My name is Ada Yip and I have a congenital bilateral profoundly deaf son who is now working in a government organization. **I am also a Teacher of the Deaf and have two Master degrees in the related field** (*Master in Deafness and Communication Studies – Macquarie University; Special Education- Sensory Impairments – University of New Castle*). I have taught hearing-impaired/Deaf students for over 25 years in both NSW and Queensland Departments of Education and have recently retired due to the pandemic.

The first reason for writing this submission is because my son has been bullied at work!!! I am really eager to find a better way to support disabled people to KEEP their jobs. Hopefully with this new Disability Employment Services (DES) model of delivery, more disabled people will work in a more inclusive / supportive environment with employers and colleagues that are more understanding and with deeper appreciation of the hard work these disabled people put into their day to day jobs.

The second reason is I have noticed that many charity or government-funded organizations are doing a lot to help disabled people to find work because more than 50% of the working-age disabled people are unemployed. Of course, it is important to help them to find jobs. However, I believe it is **even more important to support them to KEEP their jobs once they are employed**. If they lose their jobs soon afterwards, it will not be good for both the companies that employ them and the disabled workers. The company concerned may not want to hire another disabled person and the disabled worker could suffer, not just financially but psychologically as well.

As a Teacher of the Deaf, I spent all my life teaching literacy and numeracy to my deaf students so that they can get a job after they finished school (high-school, TAFE and university). However, when I discovered that my son had been bullied at work, I realized the importance of supporting these students in their workplaces. I regretted spending all my life in educating them instead of advocating for them in their workplaces. I strongly feel, therefore, that **more should be done to support them so that they can KEEP their jobs and be successful as well.**

I cannot say that **ALL** disabled people, but certainly most of them, are not good at communicating their ideas and thoughts because most of my past experiences are with hearing-impaired/Deaf people. However, I believe that **NOT being able to communicate fluently and clearly is a major obstacle for many disabled workers in their workplaces**. Sadly it is also something that they cannot do well no matter how hard they try. Sometimes this is because of their lack of speech and language fluency and sometimes because they are too afraid to speak out for themselves. (The example l can give is my son’s. He is highly educated but his speech is not quite intelligible to unfamiliar listeners and he is not good at expressing his ideas, emotions and thoughts.) On the other hand, employers and colleagues of these disabled workers also lack understanding of their disabilities and so do not know how to include /accommodate them in their workplaces. I, therefore, suggest that following steps to support disabled employees, not only to just KEEP their jobs, but also work successfully and happily in their workplaces.

1. Once a disabled person is employed and before he/she starts working officially, someone from DES should visit their workplaces to explain to the employers how to access money e.g. **Job Access**, for additional equipment/furniture for this disabled employee.
2. **Physical environment of the workplaces** should be assessed by a professional of the related disability, not just someone from the company’s Work Health and Safety team, to see what needs to be changed/adapted to the special needs of this worker. The reason is they may know the general but not the specific accommodation needs of this employee. An example from my son’s case is the people from their WHS team just install a fire alarm above my son’s seat but not aware that working in an open-plan office, he needs a soft-fabric panel partition and curtains to absorb the noise arising from this kind of office design. The background noises and reverberations actually give my son frequent headaches when he was working 5 days in the office before the pandemic.
3. Present a **PPT presentation** to people in this company re: this disabled employee’s specific disability and the necessary accommodations needed to include this person in their workplaces. All people, especially those who will work closely with him/her, in the company should attend to help them get to know this person.
4. This presentation should also mention briefly the Discrimination Act, but do not dwell on it as it will frighten the employers. However, it is important to remind them of their legal responsibilities as well. What should be **dwell on are their ABILITIES and ways to “COMMUNICATE” with this worker.**  Moreover this kind of presentations should be done **YEARLY** as there could be new colleagues and even old colleagues tend to forget if they do not work closely with this disabled person. (Do not just put this PPT presentation in a file as the colleagues may not have time to read/watch. However, Zoom or in-person presentations will allow time for questions and explanations).
5. Suggestions on **contents of the presentation**:
6. Simulation game: From past experiences, a simulation game on the specific disability usually arouse empathy and increase understanding. So the presentation could start with a simulation game e.g. in the case of deafness/hearing impairment, listen to words/sentences/weather reports etc. through a simulator so they can listen like a profoundly deaf person. Games that explain what ‘auditory memory’ is, are often well-received too as attendees will realize how hard it is to retain all the information we have heard to execute an action. Attendees will instantly realise the difficulties that a deaf person faces living in a hearing world every day.
7. Explanation of the specific disability and the effects it has on different aspects of this person’s life. e.g. what is deafness and this employee’s audiogram, lack of speech intelligibility and fluency and limited auditory memory.
8. Ways to overcome these difficulties in the workplaces. Again in the deafness field, they include writing down a list of jobs needed to be done every day instead of just telling him orally and/or using Apps that can transcribe speech into text as a “normal” way of communication medium. To facilitate communication, the communication partners need to face the deaf person so that they can lip-read and it is also important to allow time for them to process what they hear/see. For signing Deaf employees, they will need everything written down for them or colleagues learn some Auslan signs to effect a quicker communication. Remind hearing colleagues that learning to sign is useful and a lot of fun and nowadays normal hearing babies are taught to sign so they can “communicate” with their parents before they can talk.
9. **Meetings in the workplace**: For the hearing-impaired / Deaf people these are their nightmares because so many people will be talking at the same time and so noisy! How to hold meetings to cater for the needs of this disabled worker must be included in the PPT presentation.
10. Legal responsibilities and explanation of the Discrimination Act. Although I mention above, in point 4, “Not to dwell on this Discrimination Act as it will frighten employers”, yet it is also important to emphatically explain to **employers and** **colleagues NOT to see employing a disabled person as a charitable act. These people Do NOT need pity**, they have tried extra hard at school / universities to get to where they are and they deserve to be seen as their equals/peers. They just need some reasonable accommodations/adjustments to do their jobs well. From statistics, disabled employees are usually more hard-working and remain loyal to the company.
11. Questions and Answers time.

(I am sure professionals from different disability sectors will be able to suggest contents appropriate for their clients.)

1. After this disabled person has started working, **DES support personnel should keep visiting** this worker monthly, then quarterly, half-yearly and then yearly **to sort out issues/problems** **that could arise in the workplaces.** The earlier issues are sorted out, the easier they are to settle. I personally think that support from DES should be an on-going process as my son was bullied by a new manager after working for the same company for 12 years. When my son was first transferred to his Canberra office, he actually presented a PPT Presentation re: his deafness and ways to communicate with him and this “manager” was at the meeting too. However, she refused to give him the accommodations needed when she became his manager!! Maybe even after the initial support period, at the request of the disabled worker, DES should still send a support person to help sort things out so problems could be ironed out timely and quickly. We have tried to seek help from many private and government agencies/departments but none offered to help and my son still feels psychologically unsafe as this person is still his line manager!!

The above suggestions are what I have learnt and thought through in details the kind of support that I would like to see happen to a deaf employee from my recent dealings with my son’s managers. I know I missed the chance to help my son and that is why I want to help other disabled workers. To do that, I have also volunteered to give talks to workplace trainings too. I still remember vividly how devastated I was when I discovered that my son had been subjected to eight long months of unreasonable discriminations and bullies! I was so upset that I went straight to see the CEO and Head of HR of his company! Of course, I guess you know the answer already, not much has been done and that is why I believe **DES should be the government agency to promote, support and monitor workplaces that have disabled employees.**

I come to visit my son in Canberra rather frequently now that I have retired and I am available and happy to further discuss my submission if need be.

Yours sincerely,

Ada Yip