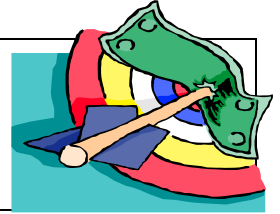


## Direct Payments Project Update November 2006



*The Direct Payments Project is a project of Disability Services in partnership with the Southern Metropolitan Region (SMR) and an active group of people with a disability, their family members and support people, known as the Direct Payments Consultants Group (DPCG).*

### **Trial of direct payments up and running**

In August 2006 four consultants from the Direct Payments Consultants Group (DPCG) commenced the trial of direct payments. Another two consultants followed them closely in September 2006 and there are now eight direct payments users in the trial. Two additional people are expected to start before the new year bringing the number in the trial to ten people.

### **Achievements of Stage 1**

The aim of stage 1 of the project was to use an action learning approach to develop policies, tools and resources to support direct payments in partnership with the DPCG.

Stage 1 resulted in the development of:

- The model of direct payments
- A Direct Payments User Manual. The manual, written in plain English outlines how to establish direct payments, the responsibilities of direct payments users and the department and includes a Consumer Guide.
- A 2-page deed (an agreement between the Department of Human Services and the direct payments user)

In Stage1:

- 8 DPCG workshops were held between January and June 2006 with a consistently high attendance rate
- A forum for service providers was held
- A forum for plan facilitators was held.

## **Action learning**

Participatory action learning is undertaken in partnership with key stakeholders to develop solutions or improved outcomes through a series of cycles of planning, acting, observing, re-planning, acting and observing. This model of policy development was chosen for direct payments because:

- Given the complexity of the issues it is anticipated that it will lead to an overall improved and robust system to support direct payments
- Such a model ensures that the needs of people with a disability as users of direct payments, and the needs of the department as funders, will be met.

The key principles of action learning adopted for the project are:

- Transparency
- Sharing of power
- Enquiry: the collection of data and learning from the data
- Openness to new ideas and change (no blame).

Outcomes of participatory action learning as a process identified by both the DPCG at their stage 1 workshops, and at a recent review by the department project management team and working group included:

- A different way of engaging with stakeholders, which builds the capacity of both the department and the consultants.
- A greater understanding of the complexities of decision-making and the management of power-relationships.
- High level of collaboration amongst all project participants which was evidenced by the commitment to and capacity to problem-solve complex issues.
- Strong advocates of both direct payments and the action learning process have developed in the DPCG and the project management team.

- Dynamism of a process of review, which expects changes, challenges and different ideas and its contrast to the usual linear process.
- Quality of the materials developed through the process.

### **Australian Taxation Office**

A class ruling has been published by the Australian Taxation Office which states that direct payments as described in the Direct Payments User Manual is not considered income. The ruling is backdated to the 1 January 2006.

### **DPCG Stage 2 Workshops**

In Stage 2 of the project, the department and the DPCG are trialling direct payments and refining the model, resources and tools.

Five workshops have been held with the Direct Payments Consultants Group in Stage 2. Issues discussed during the workshops have included:

- Transition to direct payments
- Engaging with service providers
- Consumer rights and responsibilities
- Contracts
- Negotiation skills
- Roles and responsibilities of project stakeholders
- Reviewing the Direct Payments User Manual.

A further four workshops are planned.

### **Evaluation framework**

Liz Dimitriadis Consulting (LDC Group) were appointed as evaluators of the Direct Payments Project in September and on 18 October a workshop was held with DPCG consultants, service providers, plan facilitators, and department staff to develop the evaluation framework.

The framework brings together:

- The aims of the project
- The components of the project which are being evaluated
- The indicators for measuring the impact of Direct Payments Project
- The methods used to measure the impact.

LDC Group will be attending forums and workshops to invite comment on the draft evaluation framework.