

Abstract

This research explored processes and approaches that may contribute to a transformation of Australian Community Access Services (CAS) from models that are driven by professional experts to models that stress co-production of services with professionals and consumers actively involved in developing innovative programs with high quality outcomes for individuals. Although CAS, which are often referred to as, 'day activity services', or even, 'holding centres', may have contributed to social, psychological, health, wellbeing and professional opportunities for people with disability, little research about CAS internationally or nationally has been conducted.

A Constructivist Grounded Theory approach was adopted and involved six data collection methods: memoing; observation; focus groups; face-to-face interviews; a questionnaire; and a critical discourse analysis of extant texts. International and national literature was reviewed throughout the research. Five focus groups and eight face-to-face interviews were conducted in metropolitan and regional South Australia with people with disability, family members/informal primary carers and CAS providers. Additionally, a questionnaire gathered responses from people with disability and family members/informal primary carers accessing CAS. A critical discourse analysis of Australian publically available CAS policies (n=42) and written evidence also occurred. An analysis of the data sources was conducted using Nvivo 8 and 10 data analysis software.

A theory of, "Social Transformation", emerged during the current research as processes and approaches of CAS were explored. Seven concept areas were identified that may be useful to inform the development of high quality services that are consistent with contemporary disability philosophy and values. These were:

1. Eligibility and equity,
2. Individualised service options,
3. Locally accessible services,
4. Positive agency culture and values,
5. Innovative opportunities,

6. A progressive approach to community inclusion, and
7. The involvement of people with disability as active and equal partners in CAS design, implementation and evaluation.

The findings of this study identified a need for Social Transformation from competition and disempowerment to citizen-centric approaches; approaches that are built on relationships rather than power struggles, and evolve through a co-production, between the producer and clients who want to be transformed by the service. In Australia, barriers to social inclusion opportunities and community participation through CAS were identified, including the lack of planning prior to leaving secondary education, conflicting demands from policy makers and CAS providers and, particularly, misinformation regarding eligibility and equity of funding for CAS participation.

Processes and approaches to overcome these barriers were identified for both the individual and through policy and practice transformation aimed at addressing the inequity experienced by people with disability who, for decades, have faced unemployment, underemployment and limited further education opportunities because of assumed lack of potential. Evident in this current research was the inequity of power relationships including inconsistent eligibility criteria and assessment processes, limited and misleading policy and unfair treatment of people with disability who were participating in CAS.

It is argued that the transformation of CAS with, and for people with disability, strengthens community inclusion, contributes to CAS policy development and professional practice, and adds to academic research in this underexplored area.