

Premier's Awards

FOR PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

1998

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for Public Sector Management

Disability Services
Commission

in the category of
Service Design and Delivery



Richard Court

Richard Court MLA
PREMIER

November 1998



GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA





1998 Premier's Awards

FOR PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT

LOCAL AREA COORDINATION:

A NEW APPROACH TO SERVICE DELIVERY

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES



SUBMISSION BY

THE DISABILITY SERVICES COMMISSION

FOR THE

"SERVICE DESIGN - DELIVERY" CATEGORY

OF THE 1998 PREMIER'S AWARDS



I N T R O D U C T I O N

This is a story about radical change. About transforming a traditional service system to focus on fitting services to people, rather than fitting people to services. About how an agency, through the development of the Local Area Coordination initiative, placed its customers firmly at its centre.

The Disability Services Commission

In 1993, the Disability Services Commission (DSC) was established to advance the quality of life for Western Australians with disabilities and their families. Combining the Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons and the Bureau for Disability Services, the DSC's history dates back to the early 1960's when it began as the Mental Deficiency Division within Mental Health Services. The creation of the DSC was the first time in Australia that a Government had created a single organisation with responsibility for, and only for, people with disabilities. That decision has been strongly vindicated through the 1998 Review of the Disability Services Act (1993), where the DSC's customers expressed overwhelming support for its continuation. The DSC's budget in 1997/98 was \$164 million.

What We Do

We believe that people with disabilities are people first, and disabled second — meeting their many and varied needs is a responsibility shared by Government, the private sector and the wider community. The DSC has taken a "whole-of-system" approach to its work, recognising that people's needs cannot, and should not, be met by specialist services alone. The DSC provides and funds specialist services, and facilitates access to services generally available in the community (generic services). Its key roles are:

- Policy Development
- Service Provision
- Funding & Quality Assurance
- Promotion of Equal Access
- Community Education and Consumer Advocacy

Some Facts About Our Customers

- 305,000 people in Western Australia report they have a disability.
- 96% of people with disabilities live in the community.
- 127,000 carers provide day-to-day support for family / friends with disabilities.
- 74% of the help needed by people with disabilities is provided by family / friends.
- 15,884 people with intellectual, sensory, physical, or neurological disabilities, or acquired brain injury, used the services provided or funded by the DSC in 1997/98.

Our History and the Birth of Local Area

Coordination

To understand about the DSC and *Local Area Coordination*, it is necessary to know something of the history of disability services in Western Australia (WA).

Prior to the 1960's people with disabilities were generally hidden away in institutions, and provided with physical care, protection and medical treatment. Responsibility for people with disabilities was seen to rest with the Government, rather than with families and communities.



In the 1960's, a growing concern about human rights and advances in medical technology, led to the realisation that people with disabilities *should* grow up with their families and *could* live in the community. As expectations changed, so did the demand for services, and the 1970s and 1980s led to the development of a range of new services. This included the establishment of the DSC's predecessor, the Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons, in 1986.

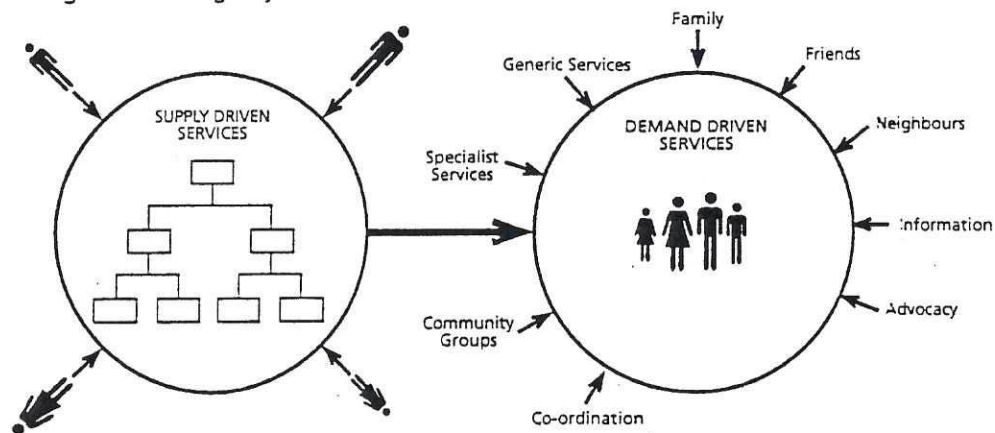
Although the groundwork had been laid for more radical change, it was still evident that people with disabilities and their families had to "fit services", rather than services "fitting people". In the late 1980's, most services were still based in Perth and were provided by professionals according to their own field of expertise. Services were not equitably distributed across different disability groups or localities within WA. There was a clear need for services to be more personal, local and accountable.

During the late 1980s, the DSC's predecessor had the vision to initiate two major and complementary developments. The first was to ensure that services were based on individual needs and not limited by existing service types. The second was to increase the array of services available. Both challenged people to reconsider who the "expert" really was - the person with a disability and/or their family, or the service provider?

About Local Area Coordination

Local Area Coordination is a uniquely Western Australian initiative designed to support people to live in their own communities and pursue their chosen lifestyle. It began as a pilot project in Albany in 1988, with the original aim of providing assistance in country WA, where an undesirable outcome of services being based in Perth was that many people and their families were forced to leave country communities. It involved dismantling the existing service system which revolved around visiting professional teams from Perth, and establishing a locally based person with a broad range of skills, experience and local knowledge.

Local Area Coordination is a "demand driven" approach to meeting the needs of people with disabilities and their families. Unlike more traditional "supply driven" approaches which require a person to fit the service, supports are packaged to suit the particular requirements of the individual. A radically different approach sees funding provided directly to the customer to purchase what they need, rather than via a block grant to an agency.



As a coordinated state-wide system of support, *Local Area Coordination* is a complement to the services provided by disability agencies, and an important precursor to the achievement of the DSC's Strategic goals. LACs operate simultaneously at multiple levels of society — that of the individual, the family, and the community, thereby paving the way for the inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society.



Finney

Local Area Coordination is a key feature of State Government policy for disability services. Such is the commitment to the program, that under the Government's "Count Us In" Strategy, an additional \$6.04 million in recurrent funding has been provided to ensure that all people, no matter where they live, will have access to an LAC by the year 2000. At the end of 1997/98, there were 91 LACs covering 70% of the State, with annual expenditure of approximately \$11.5 million.

The Role of Local Area Coordinators

LACs live and work in local communities and act as coordinators of services, rather than providers of services. Their customers are people with disabilities and their families, and in 1997/98, 36 country and 55 metropolitan LACs provided support to 4,848 people. Each LAC supports approximately 50 customers, a ratio designed to ensure that customers can be known personally and their individual needs responded to. LACs are based in small local offices throughout WA, from Kununurra to Esperance. Large country localities and metropolitan offices are usually shared by several LACs, with no administrative or reception staff.

The LAC role is multi-level (individual, family, agency, community) and multi-dimensional (accommodation, employment, health, education, respite etc). LACs provide service coordination, information, advocacy, family support, and direct funding to individuals and/or families. The combination of these elements means that an LAC works with a high degree of flexibility and creativity, which is not always apparent in other human service programs. The LAC does this by:

- building relationships with people with disabilities and/or their families;
- making connections with local community members, groups and agencies;
- supporting individuals and families to develop and maintain strong informal networks;
- helping customers to determine their own needs, plans for the future & service requirements;
- providing information and advocacy;
- assisting customers to coordinate the provision of supports and services;
- working with individuals and agencies to encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities;
- facilitating the establishment of new services and securing new funding where service gaps exist;
- providing funding directly to customers to purchase agreed services and supports of their choice;
- monitoring the quality and quantity of services provided to people with disabilities; and
- providing "grass-roots" information to those responsible for policy and funding decisions.

Many families struggle with the emotional and physical realities of caring for a son or daughter with profound disabilities, often well into adulthood. They constantly tell evaluators about the sense of being alone, tired and fearful about the future. Sadly, they also have a bitter history of dealing with what they call "face-less bureaucrats and red-tape". One of the roles of LACs not easily quantified but highly valued is that of friend and ally, as highlighted in the following comment from one of its customers...

"the coordinator has given us both practical and moral support. We feel that there is now someone on our side so to speak, who will be there for us when things get too stressful."

(parent, letter to the Minister, April, 1997).



1. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION IS effective in meeting organisational objectives and responding to customer needs.

Our Customers & Their Needs

People with disabilities and their families are our customers. They have a range of support needs related to the functional impact of their disability — accommodation, respite, employment, recreation, training, education, transport, therapy, specialised equipment, assistance to eat, shop, bathe etc.

But people with disabilities and their families are also ordinary people, seeking an ordinary life. Like most people, they have needs related to having a sense of financial and personal security, being in control of their lives, being a valued part of a family and community, having optimism about the future, making choices about what to do and when, having friends, having fun, having a life.

Quite sub-consciously, a human service can focus so strongly on the disability and its functional impacts, that it can forget the human side of the equation and the needs that we all share as human beings, whether we have a disability or not. Local Area Coordination, as a key strategic initiative of the DSC, is grounded in all the needs of its customers — not only their practical support needs, but their needs related to living an ordinary life as part of a family and a community.

As such, it is guided by a set of principles and values which revolve around building individual, family and community self-sufficiency. The Local Area Coordination Charter is "to support people with disabilities and their families to identify their own needs, determine their preferred services and control the required resources, to the extent they desire, so that they can pursue their chosen lifestyle".

Key Organisational Objectives

People with disabilities have a history of being segregated from society, both by being physically located in institutions and through simply not being included in everyday activities such as education, employment, social activities, sport etc. They have also been congregated together, based on the belief that they belonged together and could not manage life in the community with ordinary people. Country people have been particularly disadvantaged due to a lack of locally based services, with many families being separated or forced to relocate in order to receive the help that they required. People with disabilities and their families have passionately argued to be accepted as fellow human beings and included in the life of their communities. The DSC, as the body responsible for the planning and development of services in WA has embraced the challenge of helping them to make this a reality. Its primary objective is reflected in its mission statement, **"To advance the equality of opportunity, community participation and quality of life of people with disabilities throughout Western Australia"**.

This mission has been given life through the development of a Strategic Plan, reflecting the views of over 700 customers state-wide and representing a vision for the future of disability services in WA. "Coordination" (through the provision of an integrated network of supports) and "Caring for Carers" are two key and unique goals of the Strategic Plan, and their achievement requires efforts to be made at an individual, family and community level. Local Area Coordination plays a vital part in ensuring that these important organisational objectives become a reality for its customers. It does this by:

- supporting families; and
- strengthening communities.



Handwritten notes: "Supporting Individuals and Families to Stay Together" and "1997/98"

Supporting Individuals and Families to Stay Together

In the seven years between the establishment of the first LAC position in Albany and complete coverage of regional WA, at least 10 people with disabilities previously forced to leave rural communities because of a lack of local support services, have been assisted to return to live independently or with their families. In addition, very few people are now leaving due to a lack of supports (estimates down from 10 people per year to less than 2 per year). This has been made possible by LACs assisting customers to access a variety of services and supports to meet their needs, and in some cases, providing them with the funding to do so.

Rather than being totally dependent on agencies, customers now have more choice and control over what services are provided, when, where, and by who. In 1997/98, \$4.36 million was provided directly to customers to purchase services of their choice, including respite for carers, assistance to live independently, skills development for school leavers, therapy, equipment etc.

Customers (through independent evaluations) are telling us that there have been significant improvements in their well-being and improvements in their:

- ability to cope;
- control over their lives and important decisions;
- sense of being supported;
- satisfaction;
- optimism and confidence about the future;
- ability to exercise choice;
- self-sufficiency;
- sense of security.

Strengthening Communities

Rural communities which previously relied on sporadic visits from visiting teams of Perth-based professionals, now have a local community-based resource, with 36 LACs based throughout country WA, from Kununurra to Kalgoorlie to Albany. LACs in both the country and the metropolitan area have become an important resource for other agencies, as well as for their own customers.

Communities, families and governments are now sharing the responsibility for meeting the needs of people with disabilities. Strong partnerships have been formed between customers, agencies, LACs and community groups, resulting in greater awareness about the needs of people with disabilities and greater willingness to include them in opportunities available to the rest of the community.

Community self-sufficiency has been boosted through the development of a range of new services - offering customers new opportunities in relation to respite, recreation, employment and accommodation. LACs have worked with State and Commonwealth agencies, community groups, clubs, charities and the business community to bring much needed resources into communities. The DSC has directly funded:

- 12 new Individual & Family Support Associations (\$1,361,428 pa) to provide respite and family support services to 510 customers; and
- 4 new Community Living Associations (\$1,378,076 pa) to provide accommodation support services for 39 customers.

"The local area co-ordinator deserves a medal - she is such a good worker....there is such a big difference in how things are done. The local area co-ordinator is a friend as well as a co-ordinator. I would be devastated if I lost her. If there were more people like her in this world it would be a better world. I cannot put into words what she has done. I have seen results in seven months that I have not seen since pre-school".

(Parent, Evaluation, 1993).



2. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION IS INNOVATIVE IN ITS APPROACH TO THE ATTAINMENT OF A DESIRED OBJECTIVE OR OUTCOME

Innovation In Service Design and Delivery

Local Area Coordination is by its very nature unique and innovative; so much so, that it is the first program of its kind in Australia and is being emulated around the nation.

To understand what makes it so innovative, it is important to remember the context in which it was first developed 10 years ago. There were very few regionally-based services, with customers relying on sporadic visits from visiting teams of professionals from Perth. Country families faced a one-in-three risk that they would have to either send their child away, or leave their community to be closer to services. Customers in the metropolitan area were mainly served by large traditional service agencies, and demand for services outstripped supply. There was a continued segregation of people with disabilities, particularly in education and employment. Communities had little capacity to adequately respond to the needs of families and individuals. Despite the best efforts of the people involved, in the middle stood families facing limited choices and an increasing fear for their future.

In its **design**, *Local Area Coordination* works to:

- facilitate individual, family and community self-sufficiency;
- encourage and maintain informal support networks (family and friends) and decrease dependence on formal supports (agencies and paid support systems);
- recognise the customer as the 'expert' when it comes to identifying their own needs and solutions;
- provide customers maximum choice and control over their support arrangements;
- ensure that people have opportunities to pursue their chosen lifestyle; and
- strengthen community capacity to respond to the needs of citizens with disabilities through information, advocacy and additional resources.

In its **delivery**, Local Area Coordinators:

- live and work in local communities;
- build relationships with people with disabilities and/or their families;
- operate as generalists rather than specialists;
- focus on 'doing with' rather than 'doing for';
- work in a way which is multi-level (individual, family, agency, community) and multi-dimensional (accommodation, employment, health, education, respite etc);
- provide service coordination, information, advocacy, family support, direct consumer funding, community development and community education;
- work with local communities to include people with disabilities; and
- assist families to purchase their own supports via direct consumer funding.

In the report Getting Real, the Final Report of the Review of the Commonwealth / State Disability Agreement, Professor Anna Yeatman stressed the need for effective services that are locally based and more embedded in the "informal capacities of people's communities" (1996, p.53). She goes on to acknowledge Local Area Coordination as an "imaginative service response... which is still under-appreciated for its demonstration effect and significance" (1996, p.54).



Innovation Through Direct Consumer Funding & Choice

A main innovative feature of *Local Area Coordination* is that it provides 'direct consumer funding'. This means that funding is provided to customers so that they can choose what services are provided, when they are provided and by whom. For example, a family granted funding for respite is able to choose who will look after their child, whether care is provided in their home or elsewhere, and when they want to 'take a break'. Funds are provided to complement, rather than replace, informal supports and are linked to assessed need. Approximately 40% of all expenditure within the program is provided directly into the hands of consumers who mostly use it to purchase respite services, domestic help, personal care support, leisure activities, therapy services, and equipment. For the first time, customers with disabilities and their families are supported to make their own decisions and are empowered to exercise choice over the services and supports they receive.

This is a radically different approach to traditional service provision where money is typically invested in formal agencies, buildings and staffing. As part of a review of the effectiveness and efficiency of Government services by the Productivity Commission, *Local Area Coordination* was selected as the only disability service reform, and one of only four exemplary national case studies (Implementing Reforms in Government Services, 1998). The Commission highlights that direct consumer funding is more easily able to "accommodate changes in needs or circumstances... and empower consumers" (p.102).

Local Area Coordination provides two forms of funding. The first is "untied funding" and is provided as an up-front budget allocation to each LAC, which they use on a discretionary basis to meet customer needs which are typically low cost, one-off and urgent. The funding allocation is \$10,000 per year, which equates to approximately \$200 per consumer. Decisions about who receives funding and for what purpose are delegated to LACs (within policy and funding guidelines). Decisions about choice of service provider are devolved to the customer. In 1997/98 customers benefited from approximately \$910,000 in untied funding.

The second form of funding is "tied funding", which specifically aims to assist people whose current supports are inadequate and at risk of breaking down. A detailed funding plan is developed jointly with customers, and submitted to LAC management for consideration alongside other competing requests. Thus, decisions about who receives funding and for what purpose are made at a higher level. In 1997/98, customers benefited from approximately \$3.4 million in tied funding.

A short tale of innovation in service design and funding....

Bryan is a young man with an intellectual disability who had a lot of trouble fitting in at school, as well as being a handful for his mother. Despite ongoing support from various professionals, his behaviour at school and on the bus home continued to be a problem. His mother, the LAC and Education Support Unit teacher met to see if there were any other strategies which could assist him. During the course of conversation, it was raised that Bryan loved surfing. The LAC, a keen surfer himself, suggested that he had an old selection of surfing magazines at home, which he would give to the teacher. Providing Bryan behaved at school, he would be given one to look at on the bus on the way home. Further, a grant was made to Bryan's mother to assist with the purchase of a second hand board. Almost immediately, Bryan's behaviour changed. Lateral thinking and a small grant has resulted in him looking forward to school, being much better behaved, too busy with the surfing magazines to misbehave on the bus and spending his spare time surfing with others. His mother is less stressed, knows exactly where he is, has more time for herself and other family members and is not reliant on expensive ongoing professional support.

(Excerpt from vignette in the draft publication "Supporting Dreams", September, 1998.)



3. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION DEMONSTRATES LEADERSHIP AND STIMULATES IMPROVEMENT IN OTHER PARTS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Local Area Coordination is founded on strong partnerships between individuals, families, agencies and communities. It believes that no one agency should, or could, be responsible for meeting the diverse needs of people with disabilities and their families. It understands that *really* making a difference means forging partnerships and alliances with other public agencies at a strategic, as well as local community level, as evidenced in the following examples.

Historically, children with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, have been educated in separate schools and classrooms. Parents have long fought for their children to be adequately supported in ordinary classrooms and educated alongside children without disabilities. Senior staff within *Local Area Coordination* have shown leadership on this sensitive issue, by working closely at a strategic policy level with the Education Department to develop strategies for the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms. This complements the grass-roots work of LACs, who regularly liaise with school teachers, principals and parents to develop local solutions. Following a successful two-year joint pilot project, the Education Department committed an additional \$3.6 million in 1997 for the inclusion of up to 50 students with intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms, over a four-year period. *Local Area Coordination* continues to play a key role in the assessment of applications and in working with the Education Department to monitor progress of the initiative.

Customers in rural and remote areas have been unable to access enough specialist therapy services such as Psychology, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, compounded by increasing difficulties in attracting skilled therapists to work in isolated communities. *Local Area Coordination* has taken the lead in identifying the specific needs of localities and forming a close partnership with the Health Department and the DSC's Specialist Country Services Branch, in order to adequately resource rural and remote communities. As a result, the Health Department has funded a number of joint therapy positions with the DSC — the combination of resources resulting in more attractive and sustainable positions for therapists and better use of scarce resources across both departments. Customers in the Lower Great Southern, Northern Goldfields, West Pilbara, Midwest and Newman have already benefited from increased therapy services. Importantly, the needs of customers with disabilities are now firmly embedded in the Health Department's planning for regional WA.

Services for Aboriginal people in WA and people with disabilities in other States of Australia have been given a significant boost through the sharing of ideas and resources. Earlier this year, the Director of *Local Area Coordination* was seconded to the Aboriginal Affairs Department, to assist in the development of a new regionalised service network based closely on the *Local Area Coordination* model. In addition, senior officers have spent considerable time "mentoring" other State disability agencies interested in modeling the LAC concept. The Northern Territory and Queensland governments are currently trialing these new programs. Aboriginal people, along with people with disabilities in two other States, will reap the benefits of a more personalised and localised approach to service delivery, which can be applied effectively across different consumer groups and different settings.

The leadership role of *Local Area Coordination* in stimulating improvement across the public sector has resulted in many tangible outcomes for our customers:

- greater understanding among generic service providers about their needs;
- greater inclusion and choice in vital services such as health, education and housing;
- better coordination and cooperation between agencies that play a large part in their lives; and
- increased services through decreased duplication and better targeting of resources.



4. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION COORDINATES WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF OTHER AGENCIES AND CONTRIBUTES TO DESIRED ACROSS GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

When it comes to people with disabilities, Governments and communities seek complementary outcomes — **a fair and just society which respects individual difference; a system which encourages local ownership and local solutions; and a public service which cooperates to ensure effective and efficient use of public resources.** To further these goals, LACs work at a systemic, as well as individual level. They work with customers to identify their needs and improve their quality of life. They identify service gaps and work with local communities to create new services and supports. They advocate for access to existing services. As a focal point within communities, they forge partnerships with other agencies to improve the coordination of needed services.

Nomadic Aboriginal people with disabilities living in the central desert region are perhaps Australia's most disadvantaged, when it comes to accessing health and specialist services. Following concerns raised by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, Local Area Coordination worked closely with the NPY to understand the nature of their needs and the potential barriers to service provision. It then advocated with its State and Commonwealth counterparts for an across-government solution. Despite the logistical and programmatic challenges, in August 1998, Local Area Coordination secured a \$53,000 annual commitment from each of the South Australian, Western Australian and Northern Territory governments, with the Commonwealth Government funding establishment costs. This partnership now means that for the first time, central desert Aboriginal people with disabilities have access to therapy and equipment, with profound improvements already evident in health and mobility.

Securing a fair share of Commonwealth funding for the provision of necessary supports and services is a primary goal of the WA Government. A long-standing joint effort by *Local Area Coordination*, the DSC's Policy Branch and the State Treasury Department has contributed to the Commonwealth Grants Commission recommending that WA receive an additional \$57.5 million over five years for "Aged and Disabled Welfare". As part of the five-yearly review of Commonwealth/State Funding arrangements, the DSC presented a case to the Grants Commissioners about the additional costs of providing services in WA - due to it having the most widely dispersed rural and remote communities and the highest proportion of Aboriginal people. Local Area Coordination was instrumental in developing WA's position and in presenting detailed case studies to the Commissioners in a forum in Port Hedland — later commended by both the Under Treasurer and the Grants Commission as a comprehensive and useful presentation.

Gaining recognition about the unique problems experienced by families in the Kimberley region has been a source of frustration for many families. With guidance from a world-renowned expert on human services, brought to the Kimberley by *Local Area Coordination*, and developmental support from their LAC, local families established a "Council of Families", to represent the unique needs of people with disabilities and their families in the region. The Council has already been proactive in convening a meeting with six school principals, teachers and the Director of Schools for the Kimberley, to discuss the inclusion of children with disabilities in Kimberley schools. This was a unique event, and was noted by the facilitator, Dr Robert Jackson from Edith Cowan University, to be the first time in WA that parents and principals had come together in this way.

As one parent wrote

"One major achievement of the forum was the breaking down of barriers between parents and principals. At the end of the day it was evident that we had forged better partnerships. We believe this to be important as principal and teacher attitudes are crucial to successful inclusion."

(letter to the Minister, July, 1998).



5. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION PROVIDES FOR SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING

Local Area Coordination is designed to be an 'open-circuit-system'. This means that it is constantly asking customers how effective the service is in meeting their needs, through evaluations, surveys and various quality improvement mechanisms. Its successes to date are based on the commitment and humility to *really listen* to what its customers are saying. As the DSC's most evaluated program, over eight major studies and evaluations have contributed to its development and expansion over a ten year period.

The Formative Years

In response to customer feedback about the inadequacy of the visiting team approach, in 1988 the first LAC position was established in the Lower Great Southern Region as a pilot project. In 1990, an evaluation was undertaken, which investigated the impact of *Local Area Coordination* on individuals with disabilities, families, local agencies and the community. Interviews with 77 of the 81 LAC customers and 9 agencies closely associated with the program, showed overwhelmingly positive results and high levels of customer satisfaction. Significant improvements were achieved in:

- family and individual well-being, capacity to cope and confidence in the future;
- stopping the flow of people having to move to the city — no-one had been forced to seek accommodation outside of their community since the introduction of the LAC;
- facilitating access to generic services — no pre-school child had entered a segregated primary school;
- creating new locally based non-government agencies and attracting funding from 9 State and Commonwealth agencies to the Region.

On the basis of these positive outcomes, it was decided to expand the program across other areas of regional WA, using a staged implementation approach.

Expansion Across Regional Western Australia

Between 1989 and 1991, more LAC positions were established in regional WA. Further evaluations were conducted, collectively surveying 160 families, 50 individuals with disabilities and 50 agencies. The report, "An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Local Area Co-ordination and its Approach to Individualised Funding" (1993, p.17), found the reaction of all stakeholders to be:

"overwhelmingly positive. Respondents have repeatedly rated local area co-ordinators as quick to respond, reliable, personable, individually focused, informative, understanding, supportive, accountable, easy to talk to, compassionate, trustworthy and effective. Respondents have rated services and supports organised through local area co-ordinators as relevant, flexible, high quality and of both short term and long term value. ...families report that they are much more involved in decisions; able to exercise real choice; in control of services and supports; self-sufficient; secure; supported; satisfied; and optimistic about the future."

In addition, there were high levels of satisfaction with the service model - *"more user friendly and responsive than the traditional visiting team approach"*.

On the back of strong individual and community outcomes and further evaluations, *Local Area Coordination* was expanded to cover all areas of regional WA, with full coverage of WA achieved in 1994/95. The overwhelming success in the country led to confidence that it could be effectively implemented in the Perth metropolitan area.



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Expansion Across Metropolitan Perth

In 1991, the first 10 LAC positions were established in Perth as a pilot project. The first comprehensive evaluation was undertaken in late 1992 to assist ongoing program development. A further evaluation in 1995 provided outcome and satisfaction data. Both found that LAC was seen as highly valuable, relevant and useful by all key informants (families, individuals and agencies).

Based on consistently positive qualitative and quantitative data, the DSC sought State Government commitment to expand the program across the metropolitan area. This was approved in 1995/96 and implementation will be ongoing until the year 2000. State coverage is now at 70%, with 91 LACs located across the length and breadth of the State, and 55 based in the metropolitan area.

A Comprehensive Study Across Locations and Disability Types

"Local Area Co-ordination and Individualised Funding: An Evaluation of its Operation and Impact Across Disability Types and Geographic Settings" (1996), is the most comprehensive evaluation undertaken to date, comprising 15 longitudinal case studies, 169 surveys, 880 expenditure analyses. Conducted by Dr Greg Lewis and an evaluation team from Edith Cowan University, the study concluded that:

- there was a high level of satisfaction and quality throughout the program;
- all consumers noted progress in the *"provision and coordination of services and the quality and quantity of services delivered"*, along with *"measurable (often marked) improvements in the functioning and well being of the person with a disability and their family..."* (p.iv);
- individualised funding consolidated and extended the positive impacts of the program, with consumers linking its value to its *"flexibility and versatility"* (p.v);
- the program costs equated to \$2,204 per capita with 39% of program expenditure placed directly in the hands of consumers.

Other Independent Reviews

- In 1997, a consumer satisfaction survey was undertaken across **all** the DSC's programs (Donovan Research, 1997). The researchers reported that *"highest strong satisfaction is demonstrated for LACs, with **all** aspects of their service measured (ease of contact, knowledge of services, empathy, ability to organise services) scoring strongly"* (p.3). The data showed that 91% of customers reported satisfaction with LAC services and the researchers recommend that *"the results would suggest that if any one service expansion should take priority, it should be that of the LAC scheme"* (p.70).
- *Local Area Coordination* and its direct consumer funding has been subject to rigorous internal and external scrutiny, as evidenced in independent evaluations and a number of internal and external audit reports. A 1997 audit by the Office of the Auditor General found a high level of accountability for government funding, which is enhanced through customer involvement in the development of funding plans and the LACs continuing close involvement in monitoring funding outcomes.

"What consumers most liked about their local area coordinator was their good back-up and support, their accessibility and availability, their personal approach and willingness to get involved, their access to funding when needed, the quality of the services that were arranged on their behalf, their ability to meet their needs and the resultant positive impacts on both the person with a disability and the family as a whole"

(Lewis, 1996).



6. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION SUPPORTS THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO BEST PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Customer Focus & Customer Choice

Local Area Coordination epitomises customer focus and choice. It provides a locally based and accessible person. It requires that they develop an ongoing personal relationship with customers and a sound knowledge of their needs and goals. It goes to the people — it does not expect the people to come to it. It involves families in the recruitment and selection of their LAC. It is founded on the premise that people are in the best position to determine their own needs and support arrangements. It goes one step further and creates the opportunity for customers to make their own decisions, control their own resources and exercise choice over what is provided, when it is provided and by whom. It has consistently put around 40% of its budget into the hands of its customers so that they can do this. It has a strong community development focus and has established a number of new services and range of new partnerships with generic service providers, thereby ensuring that people have **real** choices.

National Bench-Marking & Competition

Local Area Coordination has been shown to be innovative, cost-effective and able to provide genuine consumer choice. The Productivity Commission, through its recent national review of government reforms, compares the program with its most similar State counterparts across a number of dimensions (Open Government - Improving Reform Implementation, 1998). The Commission profiles *Local Area Coordination* as the most comprehensive and well developed program of its kind, and selects it as one of only four exemplary case studies, and the only one focused on disability services.

In the same review, the Commission also identifies that *Local Area Coordination* "used competition to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of supports and services to consumers of LAC. The main competitive mechanism was the devolution of decisions about service providers to consumers. As long as the consumer has the choice of more than one potential service provider, providers should face incentives to improve the efficiency of the services that families can purchase with LAC funding" (Media Statement, September, 1998). Indeed, customers have used much of the \$4.36 million allocated to them in 1997/98 to purchase services from non-government agencies or private individuals, and have exercised choice based on market principles such as quality, responsiveness and cost effectiveness.

Investment in People - Staff Induction, Development and Supervision

The customers of *Local Area Coordination* are amongst society's most vulnerable — to give life to the ethos of valuing and empowering customers means valuing and empowering staff. In a 1997 review of the DSC's Human Resource Practices by the Public Sector Standards Commission, Local Area Coordinator was highlighted as having achieved significant outcomes, particularly in the areas of mentoring women and the employment of Aboriginal people.

In addition, new staff are provided with comprehensive orientation and training, including participation in a national training program developed in partnership with Edith Cowan University. A comprehensive "Supervision Charter" has been developed as a "bottom-up" process involving people at every level within the program. Supervising LACs are provided at an average ratio of 1:8 and have smaller allocation of customers, thereby providing LACs with locally based "hands-on" supervision and support. The management structure is flat, meaning that any level of management is only one layer away from customers — unusual in a large human service program. Experienced staff are encouraged to undertake other roles within the program, to facilitate ongoing development and contribute to the program's State-wide perspective.



7. LOCAL AREA COORDINATION IS IMPLEMENTED IN AN EFFICIENT AND COST EFFECTIVE MANNER

Families and friends provide 74% of all the help required by people with disabilities, therefore, there is a clear economic, as well as social reason to support these informal carers. In WA alone, it is estimated that it would cost tax payers an additional \$1 billion per year if formal services were required to replace informal unpaid support. *Local Area Coordination* is specifically focused on supporting families and carers to maintain their caring role and does this by:

Providing Grants Which Prevent the Breakdown of Informal Supports

Funding provided by *Local Area Coordination* helps to prevent the breakdown of natural support networks and the subsequent reliance on expensive formal services such as group homes, hostels and nursing homes.

- In 1997/98 approximately 1600 families received funding totaling \$4.36 million to purchase a variety of services such as respite, domestic support, carer support, camps, equipment, therapy etc, at an average cost per person of around \$2,700 per annum;
- Since 1995/96, \$1.48 million in accommodation support funding has been provided to 56 LAC customers deemed to be in **critical need** of support, at an average cost of \$26,464. As noted by the Productivity Commission, the average cost of a place in an accommodation facility is about \$60,000;
- In 1997, 60 families assessed as in **critical need**, received \$270,000 to purchase respite services to give them a break, at an average cost of \$4,496. Recent analysis shows that less than 7% of families have required any additional funding, indicating the success of small grants in supporting informal carers to continue in their caring role and in reducing demand on other high cost options.

Establishing New Services and Supports

The development of a range of new services and supports has helped improve the quality of life for individuals and families, and has helped families to maintain their caring role. Rural communities have been strengthened, such that it is now unusual for people to leave in order to access services.

- Whilst paid staff come and go, naturally occurring relationships and friendships often remain over the long term, and can reduce the burden on formal support services. LACs provide information, support and resources to support existing informal networks, as well as help them to develop where they do not exist. Many new friendships and alliances have resulted with LAC assistance.
- LACs have worked with customers, community groups and key State and Commonwealth agencies to develop new non-government organisations, whose community based management committees provide significant voluntary effort. These organisations are now integral parts of their communities, from the East Kimberley to Albany.
 - 12 Individual & Family Support Associations receive \$1,361,428 in DSC funding to provide respite and family support services to 510 customers, at an average cost of \$2,700 per person, with several also receiving funding from the Lotteries Commission for other program initiatives;
 - 4 Community Living Associations receive \$1,378,076 in DSC funding to provide accommodation support services for 39 customers, at an average cost of \$35,300, with many homes provided by Homeswest and the Lotteries Commission contributing to home establishment costs;
 - 8 new specialist employment agencies in the country receive Commonwealth funding for employment services, with several also receiving State funding for recreation programs.



Maintaining low administration costs

A lean bureaucracy and a commitment to minimise paperwork ensures more funding is available to provide to people with disabilities and their families. On average, 40% of the budget is provided directly into the customers' hands. An external evaluation (Lewis, 1996, p.vi) found that only \$168 per person, or 7.6% was expended on administration, "...a very low administration overhead compared to similar human services programs".

These figures reflect the ethos of *Local Area Coordination*. LACs base themselves in simple offices, with family homes being their general place of work. They are equipped with a computer, a car and a mobile phone — no salubrious offices, receptionists, or office staff. Program administration and support services are centralised in Perth to save costs.

A "Supply Driven" rather than "Demand Driven" System

As noted by the Productivity Commission, "*institutionalised care for people with disabilities typically offers broadly similar and relatively intensive levels of services - including housing, food, medical, education and recreation - to all consumers. Consequently, the cost to government per individual is high, about \$60,000 a year. Further, such care may weaken consumers' links to the broader community. And, although many individuals (and/or their families) may not be able to cope independently, many do not need or want all services provided in an institutional setting*" (Implementing Reforms in Government Services, 1998, p.94). The Local Area Coordination focus on supporting the informal system (families and friends) ensures that there is no wastage, no services un-utilised, and no expensive buildings constructed only to be disused later. It does this by:

- moving decision-making closer to the customer and allowing them to exercise choice in the nature and timing of services and supports, "*this is more flexible when the needs of consumers vary, and it can provide better targeting (given that individuals may not need or want all services that are available)*". Productivity Commission, 1998, p.98.;
- providing grants directly to customers, thereby cutting out the infrastructure and administrative costs associated with providing funds through an agency;
- facilitating access to non-traditional services such as domestic help or live-in personal carers rather than relying totally on more expensive specialist or professional services; and
- linking customers into existing services available in the community, thereby minimising duplication or the need for the development of expensive "disability-specific" services.

The State Government's "Count Us In" Strategy provides an additional \$125.5 million over five years. The effective utilisation of millions of dollars to increase community based services and provide support to customers, is to a large extent based on the success of LACs in 'paving the way'. **Their role in keeping families together, creating accepting and adequately resourced communities, and providing information about customer needs and service gaps to inform funding decisions, cannot be overstated.**



Summary

Local Area Coordination works quietly and effectively to bring change at an individual, family and community level. While we do not often seek external recognition, we do make a point of listening to what our customers tell us, and they tell us clearly and consistently that we are making an enormous difference to their ability to cope and their quality of life. In an area like disability services, so fraught with heartbreak and unmet demand, it is heartening to find an initiative which is so universally well regarded and yet so fundamentally simple.

Local Area Coordination does not expect people to fit into boxes, nor does it presume to be the expert. It believes that families and individuals are best placed to determine their own needs. It recognises that services should fit people, not the other way around. It understands that for people with disabilities to truly be part of the community, the community will need to be encouraged and supported to make them welcome. It understands that no one agency should, or could, be responsible for people with disabilities. This is a responsibility that the community as a whole shares and means developing partnerships with other people and agencies. It understands the importance of standing by people who are so vulnerable, and of having the courage to ask something so different from the existing service system.

Local Area Coordination is a team of 115 people who are proud of what they have achieved. We have taken the opportunity of our 10th year anniversary to share some of our achievements with the rest of the public sector through the Premier's Awards. These achievements include:

- people with disabilities and their families reporting that they feel more optimistic about the future, more able to cope, more in control of their lives, and more satisfied with the government's response to their individual needs;
- better resourced and more welcoming communities, particularly in rural areas where families are no longer separated or relocated due to a lack of services and supports;
- greater support for people with disabilities and their families through the provision of one ongoing, locally-based point of contact with personal knowledge of their needs and circumstances;
- increases in the number and type of services available to customers;
- decreasing the demand for high cost services and institutional accommodation;
- greater access to generic services such as education, health and housing and improved access to community facilities and services;
- the allocation of approximately 40% of the *Local Area Coordination* budget (\$4.36 million in 1997/98) directly into the hands of customers to purchase services and supports of their choice;
- identification of *Local Area Coordination* as one of the State Government's key strategic policy directions - and through the multi-million dollar "Count Us In" strategy, the commitment of a further \$6.04 million to expand the program;
- national acknowledgment by the Productivity Commission and the Review of the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement that *Local Area Coordination* is an example of innovation, cost-effectiveness and best practice.

"still can't believe it is a government department - it is so nice to know that there is someone else to back you up"

(parent, LAC Evaluation, September, 1996).