

Submission into the review about Disability Employment Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback into the review about disability employment services.

Background

My contributions are from the point of view of a person from a non-English speaking background living with a disability that has been in the workforce ongoing for over thirty years. I commenced my working life in open employment without support. It was tough but I managed. I had a sense of accomplishment. I found it difficult to compete against able bodied people for promotional roles. I got left behind. At first, I thought that was protocol driven because others had been there longer but when the temps are given promotional opportunities before you when they don't even have the same experience or education as you then there is something terribly wrong.

I could not see the situation improving in this workplace. When I was tapped on the shoulder to move into a role within a disability organisation, I took it. I thought that a disability based organisation may be more accepting of diversity and more forward thinking. Instead of the situation improving, it got worse. I observed a culture where clients were not the focus of the organisation (the culture reminded me of the time I had spent in an institution following my first brain haemorrhage). I told my husband that it is almost as if the disability sector attracts people that like control. Perhaps this type of person feels empowered in an environment where processes are developed to protect the management tier?

I started applying for jobs back in the mainstream area. I often got called in for an interview. I was mostly-unsuccessful ("the preferred applicant had more relevant experience"). This happened over a dozen times a year. I saw this as evidence that there is in fact discrimination in recruitment against people with a disability. Last week, I found the evidence:

Even though I have not achieved career opportunities within the public service, I have obtained qualifications in project management and governance and am on three national organisations Boards / Advisory Committees.

"In particular, it has been reported that many employers do not appreciate the value a person with disability can bring to their organisation. For example, a 2012 survey of employers found a greater resistance to the idea of hiring a person with disability than to hiring a person from the other groups in society. When asked about their willingness to consider job applicants for future vacancies, a random sample of employers responded as follows:

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- *mature-age job seekers—90 per cent willing;*
- *parents returning to the workforce after a long-term child care—89 per cent willing;*
- *very long-term unemployed people—71 per cent willing; and*
- *job seekers with disability—54 per cent willing.*

A significant proportion of employers could see no benefit, that is”

Source - <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/DES-Reform-Discussion-Paper-November-2016.pdf>

I found out about DES and Job Access, I volunteered to take part in this program. Once I started being involved, I shared this information with the human resources unit so that other people that are eligible can also utilise the service.

I personally wrote to the Male Champions of Change seeking support for disability as a diversity topic in the same manner as gender. The champions all wrote to me personally congratulating me on my successes but did not understand the essence of my letter. I wrote to the Canadian government to research the way in which disability employment was supported and learnt that this was done through the tax system and tax incentives. I believe that this could work in Australia to shift the momentum from social security mentality to a working culture.

I have been involved in a Change reform project in SA Government to improve disability employment outcomes in SA Government. My project was supported by the Commissioner for Public Employment and the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity.

I was a member of the intra departmental Disability Access and Inclusion Plans Steering Committee for the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion.

My observations are that;

- The culture in many organisations is not conducive to encouraging or embracing diversity (this is evident from the top down and demonstrates a lack of understanding of the economic and performance benefits of employing people with a disability),
- There is a disconnect between the policies and procedures of the department which support the employment of people with a disability and the actual experience of employees and their managers and barriers in their day to day work,

There are many and varied benefits of employing people with a disability. Some of these benefits are measurable, Perhaps the greatest benefits are intangible, it will

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take a leader with great insight to seriously commit to adopting a diversity policy that understands the benefits of disability diversity :

Tangible benefits	Intangible benefits
People with disability generally take fewer days off, take less sick leave and stay in jobs longer than other workers	There is a looming skills shortage, widening the labour force is essential
Employment costs for people with disability can be as low as 13 per cent of the employment costs for other employees*.	Diversity drives innovation. A report shows that innovation drives business success and jobs growth (Hon Greg Hunt MP)
Once in the right job, people with disability perform as well as other employees	People with disability build strong connections with customers
People with disability boost staff morale and enhance a sense of teamwork	Hiring people with disability enhances an organisation's image in the general community
Deloitte's Access Economics wrote a report on the economic benefits of employing people with a disability	Workplaces that employ people with a disability have better safety records, as the workplace is adapted for accessibility
Price Waterhouse Cooper wrote a report measuring the economic benefits of increasing the employment rate of people with a disability by 1% to Australia's GDP	<p>While Australia is often described as a multicultural success story, our diversity is not reflected in the leadership ranks of Australian organisations. Simply put, a more diverse leadership team makes for better decision making, and drives the long term sustainability of the organisation.</p> <p>Source: Dr Tim Soutphommasane, Race discrimination Commissioner (CEDA)</p>

Sources: * Graffam, J, Shinkfield, A, Smith, K, and Polzin, U 2002, 'Employer benefits and costs of employing a person with a disability', Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol. 17, pp. 251-263.

Recommendations:

- Share and Highlight the economic and cultural benefits of employing people with a disability,
- The Commonwealth and State governments must take a leadership role and lead by example by promoting diversity across classification levels (KPMG in South Africa fast track employees with a disability through the system). Recruitment and Retention need to be developed to focus on achieving strengths based placements and achieving diversity targets,
- Government should resource an area to focus solely on disability employment recruitment, retention and development,
- Place skilled people with a disability in bona fide vacancies that would normally be occupied by temps-giving real opportunities to people with a disability,
- Establish a disability employment pool within government for the purpose of recruiting and promoting people with a disability-all vacancies should be cleared by this unit prior to filling,
- Ask if not why not-in terms of employing people with a disability,
- Aim for disability diversity across classification levels
- Disability employment targets should be embedded in executives contracts through performance measures,
- Cultural change needs to become a focus,
- Increased focus on recruitment, retention and progression.
- Promotion of the DES and NDRC scheme,
- Engagement with employers about supports that are available and the business and economic benefits of employing people with a disability,
- Incorporating disability awareness training (currently available through job access),
- Making disability awareness training compulsory for managers that supervise people with a disability,
- Raise awareness of the issues faced by employees with a disability,

- Generate ideas about how to remove barriers to employment, mindset is often a greater barrier than physical barriers,
- Having a workforce that reflects the diversity of the population will lead to improvements in customer service,
- Sometimes support might involve developing the clients skills and strengths assisting them into a more suitable roles (that is, money invested in the client might be more productive than the purchase of equipment),
- People with a disability are under represented at decision making levels this promotes the status quo,
- Diversity across organisations will make organisations more agile, this will have a positive impact upon an organisations performance
- A strategy to have diverse representation across organisations will improve an organisations culture, resilience, profile and performance,
- Incentives should only be offered when KPI's are achieved, Executives must be held accountable for not achieving KPI's,
- Once government have got their house in order and achieve the disability employment targets then a procurement strategy should be developed to preference organisations that achieve disability employment targets,
- Personal development of employees with a disability be considered resulting in employees utilising their strengths,
- Gain the support of key corporate groups such as the male champions of change and/ or ASX governance Council to advocate for recognition of the benefits of having the disability mindset represented,
- Encourage diversity initiatives similar to the Champions of Change and ASX governance council (if not why not) for people with a disability –An integrated society will lead to economic benefits (Deloitte's Access-the economic benefits of employing people with a disability),
- Payroll tax exemptions should apply when people with a disability are employed,
- Change societies mindset from one of social security mentality to one where people are encouraged to work,

- As per NDIS recommendations- Individual employment support (assumes group of three)

This support includes time-limited on the job training and post-placement support so that a participant is given time to adjust and manage demands of the job. It can also provide advice to employers. Participants assisted by this funding must not be eligible for Disability Employment Services (DES). Local Area Coordinators can also assist participants to make contact and discuss their needs with an employer or DES provider.

Participants with employment-related supports in their plan may also receive funding for support in other areas of their lives, including community participation support. Other funding which may be included in their plan - and which may assist with employment - is funding for transport and funding for assistance with daily living (such as personal care while at work).

One way I think this could occur is by having an opt out option in the NDIS for people who would prefer to self-manage rehab, supports and personal development. This group of people could be offered tax incentives. This could help to make the NDIS sustainable and give people a goal to work toward.