



## Realising Recovery Through Employment

### Temp Solutions 2003 – 2009

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*People with experience of mental illness will have ready access to temporary work that enhances their social, economic and mental wellbeing and increases employment opportunities.* Temp Solutions Vision.

Temp Solutions (TS) was a temping agency providing work exclusively to people who have experienced mental illness or used mental health services.

TS was set up by Kites<sup>1</sup> in response to the increasing number of people who experienced mental health problems who wanted to work but were reluctant to enter into full time employment. Reasons for this included fear of becoming unwell and letting the employer down, loss of confidence and wanting to ‘test the waters’. This need from consumers coincided with requests from the mental health sector for consumers to work in their services. At the time mental health and addiction service providers were required under the mental health sector standards to demonstrate the participation of consumers in the planning, delivery and monitoring of their services. Providers had difficulty knowing how to do this and indicated that a temp agency would be of assistance to them.

The underlying philosophy for TS was that recovery from mental illness is possible, that social inclusion through meaningful paid employment is an essential part of recovery for many people who experience mental illness, and that such employment reduces the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

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<sup>1</sup> Kites is a Community Development NGO whose aim is for people who experience mental health problems to have equal opportunities as other citizens to live, work and participate in the community. Kites unique contribution is to seize opportunities, transform ideas and find solutions to create change in services, systems and behaviour in communities.

Building Bridges Conference 2010 – “A good idea isn’t always enough”

The approach to establish and run TS was as a business model. Therefore funding to assist its development was sought from the Department of Labour’s Community Employment Group (2003).

TS aimed to become a stand alone business entity and with that goal in mind the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) provided a three year Enterprising Communities (EC) grant in 2006. Some additional funding from philanthropic trusts also contributed. In December 2008 TS entered into an agreement with Work and Income Wellington Region, via MSD Industry Partnerships to undertake career planning with 20 clients. This person-centred process was intended to assist the client to identify their employment goals and any assistance required to achieve them, and to provide assistance or referral to other agencies where appropriate.

## The Successes

The mission statement of TS was *‘to provide workers and customers with a valuable service that increased employment opportunities.’*

Most workers enrolled with TS were on either sickness or invalids benefits. In 2009 TS had 163 people registered on its database. The table below shows the distribution of number of years out of work (for those registered who have provided this information) how many in each group have worked for TS, and how many in each group have obtained permanent work since enrolling. (These figures exclude anyone who had existing work prior to enrolment.)

	Years out of work			
Number of people	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	Not Stated
Registered	96	15	3	49
Worked for TS	56	8	2	21
Obtained employment	30	4	0	4

## Key Achievements

- 2002 Establishment
- 2003 Appointment of permanent manager (part time)
- 2006 MSD Funding acquired
- Manager appointed full time
- Admin position established
- 100%+ increase in revenue

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In 2007 the value of TS was recognised internationally when it was awarded the Australia and New Zealand Mental Health Services Gold Achievement Award for consumer provided services. This was in recognition of the value to our workers and to the mental health sector of a consumer led organisation demonstrating the capacity people with experience of mental illness have to work well.

2008            Negotiated additional contract with Work and Income

### **Value for the Workers**

TS provided its workers with:

- An annual average placement rate equal to 22% of current enrolments into one or more temporary work assignments
- An opportunity to build confidence in their employability
- A service provider with first-hand knowledge of the issues they face when seeking work
- An ongoing and non-threatening point of contact with a specific focus on work
- Career advice with realistic consideration of their health issues
- Contact with other people who have similar experiences and are now working

The following feedback demonstrates the perceived value commonly expressed by job seekers who have worked with TS:

*“I have to say from personal experience the work I did for Temp Solutions was incredibly beneficial to my own mental wellbeing. Working for Temp Solutions meant that I was encouraged to have confidence in my abilities, it meant that my mental health issues didn’t negatively define who I was and it meant that I could put my skills to good use.”*

*“Most importantly [working for TS] instilled in me a very real sense of pride about who I was and how I saw my future. Your award is well deserved; your organization is a vital cog in the recovery journey for many people...”*

*“Temp Solutions is an agency that provides avenues of work for me that, by their short-term nature, is compatible with my present working capacity. As well as this, it is work in the mental health sector, where I feel I have something to offer...”*

*“Being able to show my children that I was employable and so their perception of me improved.”*

### **Value for Customers**

TS developed an infrastructure so that temporary work could be supplied to customers with the minimal amount of fuss and effort. Contracts were used which met legal requirements and were clear and descriptive making it easy for employers. TS charged market rates and kept them competitive to other temping agencies.

Key functions TS offered customers (the employers):

- Identifying suitable worker(s) from a diverse and skilled database of over 160 people
- Clear contract agreements between all parties
- Rapid response – placements made on less than 24 hours notice of a request
- Undertaking obligations such as ACC, payroll etc
- Interface between employer and employee if that is wanted
- Recruitment
- A monthly itemised invoice for services.

### **Why TS Closed**

During its six years of operation TS assisted many people who had experienced difficulties and hardships by facilitating employment placements which resulted in either having their benefits reduced or going off them altogether.

It is difficult to quantify the range and level of the various benefits people got from being involved with TS. Nor have we tried to quantify these benefits in terms of money and numbers on spreadsheets. However to a large extent the low TS income and numbers of job placements were the key factors in the closure of TS. Put simply, the demand for workers or numbers of jobs was insufficient to bring in enough revenue to make TS sustainable and to keep operating in a business environment.

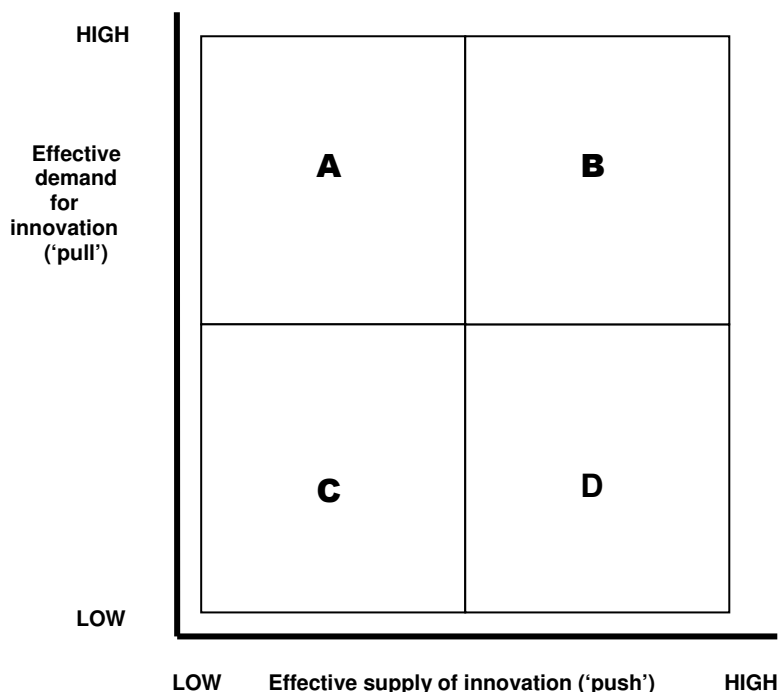
In a research report undertaken in the UK by the National Empowerment for Science, Technology and the Arts (2007)<sup>2</sup> some factors required for growth of social innovations and how to map them have been described.

*“Successful social innovations demonstrate alignment of what we call **effective supply** with **effective demand**”* (p.11).

The research refers to effective demand which is “demands, wants and needs that become effective when they are backed up with purchasing power” (p.11). In the TS situation the effective demand translated into customers who were willing and could afford to contract TS to supply a worker. The other factor for social innovation growth is ‘effective supply’.

The report states that “supply is effective when innovations have been made useful and workable and demonstrably working at reasonable cost, and without depending on the efforts of unusually talented individuals (p.12).” In the TS situation supply was not effective because it was unable to work within budget and it did ultimately depend on the extra efforts of staff and management to function.

The report goes on to suggest that the combination of ‘effective supply’ and ‘effective demand’ is essential for innovations to simultaneously achieve social impact and prove to be financially stable. The relationships between effective demand and supply are demonstrated in ‘The Growth Map’ (Figure 1, p.11) from the report.



<sup>2</sup> Mulgan,G., Ali,R., Halkett,R, & Sanders,B. (2007). *In and out of sync: The challenge of growing social innovations* (Research Report). United Kingdom: National Empowerment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

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TS would have had to be in the B section of the map where “viable innovators find customers who are willing to pay for.” Whereas during most of its time in operation TS it was situated in section C.

The intention was for TS to be a stand alone business by 30 June 09. The revenue (\$400k) required for the business to be self sustaining was not realised. Kites recognises that the aim of TS becoming a self sufficient business was never achieved due to a number of factors though since the closure there has not been an opportunity to do a formal evaluation of TS.

Some of the recognised contributing factors were:

- A review and subsequent changes to health and disability sector standards meant that the requirement for mental health services to demonstrate consumer participation in their services was diluted.
- The development of the mental health consumer workforce has not progressed at the rate intended in key Ministry of Health strategies and policy documents such as: *Te Tāhuhu* (2005)<sup>3</sup>, *Te Kōkiri* (2006)<sup>4</sup> and *Tauawhitia Te Wero – Embracing the challenge* (2005)<sup>5</sup>.
- A number of TS workers (at least 6) have gone on to fill Consumer Advisor positions at local DHB’s – these placements have been very successful and also the positions in themselves mean the need for consumer work is reduced.
- Whilst some organisations request a significant number of placements some jobs do not produce significant revenue.
- Marketing has not been as focused as it could be due to resource constraints– customers may have had a perception that TS can only respond to certain requests, particularly administration and interviewing roles.
- The focus on the mental health and community sector has not provided enough demand for workers, and is therefore too narrow.
- Discrimination and stigma toward people who experience mental illness is a factor that creates a negative point of difference between our service and other temp agencies because we charge the same market rates for a product that customers perceive as less valuable.

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<sup>3</sup> Minister of Health. (2005). *Te Tāhuhu – Improving Mental Health 2005 -2015: The Second Mental Health and Addiction Plan*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

<sup>4</sup> Minister of Health. (2006). *Te Kōkiri: The Mental Health and Addiction Plan 2006-2015*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

<sup>5</sup> Minister of Health. (2005). *Tauawhitia te Wero – Embracing the Challenge: National mental health and addiction workforce development plan 2006 -2009*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

## **In conclusion**

Employment is well known as a means to assist recovery from mental health problems. The Mental Health Commission<sup>6</sup>, (2001) states that “paid employment is ‘a critical component of the pathway to recovery’”. However, while employment offers real benefits to people with experience of mental illness, the reality is that unemployment rates amongst this group are higher compared to the general population.

Kites Trust is about developing and testing new and innovative ways of working and this was why Kites supported TS for over five years. Despite extensive efforts to secure the future of TS it closed in September 2009. Kites Trust has grown from the experience of developing and running TS. We have celebrated the successes and learnt many lessons from the passion and commitment of the staff and workers. One of the hardest yet most valuable lessons learnt from the closure was that sometimes a good idea isn’t enough and it is ok to walk away. Many of the existing contracts at the time of closure were picked up by Valley Transitionz<sup>7</sup>, a similar consumer employment agency in the Hutt Valley. In effect this has enabled the concept of TS to continue be it in a different way. The Kites Trust Board is acknowledged as ultimately they were responsible for making the decision to close TS. This was not an easy decision as they too believed TS was a good idea.

Temp Solutions was a good idea. Employment is a significant part of getting and staying well. Employment brings so many benefits beyond the financial one. It’s about being part of society, having an answer when someone asks you where you work, having something to do that is meaningful, assisting with self esteem and being valued by work colleagues, employers and customers. TS has done and been that for many people and they represent what was so important about TS, the people.

We are proud to have been part of TS and all that it has achieved.

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<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Commission. (2001). *Employment Checklists*. Wellington: Mental Health Commission.

<sup>7</sup> [www.valleytransitionz.co.nz](http://www.valleytransitionz.co.nz)