



Case Study

Disability
Service
Standards



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Quality management for a caring community

“DSQS and DESQA differ from other quality standards as they delve deeper in user experiences.”

How can you apply a quality management system that also protects the most vulnerable members of our society? The challenges facing disability service providers around Australia have led to the development of two very specific quality management systems – DESQA, Disability Employment Services Quality Assurance, and DSQS, Disability Sector Quality System in Queensland Scheme. Other states are now working on their own local standards.

The federal government’s Department of Families, Housing, Communities and Indigenous Affairs introduced DESQA in 2001, to ensure organisations who provide employment services for people with disabilities offer quality services and better outcomes.

DSQS was introduced by the Queensland government in 2003 and fully implemented by 30 June 2008, to target a consistent level of quality in the disability service sector. It provides a framework that recognises the importance of providing quality services that are responsive to the needs of people with a disability.

As Simon O’Neil, Principal Project officer for **DSQS**, explains, “DSQS applies to 250 organisations across Queensland, from larger service providers to families who are individually funded to care for people with disabilities.”

A unique focus on outcomes

DSQS and DESQA differ from other quality standards as they delve deeper in user experiences.

“The audits are unusual, in that consumer expectations are key,” explains Marc Barnes, NCSI Manager for Government, Health and Services. “We recruit a number of people who have used the service and interview them. They may be people with minor or temporary disabilities, or their families and carers.”

By adding their own life experience, and guiding the auditor through the processes from a client point of view, the results are “more qualitative than some of the other standards,” says Marc. “The audit methodologies and values are the same, but interviewing service users adds a different element.”

Service providers find that this also gives them valuable feedback and ideas for improvement. Robyn Gleeson is the National Quality Manager for **CRS** Australia, a nationwide disability employment service provider certified to DESQA.

“It’s a positive experience for staff,” she says. “The feedback from jobseekers is invaluable. Independent feedback helps us to clarify our strategies.” Lee Finlay, Training Manager for Queensland support program **IFYS**, agrees. “The first day is just fabulous,” says Lee. “Our clients come in and they give us really honest feedback because the Service User Auditor is there. It’s also a chance to see them again, find out what’s happened for them.”

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Robyn Gleeson
National Quality
Manager
CRS Australia

More than just a process

Disability services can fundamentally improve the lives of disabled people and their families. “**Wesley Mission** has always been very good at maintaining best practice quality standards,” says Barbara Leadbetter of Wesley Mission’s Young Care program. “But here the focus is much more on the individual.”

Although **Wesley** is mainly known for its Aged Care facilities, the Young Care program supports people aged 18 to 55 who are at risk of entering into a nursing home because of severe disabilities.

“At the moment we have 16 people living in our new purpose-built building in Brisbane. 10 residents have MS; others have an acquired brain injury. It’s a completely new care model. These residents would be impossible to care for at home, they need medical support as well as social support. And we need a higher staff ratio to manage this.”

IFYS also runs a residential support program in Queensland, helping young people in residential aged care find new accommodation and providing independent living support. “For so many years, we were a small youth organisation doing really good work, but we didn’t have all the accountability and documentation,” explains Lee. “We were making such a difference on a small scale, but we had to become more professional to make it on a large scale.”



At **CRS**, Robyn sees certification as crucial to the disability employment sector. “At the end of the day, it’s about the people,” she explains. “These jobseekers are vulnerable to their rights not being protected because of their disability.” **CRS** has over 170 sites funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and work with people who need specialist disability management services and support for up to six months after they start a new job.

EACH Employment service helps many job seekers with mental health issues and permanent disabilities find work, and stay in work, in Victoria. For

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Jane Hancock, Regional Manager in Bayside, the main benefit of the DESQA standard is that “it ensures people’s rights are adhered to. **Guidelines from Centrelink do not always apply easily to people on a disability pension. DESQA gives us some discretion to act according to their needs, so we can take a softer approach.**”

A framework for quality care

The core benefits of both DESQA and DSQS revolve around a quality care framework.

“Services can implement their own independent systems,” says Simon O’Neil at **DSQS**. “It audits them against human rights principles, and their users participate in the process. This also provides a formal complains and feedback system.”

“Participating in the audits has led to significant improvements,” says Robyn. “For example, the verification of wages and conditions is now a standard procedure for all of the job seekers we assist into employment.” At **EACH**, a brochure was recently changed to improve communication flow, after feedback was received during the audit. **IFYS** now has a formal service users reference group in place. “It’s both an advocate group and a feedback forum,” says Lee.

This tailored quality framework was also essential when Young Care first opened. “Everything is aged care focused at Wesley,” says Barbara, “so we had to re-write it all and start from scratch. We needed extra staff to do it – but because accreditation drives the board and the CEO that wasn’t an issue! They understand how important quality is.”



The audit experience

NCSI has been auditing disability service providers for over 10 years. “Our audit team has a higher level of quality experience in this area,” says Marc. The Audit Trainer Service Users, or Consumer Technical Experts, become part of the independent audit team during the two to four day audit, and attend workshops about the sector before the process begins.

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Jane Hancock
EACH Employment
Regional Manager

“We’re not there to catch people out,” says Marc. “We’re helping them provide a better service.”

Simon points out that **DSQS** funding provides financial support for the benchmark independent audit cost, although providers have the choice of who they use and their budget.

“We continue to use NCSI because the process is well managed and clearly communicated,” says Jane at **EACH**. “That means our staff at EACH Employment have a clear understanding of the review process.”

Making a real difference, one person at a time

While these standards are performance benchmarks that drive government funding, they also help these organisations with future challenges in the disability sector, and allow them to expand their services.

“With the financial crisis, rising unemployment made it harder for our jobseekers to be competitive,” says Robyn. “We’re continuing to improve our service so we can help our job seekers remove barriers to employment, whether that’s through providing training, work experience, or allied health interventions to improve their abilities.”

EACH is expanding quickly into new regions in Victoria, and will now work with other types of disabilities. “We’re about to triple our business across the region, it’s a huge growth,” says Jane.

For **IFYS**, the main challenge is staffing as they grow. “We’re getting a reputation as a good service to be with, and more referrals, so it’s hard to keep up with enough quality trained and medically experienced staff,” says Lee.

Wesley Young Care has also seen a rise in demand. “Every day we get calls from people; parents and carers at their wits end,” says Barbara. They are now tendering as new centres open around Australia. “The certification will absolutely help with these tenders. It’s very important when you’re looking at care.”

“Every year when we get the report and suggestions are made, we don’t just put them aside,” says Lee. “We’re always working towards continuous improvements, and the majority have already been implemented. Because these suggestions are made to improve the quality of service we provide – and that’s what it’s all about!”

For more information on how your business can achieve DESQA or DSQS certification with NCS International, please visit our website www.ncsi.com.au, email us at marketing@ncsi.com.au, or call **1300 856 554**.