

'People with a disability taking charge'

Direct Payments Project

Direct Payments Consultants Group

Partnership in the Direct Payments Project

In January 2006 a group of people, which has come to be known as the Direct Payments Consultants Group (DPCG) were invited to participate in the Direct Payments Project. 'Direct payments' is an option, in which a person with a disability* can have their funding for disability support paid directly to them. The person is then able to arrange and purchase the supports they require to meet the goals they have identified in their individual plan.

Through the first stage of the project the DPCG, in partnership with the Department of Human Services, have developed a model of how direct payments might work. People with a disability and their family members have taken an active role in the development and direction of the project, and will continue to have a role in trialling and fine tuning the model in the second stage. Both the Department and the DPCG are learning a new way of developing policy through this project where the learnings and reflections on decisions are used to generate new ideas which in turn are discussed and tested out.



Direct Payments Consultants working on the model of direct payments.

This project is being evaluated for its process and content.

The evaluator has maintained regular contact with the people involved in the DPCG to gain a picture of the benefits and challenges of working in this new way on projects from the perspectives of both the individuals and the Department of Human Services.

* can also be the person's family member, guardian or administrator

Achievements of the Direct Payments Consultants Group

The DPCG has developed ideas and materials about:

- How to use support funding flexibly within an agreed individual plan.
- The different options for how they will receive their support funding.
- How to meet both the needs of individuals, and the legal and accountability requirements of the Department of Human Services.
- What information people need to make informed decisions about the quality of the supports they are purchasing,

The ideas and materials that have been developed in the first stage of the project have been put together in a Direct Payments User Manual. This manual will be tested and improved in stage two of the project - the 6-month trial of direct payments.

Some of the views of the DPCG:

- This is an example of acting under best practice.
- It is good to see the State Plan being implemented.
- This project is likely to make people more independent and it meets all State Plan goals.
- Direct payments have great potential to change the lives of people with a disability as has happened in the United Kingdom with eight per cent of people using direct payments subsequently entering the workforce.

What is next?

The trial of direct payments is due to start in the second half of 2006. The DPCG will continue to work with the project officers of Disability Services to modify and improve direct payments during the trial. The information gained from the evaluation will form an important base for recommendations about the further development of a system of direct payments to people with a disability and the ways in which this approach can be improved.

Members of the Direct Payments Consultants Group

Sam Armytage

I am a practicing solicitor managing my own legal and financial services business in the Melbourne CBD. The Department of Human Services (DHS) has provided vital support to me in this endeavour through innovative programs delivering attendant care and other assistance.



I am participating in the Direct Payments Project for the privilege of contributing to the development of another innovative DHS initiative delivering people with a disability greater empowerment over their lives.

Rosalea Collins

I am 53 years of age and live on the Mornington Peninsula. I have the sole responsibility of caring for my children, especially my eldest daughter, Kathryn, pictured with me, who is 21 years old, is totally blind and has cerebral palsy. I became interested in the Direct Payments Project because of the potential it offered, especially the flexibility to choose suitable program options. I am impressed with the idea of having greater involvement in the planning and implementation of my daughter's personal care and daily program, as well as the management of the funding to finance the program. In the past this has been an area of frustration and unnecessary stress.



The option of direct payments is exciting and I am looking forward to the challenge of providing my daughter with a varied and interesting program that will enhance her potential and improve her life on a daily basis.

Michael Jarrett

I now live in Pakenham after living and working in rural Victoria for more than 20 years. I've worked as a MetroAccess Project Officer in City of Greater Dandenong since January 2006. MetroAccess is basically a community development project aimed at increasing the community's capacity to be more welcoming and inclusive of people with a disability. I love the work as a change agent.



Being part of the development team of the Direct Payments Project has been exciting. It's been a co-operative effort that will benefit many people with a disability as the project moves from a pilot project to being available to everyone. For me, having direct payments gives me control of my allocated funding to purchase services from the places I choose. Control means more flexibility to meet the goals in my plan.

John McKenna

I previously worked for 11 years in the telecommunications industry and have recently joined the Travellers Aid Society of Victoria managing the Travellers Aid Access Services area, which provides support to people with a disability in the central business district of Melbourne. It is great to be involved in the Direct Payments Project, to be at the forefront of an initiative that has the opportunity to change people's support needs and which is aligned with the State Plan. I am encouraged knowing that Victorian citizens will now have more opportunities for choices to enhance an independent lifestyle. By being involved in this project it demonstrates that DHS is walking the talk. Independence is something that many people strive for. Being a part of this initiative gives a great sense of "self-help".



Val Johnstone

I am a person with a disability (vision impaired), who believes in the dignity of disability, enabling independence and community involvement. I'm a Mum and Fiona is my daughter; she is a young woman with a disability (Down Syndrome), who has lived independently and quite successfully since February 1997.



As a member of the inaugural Disability Advisory Council of Victoria, I have contributed to reference groups specific to key strategies of Disability State Plan. A social worker by profession, I have worked in a range of community contexts. For me, the Direct Payments Project has been about participation that influences change, working towards a fair and reasonable system for persons with disabilities to make independent purchases of services and/or goods with funding approved in a plan.

Now, it is not all work and no play! Most Sunday afternoons, I am off to listen to live jazz. I love theatre (strong dialogue) and travel is high on my agenda! I find gardening, cooking and “catching up with friends” very pleasurable”. All of the above are social, dynamic, engaging of mind and body, often presenting challenge and opportunities to be creative, patient and above all reflective so as to savour experiences.

Dean Richards

I work full time in Port Melbourne for a company in the gas industry, and live with my parents. I have been receiving support through Homefirst for many years. I joined the Direct Payments Project to gain back control of my care and have better influence on how my care is run. I'm also looking to improve efficiencies that will save me money and increase the hours I receive for the same funding.



Michele Sholl

I managed the Futures for Young Adults funding for my daughter, Kate, for a number of years because it was acknowledged by DHS that her needs were not being met by the standard arrangements. Having control of the funding made it possible to obtain individually tailored support for Kate, which was instrumental in her recovery and increased independence. Kate has Down Syndrome, insulin-dependent diabetes and schizophrenia, but is now able to live independently in the community thanks to the high quality and flexibility of the support she currently receives. I have a strong commitment to people with a disability having control over their lives and feel that direct payments will be an empowering initiative that should be available to all.

