

# PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Cuts to programs for disabled school leavers delivers blow to families**

*July 26 2004*

Families caring for children with disabilities in Tamworth will be severely penalised by State Government funding cuts to adult and post school programs, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper said today.

On Friday Mr Draper met with Challenge Disability Services chief executive officer Barry Murphy who expressed grave concern over the impact of reforms which will see existing programs aiding disabled clients' transition from school to work, cut and replaced with new programs, but at reduced funding levels.

Mr Draper accused the Government of walking away from its social obligation to provide for disabled individuals by putting the onus of care squarely back onto parents and family members.

"Treasury's axe has fallen on the most disadvantaged members of society setting the clock back 50 years to when families had to care for their disabled children around the clock," Mr Draper said.

Mr Draper expressed concern over the fact that the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care had informed service providers such as Challenge that current programs had only achieved employment outcomes for less than 3% of participants.

"The Department's justification that existing programs have achieved limited results in terms of securing jobs is little more than statistical game playing with vulnerable members of our community," Mr Draper said.

"These figures do not accurately reflect the situation on the ground as the vast majority of program participants would realistically not be likely to secure employment due to the nature or extent of their disability."

Mr Draper said it was a case of NSW Treasury looking to spread funding for the services without consulting with parents and service providers.

[www.peterdraper.com.au](http://www.peterdraper.com.au)

Media Contacts: Peter Draper 0417 290 376  
Donna Hurley 0419 409 538

Electorate Office ph. 6766 1422  
Parliament House ph. 9230 2341

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The programs to be cut include the *Adult Training Learning and Support Program* (ATLAS) and the *Post School Options* (PSO) Program. They will be replaced by the *Community Participation* and *Transition To Work* programs.

For some families funding levels will be cut by up to 40% with *Community Participation Programs* now offering \$9000 per individual with moderate support needs, \$13,500 for high support needs and *Transition to Work Program* funding of \$15,699 per individual on a one or two-year program.

Previously funding of up to \$23,000 was available to some high support clients.

“The cuts will result in the loss of almost 260 support hours per week at Challenge with clients’ funding to attend programs being cut from 5 days a week to 2 to 2.5 days per week,” Mr Draper said.

“Service providers such as Challenge Disability Services will struggle to maintain their current quality and range of programs for clients on reduced funding,” Mr Draper said.

“These cuts will burden clients and their families who face having to make alternative arrangements on the days the programs are not provided.

“Parents may not be able to step into the breach due to financial commitments forcing them to explore options of alternative accommodation and care for their disabled child which may not be in the best interests of the individual.

Mr Draper will now meet with parents of disabled community members at a public meeting on August 6 to discuss the issue.

Mr Draper has made representations on the matter to the Minister for Disability Services Carmel Tebbutt and plans to raise the issue as a matter of public importance when Parliament resumes in August.

**End Release**

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Donna Hurley 0419 409 538 Parliament House ph. 9230 2341