would necessarily lead to a considerable rationalisation of the number of existing service providers.

It is apparent that in some regions, the number of approved providers exceeds the number of providers that can be sustained by the number of service users anticipated (in 2010) to require services in that region.

It is our view that ADHC needs to develop and implement appropriate procedures for ensuring that the volume of approved service providers in any area remains in proportion to the likely number of TTW service users in that area. Increasing "competition" is not likely to be of benefit in those regions where providers are already demonstrating above average outcomes. Nor is increasing competition likely to be of benefit when it results in oversupply of providers for a given region.

We recommend that ADHC give consideration to implementing minimum size standards for service providers. While some exceptions may exist in regional areas and certain unique service providers, overall, very small service providers are not in the best interest of service users. We would suggest that after appropriate analysis of the underlying factors driving economies of scale, ADHC implement minimum service size guidelines.

Recommendation 11:

It is recommended that, to the greatest extent possible, TTW and CP programs should be operated and delivered as completely separate services, as the overlap of these services has a clear negative impact upon the ability to achieve an employment outcome as a result of TTW.

Some providers that offer joint activities for TTW and CP service users emphasised that this is done primarily to achieve cost efficiencies. The integration of CP activities and TTW activities often occurs for logistical and structural reasons, for reasons of economy, and for reasons of convenience.

However, the integration of CP services and TTW services is often a source of distress to parents and service users alike and, it would seem, is not conducive to the implementation of best practice service delivery principles, or to the achievement of employment outcomes.

Providers that had clearly separated their delivery of CP and TTW programs reported marked improvements in TTW outcomes.

Recommendation 12:

It is recommended that, in the assessment of tender and funding applications, preference should be given to organisations whose TTW and CP activities are clearly distinguishable in terms of the nature of the activities, the sites at which they are delivered, and the service users who participate in them.

Given the clear correlation between separation of CP and TTW programs and improved outcomes, this should be taken into consideration in the allocation of TTW funds in the future.

Recommendation 13:

It is recommended that induction, performance monitoring and remedial action processes for TTW service providers be materially strengthened.

It is the case that a small number of providers are not achieving expected performance standards in the form of employment outcomes for service users. It is our view that any substantially underperforming organisation should be required to improve its performance or ADHC give consideration to future contract renewal.

It is also the case that many providers indicated a preference for more proactive involvement of the ADHC in its oversight of the TTW program. Many providers would welcome more extensive induction as a new service provider, as well as the provision of ongoing advice and professional development. However, they are aware that such improvements may not be able to be achieved within available resources.

Recommendation 14:

It is recommended that ADHC pursue their discussions with the Commonwealth to consider the full implications of initiatives associated with the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and to make any necessary adjustments to the post school programs policy framework..

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy makes a number of commitments related to improving access to education and training and career and transition arrangements for young people with disability. Specifically, it suggests that to make the transition from school to employment as smooth as possible, eligible school leavers who directly register with a Disability Employment Service provider will be exempt from the Job Capacity Assessment process. This measure is designed to provide certainty for people with disability, their parents and carers and allows providers to make solid commitments to early intervention partnerships with schools.

Recommendation 15:

It is recommended that organisations that are contracted to offer TTW services ensure that staff working on the TTW program are aware of the importance of, and equipped with the skills to develop and maintain, effective working relationships with:

- *Service users and their families*
- *Schools*
- *Employers, and*
- *Other education, training and labour market intermediaries.*

One of the hallmarks of successful service provision seems very much to reside in the ability of service providers to create and maintain positive, open, interactive and effective relationships with service users and their families, with schools, with employers and with other education, training and labour market intermediaries.

Recommendation 16:

It is recommended that ADHC investigate the feasibility, and benefits of, funding TTW service users on the basis of their individual needs and the level of support required to prepare them for labour market entry.

The model of having a single funding and program structure for a client market with such a broad range of developmental and learning needs was often singled out by providers as a key challenge to the program's capacity to be flexible and meet the needs of service users.

A differentiated or tiered system of TTW funding—and corresponding flexible time-periods—was seen by some providers as a potential solution to the diversity of developmental needs presented by TTW service users.

It was suggested that funding for individual service users could be adjusted depending on the client's support needs, with higher functioning service users receiving lower levels of funding and service users with more inhibiting disabilities receiving higher funding. It was also suggested that this assessment could be undertaken when the client's functional capacity was being assessed.

However, the validity, viability, and potential costs and benefits of this approach have not undergone sufficient investigation to warrant a conclusion on the value, or potential lack thereof, of any such approach. Accordingly, this subject remains a matter for further investigation.

Recommendation 17:

It is recommended that ADHC consider all available avenues to ensure parents and service users are fully informed about the nature of the assessment process.

Despite ongoing communication by ADHC on the nature of the assessment process, some parents and service providers reported that they lacked a full understanding of the assessment process and/or instrument.

As mentioned earlier in this report, examining the assessment process is beyond the scope of this evaluation, and to the best of our understanding the validity of the assessment process is not under question. However, it is worth noting that many parents and some staff of service providers do not fully understand the assessment process, and in particular, the grounds for making the distinction between entry into TTW or CP.

Recommendation 18:

It is recommended that the eight- hour paid work restriction be reassessed and a more current and realistic upper limit be applied.

The limitation imposed on service users of being able to work a maximum of only eight hours per week is another area of the program's guidelines that was frequently singled out as a hindrance to good practice. Whilst measures need to be in place to ensure that TTW funding is not exploited, it was felt that some clients are disadvantaged by this restriction. It is a barrier both to developing employability outcomes and a barrier to the normal social and developmental experience of holding down a part time job whilst undergoing further studies.