

THE GAP BETWEEN SERVICE INTENTION AND SERVICE PROVISION

"A wonderful shop front, but frequently little inside!"

The gap between service intention and service provision for the most disadvantaged in our community, those with an intellectual or multiple disability, becomes wider as service policy writers paint an ever more glowing picture of what service should be..... Whilst service providers battle traditional staff, especially public service staff resistance to change from traditional minder care to quality of life active support care as depicted in current care policy.

The Victorian Auditor General says:- *"Victorians living with a disability face significant barriers to social and economic participation in the community. These barriers are exacerbated by the difficulties people with a disability experience in accessing adequate and appropriate care and support"*.

We see the department's extensive and comprehensive care policies, standards and values being extensively promoted by their head office policy writers, with DHS Regional Offices producing glowing newsletters and presenting glowing seminars. Whilst at the service points, in real time, a totally different picture exists. A picture which the bureaucrats and the politicians try to ignore - services which are reactive, inconsistent and totally lacking in customer service.

Unlike the CSOs (Community Service Organisations), who are not fully funded, the Department of Human Services, Disability Services has resources to allow its management to buy their way out of everyday service problems and man management issues. They have infinite resources to defend their traditional public service issue avoidance status quo, despite many recent papers depicting questionable service provision.

The Victorian Auditor General's Report says:-

"Due to the significant issues identified in this audit, there remains a disconnect between the new support model and the actual delivery of the model by service providers. It will be critical for DHS to address these issues. In particular, DHS needs to establish mechanisms to monitor how well the new service model is being implemented and applied."

Of particular concern to audit is that the three issues of capacity and expertise of service providers, block funding for SSA, and individual support plans were raised by us in 2000.

In the course of the present audit, DHS advised us that it had initiated actions to address these issues. It remains to be seen whether these actions will have the desired effect.

The future service requirements of the people currently receiving support need to be better understood. In addition, there is a need to identify those people who may seek, and be eligible for, support in the future. Some initial work has been undertaken but it needs to be far more extensive and systematic. Without this information, DHS is poorly placed to plan for and manage the full extent of its future resourcing requirements. This may perpetuate a service system that is reactive and crisis driven."

The Senior Practitioner's review of restrictive practices says:-

"Staff attitudes, perspective and approaches..... It was established earlier in the report that the input of staff has a marked effect on the behaviour of the people for whom they provide support. Through the stories presented here, family carers also showed how the attitudes, perspectives and approaches of staff had a significant impact on the way they orientated to and engaged with their clients and, as a result, the client reactions that were produced.

The views held by service providers have significant impacts on the lives of people with a disability. The following quotes show that when the professional assumes there is nothing that the service can do, then the service does nothing.

When asked why the person should be frightened some of the participants indicated that they would not complain to the staff. Some said it would not make a difference and that it was pointless to complain as staff would not open the door, implying that there was simply no point to a complaint. Here are some of the examples participants gave when asked whether they had similar experiences to those in the skit,

The system of power relations between staff and clients: The findings of this study clearly show that power rests to a substantial degree with direct support staff. Their requirement to meet organisational needs is often at the expense of client choice, and they are also unlikely to be able to fundamentally change the service setting. Much more of this will be explored in the section to follow when considering the views of family carers."

The Federal Government's report "Shut Out" says:-

"Many people in the community believe disability is someone else's problem. They do not believe disability will touch their lives, and give little thought to the experience of living with disability, or caring for someone with a disability. Without first-hand experience, they hold on to the belief that at least things are better than they used to be. The stories you will find in this report will challenge those beliefs. For many years people with disabilities found themselves shut in hidden away in large institutions. Now many people with disabilities find themselves shut out of buildings, homes, schools, businesses, sports and community groups. They find themselves shut out of our way of life. As this report sadly illustrates, Australians with disabilities are among our nation's forgotten people".

The law frequently complexes the problems:-

Adults with limited intellectual capacity through intellectual or multiple disability are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, and are often further disadvantaged by the law itself.

An adult with no meaningful communications and unable by reason of their disability to make reasonable judgements in respect of all or any matters concerning their personal circumstances and/or estate, is considered under common law to have the right to make the same judgements as an adult with regular intellectual capacity. Yet in reality, they are totally unable to do so!

These adults are very vulnerable, as common law privacy ensures they have rights they cannot themselves realise, or even obtain support to realise. They are unable to have someone act on their behalf, as a person cannot be given rights to act by a person with no intellectual capacity to do so.

In the law's quest to protect and empower vulnerable people, those with the lowest intellectual capacity become disadvantaged by the very law intended to protect them.

LISA Comment:

The gap between "intention" and "provision" is a frequent problem where government departments provide direct services. They are frequently captive market, where the consumer has no choice. And, where penalties for under achievement cannot be effectively applied.

Telecom was the most defended captive market ever. It took the full weight of the Federal Government to break the hold Telecom had over people and business. Even so, the present Labor Federal Government is breaking Telstra down even further to make them even more accountable, even although consumers now have a choice of service provider.

Yet, we see no effort by the State Labor Government of Victoria to make the totally out-of-control Department of Human Services accountable to those they are intended to serve - consumers have no real choice of service provider. Any claims of accountability by this captive market government department is mainly smoke and mirrors.

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