How can we help people with disability to find and keep jobs?

People with a disability are at the beck and call of Centrelink and the DES and until they are given the opportunity to manage their own journey into employment, where they have the intelligence and care/support, they will not have anything more than an obligation to be met. This seriously impacts on the mental wellness of the disabled job-finder as they are obliged to follow directions from badly trained personnel from DES providers who seem to benefit from having unemployed disabled persons on their books.

Furthermore, regular commitments, required by Centrelink Pathway Consultants for goals that they require to be documented and signed for, place further stress on a disabled person for goals that they want filled, but have little possibility of achieving with current DES practices. This may be more specific to Intellectual and Mental Health Disabilities, where functions are impacted by a created lack of motivation and useless appointments where appointments are made for the sake of a commitment to a Plan in preference to an appointment attended to genuinely access skills and plan marketing and training with appropriately informed and trained client case managers.

The industry seems to attract ineffectual marketers that have no skills, and have no enticements provided to acquire Employment Partners that have business benefits to be gained by employing ‘job-hungry’ disabled employment seekers. Many people with a disability seek employment to help them connect and evaluate their place in society and many prove to be more valuable employees then their abled bodied contenders for positions that are unfairly proffered to applicants without any reasonable consideration given to a ‘left of field’ applicant that has matured, trained, adequately addressed the criteria for the job, but has been unable to achieve experience due to poor representation and employment possibility.

Our experience with 4 X DES agencies over 8 years has led to only 3 interviews and very little job guidance or investigation, but much bullying and time wasting searching for and applying for ‘listed’ positions, instead of understanding the nature of employment in the region in relation to specific skills and training. OPPORTUNITIES are not available or supported for agencies to build up PARTNERSHIPS with industries and employers as they have no backing from government to make positons available EQUALY for a person with or without a disability. The disabled person requires a ‘head start’ and employers should be required to appoint them as an EEO commitment that is made with an acknowledgement of the value they will gain from the commitment. Many such positions appear on job lists for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders, with Government associated Health Providers. Why are these positions not offered also to people with a disability, who are often already trained and job ready? Government agencies should be putting their proverbial ‘mouth where their money is’ and be prepared to offer a percentage of jobs to people with a disability. This should include Defence Force, Administration such as the RMI, Centrelink, Medicare etc, and particularly government regulatory agencies such as the EPA, Trains and Ferries, and Government funded Organisations such as Local Government, Fire Services, SES, Ambulance ie jobs for funding.

Keeping a job is more about putting a client into the RIGHT job in preference to the ‘desperate’ placement of a client into a position that potentially will not be suitable due to lack of training, inadequate support, inappropriate work behaviours by client and colleagues, non-negotiated long term possibilities. Disability clients become SO desperate to secure a job, they are prepared to accept stop-gap positions that only partially fit the requirements of the client and result in short term, demoralising employment at best. This is so much about positions not being negotiated in advance through partnerships and contracts. This seems to only be possible through incentives that the DES Agencies are not in a position to negotiate, but would guarantee employment for people with barriers to employment that need to be considered at every turn.

How can we encourage employers to hire people with disability?

In the current climate, employers are minimising staff and there is little growth in any employment fields. This means that for employers to take on a new employee, let alone one with a disability, there needs to be an incentive offered that allows the employer to not incur additional costs. This can be in the form of subsidies or tax breaks, and need to be locked in with commitments that fulfil EEO guidelines. This is more likely to be negotiated successfully with Government agencies.

What can we do to promote the benefits of hiring people with disability?

An employer can only employ people if they have a need, and private companies tend to employ workers that will offer long term commitment or be happy with casual, unencumbered employment. Disability clients will generally prefer long term employment so that allowances and conditions can be set up and utilised with minimum fuss. Like all employees they aspire to recognition and reward in their workplace and this probably needs to be considered when looking for suitable employment. Again, this will be easier to achieve when the employer has a contract or arrangement to employ disabled persons as part of their employment strategy.

How can we support people at different stages of life?

 Do you agree with the main ideas?

The ideas are generally fine, but very short on results. In the Newcastle Regional area, possibilities for employment are in line with regional development and economic success.

 *Base funding for disability employment on the needs of each person……*is probably unrealistic and would not be more beneficial than employer partnerships that provide a guarantee of employment compared to hit and miss employment applications. Surely the cost of the disability pension can be offset against pay for employment.

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*Help people plan their careers. Then they can build their skills according to that plan*. ….. (How can DES providers improve the way they help people get jobs?)

 Seems to be offered within the bounds of the skills of the client case workers in DES agencies. Professional services such as psychologists that can assess capacity and predisposition within the bounds of the client’s barriers to employment are given very little time and funding by DES agencies and other assessment by staff is NOT professionally appropriate or effective. Disabled clients need a sensitive approach when so much of their personal being is questioned and judged. A client case worker is not given the skills to make these assessments and therefore consider the client in terms of the jobs that are foremost available to the agency. My disabled person was assessed as being appropriate for outside ‘green team’ work, when, in fact he has profound barriers to working outside. He was made to feel guilty that he would not agree to the assessment.

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*Understand what employers need.*

Much more learning needs to be done by case workers to understand types of industries in their area and job possibilities within those industries. THEN this information can be shared throughout the DES Agency and then marketing executed to specific employers that provide such jobs. My disabled person has been asked to provide lists of possible employees and then these lists ignored and job vacancy list worked on instead. This constitutes a lack of training and skills of the case workers, and an importance placed on number of jobs applied for in preference to using time and energy to access employers and jobs within chosen industries. A former Bunnings manager working for a DES identified that the first 100 applications out of 2000+ for a position would be considered and the rest discarded unopened. What chance would a disabled person have with such competition? A contract or partnership here would add value to both employer and applicant. And the requirements of the employer are determined before a job listing is made.

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*Create more opportunities for open employment*

*. Open employment includes jobs in mainstream businesses or organisations. It’s not just for people with disability.*

*(*How can DES providers improve the way they support people who are

in a job? How can DES providers improve the way they support employers?)

Obviously not all disabled are capable of participating in mainstream employment, but the opportunity should be given if the client has developed skills that would be beneficial to an employer to offset any difficulties created by their disability. For my person, who has extensive training in the IT industry, a casual employment/job share with an employer needing basic IT skills would give him a start in the industry that would add to his employability by adding experience to his CV. Subsidies would be instrumental in providing support to employers, and ‘at work’ support would see the employer not inconvenienced by specific individual needs. This capacity for support by the DES is only of advantage if the jobs are secured…..no job, no need for support. Another important dysfunction in current practice to job finding with DES Agencies is their inability to offer subsidies to ‘government employers’ due to the ‘double dipping’ mentality. It is not relevant to the job seeker to WHERE the funding for the agency come from; the importance is in securing the job. And a secured job results in a reassessment of the individual disability pension….a saving to the government.

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*Use technology well across the Government so that services connect with one another.*

*This will help us make things easier for people and service providers.*

 Information about a job seeker should be an open file for the job seeker to have access to. This could make the benefits to the DES agency of appointments and training more transparent and appropriate, instead of years of ‘voluntary’ job seeking achieving VERY LITTLE.

*What will DES be like once the NDIS starts all around Australia?*

Surely the NDIS is not about DES Agencies. NDIS can function in conjunction with Centrelink Pathway Planners to determine appropriate goals, which may include employment, but NDIS needs to maintain its ‘therapeutic’ ideals in preference to a much more specific requirement for job finding. A person with a disability needs to have boundaries set for dealing with specific and varied conditions and employment should not encroach on this.

*How can DES providers improve the way they help people get jobs?*

By considering the needs of the individual, not the bounds and conditions of their contract…which currently minimises genuine effort to find employment and instead aims at ticking boxes for proof of activity with a client and therefore confirmation of obligation.

*How can DES providers improve the way they support people who are*

*in a job?*

Support the client as needed including exit interviews and immediate debriefing, so that insecurities and self-assessment don’t become distorted and distructive.

*How can DES providers improve the way they support employers?*

We know nothing about JSA and therefore have never had the opportunity to assess whether they would be appropriate for a ‘volunteer job seeker’. This is because Centerlink consultants are not adequately schooled to advise people with a disability who would be the best ‘job finding’ agency to engage. This advice and information about statistics for job seeker successes within a local region should be readily available and would ensure that both job seekers and job finders are rewarded by choosing effective people.

How can JSA providers improve the way they help people get jobs?

How can JSA providers improve the way they support people who are in

a job?

How can JSA providers improve the way they support employers?

How can JSA better support people with disability?

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*How can we help people who want to change from working in an ADE to*

*working in open employment?*

*How can we help ADEs to be more successful businesses?*

Leave (and support) already successful enterprises with funding that ensures their success and their ability to EMPLOY people with disabilities. We have seen many successful providers cut down with funding removal, leaving the employees with NO alternatives in their local areas.

*Do employers know that they can receive support to hire people with disability?*

It would seem that DES agencies offer subsidies as a last resort. Support is hinted at in applications, but this approach assumes that an applicant will make it to the short list to further discuss employer benefits. In fact, only intense pre discussion can currently sway an employer.

*How can we better support small employers?*

More /ongoing work experience can help an employer see the benefits of the person with a disability, and should be at the discretion of the employee/worker/client.

*What else can we do to encourage employers to hire people with Disability?*

More benefit to the employer…wage subsidy, tax exemption, more realistic employment conditions eg. Superannuation and holiday payments suspended. Regular assessment/reviews of employee with DES consultant.

*What do you think employment for people with disability will be like while using the NDIS?*

Hopefully not associated.

*How can we improve the way that the NDIS works with employment services?*

How can you possibly assess the cost of providing employment services for an individual. If the planner gets it wrong, who will be disadvantaged?

*How can the Personal Helpers and Mentors programme help more people to find jobs?*

Perhaps utilizing Mentors to provide insight into careers could be beneficial. Many disabled people have restricted access to people that can help to define careers and show examples of some industries. This could be invaluable before starting a commitment to a DES agency.

*What other ways can we help people with mental illness to find and keep jobs?*

By accurately assessing the client and determining their effective wellness strategies and incorporating these into sessions with Case workers and therefore proving effectiveness of these strategies before offering strategies to an employer. Most mentally ill people will have a ‘strength’ that makes them feel connected to their ‘happy’ selves. This strength should be part of their goal or career identity.

***National Disability Recruitment Coordinator,***

Are these people available to DES agencies to help create partnerships with industries and businesses that employ many people and could give the agency a familiar, receptive contact with modifications and allowances understood or in place?