



Our Mission: To promote, protect and defend, through advocacy, the fundamental needs, rights and lives of the most vulnerable people with disability in Queensland.

SUBMISSION TO THE ISSUES PAPER

“EMPLOYMENT SERVICES – BUILDING ON SUCCESS”

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QAI endorses the objectives, and promotes the principles, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Patron: Her Excellency, Ms Penelope Wensley, AC Governor of Queensland

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI) is a community-based advocacy organisation that has for the last twenty-five years campaigned for the rights of vulnerable people with disability in Queensland.

There is a plethora of statistical information to illustrate the higher unemployment rates of people with disability.

However, in the “*Strengthening your business through diversity: A guide for employers*” - benefits to employers of employing people with disability included average or better ratings in the area of attendance, flexibility and productivity; have fewer absences and better retention rates; cost marginally less in relation to workplace safety and insurances; have a diverse range of skills and needs for support; have a positive impact on staff morale; do not cost more than employment of a person without a disability as there is financial assistance for workplace modifications; and can build customer loyalty.

Yet despite this information little has changed to progress the employment participation, right to fair wages, recognition of people with disability who volunteer in some instances for many years in the same workplace, or to reduce the intrusive and negative assessment processes.

Recommendation: Information for employers regarding the benefits of employing a person with disability should be sent via the Australian Tax Office to promote and encourage employment opportunities for people with disability.

ISSUE

How to improve the Disability Employment Services (DES) approach to meeting the workforce needs of employers and build stronger relationships?

Recommendation: DES would build relationships with employers and employer groups in their local geographical areas to ascertain niche roles which could be filled by people with disability. This can be more productive for both employers and DES providers and beneficial to potential workers. It would certainly be cost effective for employers who can employ a person with a disability to perform roles normally carried out by more senior staff members.

QAI is deeply concerned by relationships between DES that are associated with Australian Disability Enterprises and the notion that such workplaces can be described as “inclusive” – see “Inclusive Employment 2012-2022 – A Vision for Supported Employment. This document quotes that currently (2012) an average hourly wage rate for workers with disability in supported employment of \$3.65 –

average working hours for people with disability in supported employment of 24 hours a week – 300 people per year moving from supported employment for the open labour market”. Given these figures it is not indicative of real efforts made to see people with disability move from veritable ‘sweat shop’ working conditions and rates of pay to fair working conditions.

Recommendation: All people with disability currently working in sheltered workshops (let’s call them what they are) be progressively paid into at least minimum award rates rather than the current productivity rates of pay. No other citizens in Australia are subjected to this kind of assessment and rate of pay according to their level of productivity. When people work the hours to their best ability that should suffice to receive the same pay as anyone else. Any shortfalls that employers cannot meet should be met by government support.

ISSUE

How can employment services encourage partnerships with other organisations to meet the needs of job seekers?

How can partnerships reduce duplication and free up resources for job seekers?

Recommendation: QAI recommend that employment services peak bodies partner with advocacy organisations to be better placed to understand the issues and needs of job seekers with disability. Partnerships of DES, advocacy groups and cross government collaboration at all levels (local, state and federal) would reduce the need for multiple assessment processes. This should begin with assessments undertaken with school guidance officers, tertiary education and linking by Local Employment Coordinators and training organisations.

We direct you to our attached submission to further explore employment issues for people with disability.

ISSUE

What can be done to encourage job seekers to move to other locations to find work?

Recommendation: For many people with disability this issue will necessitate the smooth collaboration of service providers and government departments in the range of personal support, public housing and the local DES. By the development of cross government cooperation, perhaps by a local coordinator who connects with all levels of government to facilitate fluid and smooth transition of services and support, this could be well executed.