

## Spinal Works – Milestone 4 Report

### ‘Survey of TAFE Teacher / Consultants for Physical Disability’

This phase of the *SpinalWorks* project involved a state-wide engagement with TAFE NSW Teacher Consultants – Physical, who provide expert support services to students with a physical disability.

Milestone 4 of the project includes the provision of feedback on the collated survey information, and consideration future continuous improvements from key survey findings. This contributes to the wider goal of ensuring that information is disseminated regarding the insights gained and systems established in the *SpinalWorks* pilot, with an aim of ensuring the uniformity of transitional planning and student placement when returning to the community after spinal cord injury.

### Methodology

The project used a survey tool which was distributed to full-time Teacher /Consultants for Physical Disability across NSW TAFE institutes. The options for response were telephone, email and mail. The key findings and recommendations are based upon the survey results with a 57% response rate.

The survey was formulated to gather a cross section of both qualitative and quantitative data, with nine questions ranging from student referral sources to impressions and expectations of the *SpinalWorks* project. The survey also requested that Teacher/Consultants identify the educational barriers for students living with spinal cord injury. This was further explored by questions seeking information on strategies that were currently in use to circumvent identified barriers, and by requesting Teacher/Consultant recommendations for future actions.

### Key Findings

Key findings are based on frequency and consistency of responses occurring within the survey. However, several responses were isolated in frequency due to individual needs and geographically specific issues. These responses are included in the attached *Appendix 1- Data Set*.

The most frequent and consistent key finding emerged in the question regarding educational barriers for students living with spinal cord injury. The three significant barriers that were clearly identified by the Teacher/Consultant in the survey data collection are:

- access to the built environment (**84%** of respondents)
- transport Issues - cost, reliability and access (**75%** of respondents)
- lack of appropriate courses and loss of courses that were appropriate and without financial barriers (**50%** of respondents)

In addressing the above barriers the most common strategy identified by Teacher/Consultants is to modify attendance requirements, class locations and timetables. The flexible delivery of courses being coordinated by Teacher/Consultants is more often associated with built environment issues, available courses and transport barriers, than with the need for a reasonable adjustment directly related to the individual's physical disability.

The second key finding is in relation to the referral system for the *SpinalWorks* project. There was wide variation in responses by Teacher/Consultants regarding where students were arriving from. However, the data demonstrates that Teacher/Consultants and prospective *SpinalWorks* students are utilizing all the available pathways to the project.

The most frequent response to the questions on what Teacher/ Consultants require when a student is being referred was:

- Early notification & consultation to provide time for preparation of equipment, transport requirements, personal care assistance etc.

This requirement was followed in frequency by Teacher/Consultants placing value on clear *Individual Education Plans* and the contact details for participants' supporting professionals.

The above findings indicate that Teacher/Consultants are aiming within their allocated resources to provide a holistic training environment to students living with a spinal injury. The data demonstrates that TAFE Teacher / Consultants have naturally progressed towards the '*Whole of Life*' service delivery model and have been using innovative techniques to support a holistic training platform within a mainstream VET environment.

This theme of the need for a holistic training environment is again present in the key finding that addresses the Teacher/Consultant use and impressions of the *SpinalWorks Project Information Kit*. While 42% of respondents found the Information Kit informative, 17% of respondents made improvement suggestions. The most frequent improvement suggestions were for information on *Personal Care Assistance* within the TAFE environment, and information on access to adaptive technology and training.

## **Recommendations**

The survey contained scope for Teacher/Consultants to put forward recommendations. These recommendations are included in the attached *Appendix 1-Data Set*.

The recommendations derived from the key findings are;

- The need to systemically address the environmental factors that Teacher/Consultants are identifying as the most significant educational barrier for students living with spinal cord injuries. The information provided by Teacher/Consultants may be disseminated to the existing infrastructure of

TAFE Access Committees. The medium term goal should be to bring VET facilities in line with the minimum requirements of the Building Code of Australia and the proposed DDA Disability Standard on Access to Premises (Premises Standard.)

- Offering of information collated from the duration of the *SpinalWorks* project to mainstream projects that involve the systematic exploration of courses and pathways for VET purposes. *SpinalWorks* would also recommend the inclusion of Teacher/Consultants for Physical Disability and all relevant stakeholders in course design projects and process.
  - *SpinalWorks* will document and implement the improvement suggestions that Teacher/Consultants have offered in the survey project. These improvement suggestions include providing further information on Personal Care Assistance in VET environments, and consistently updating information on access to adaptive technology and training.
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