**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 296

**Name** James Patton

**Submission made by**

[x]  Other
 Please describe: Ex DES Manager and now Ability Links, Linker

# Organisation or Government Agency Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

[ ]  Owner

[x]  Manager In a Disability Employment Service

[ ]  Human Resources Manager

[x]  Other

**If other, please tell us your role within your organisation**

Linker in Ability Links NSW Program

**What is your experience of providing work/services/advocacy for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

I worked in Disability Employment Services as a case manager and manager for 2 years and 6 months. I now work in the Ability Links program assisting persons with disability access more mainstream social outlets including employment.

**Do you have any case studies of the experience of older Australians/Australians with disability working or looking for work?**

While working in disability employment services I assisted many people look for work and return to work after a time out of the work force. Unfortunately a minimal amount of these placements were successful.

An example of a very good placement is a participant with an intellectual disability who now works for a turf line painting company.

The reason for the success was as follows. The company contacted the DES and were looking for someone to place labels on bottle tops. They knew the job was very basic and were looking for someone with a disability who would appreciate the opportunity to do this task. They were looking for accuracy and speed. The DES conducted a trial within their office where 6 people attended the trial. On finding out what the position would entail 2 people left the trial as they thought the position was below their capabilities. During the trial the case manager talked with participants and assessed there performance and communication skills. A participant was identified as the right person for the position.

On taking the participant to his introduction the manager of the company had previous dealings with the participant and was very happy to have him on board. The manager knew that it would take a bit of work to get the participant up and running and was willing to put in that effort to assist the participant. The participant went from putting labels on bottle tops to cleaning the factory and drilling holes in metal. He is still working there 3 years later.

This was a successful placement as the manager of the company knew what he was taking on and it was going to take time and a bit of effort to assist the employee reach his full potential. The participant really wanted to work and had a great attitude. Pre planning had been conducted by the DES and the best person for the position was found through a trial. There was good communication between the employer and the DES at all times.

**Examples of when work placements do not work out:**

An example of when the placement did not work out is when a labour hire company was looking for warehouse factory workers. There were potentially 10 ongoing casual positions available and all case managers within the company put forward participants they thought would be able to do the job. There was no double checking of how suitable the participants were for the positions and the labour hire company randomly picked 10 participants to start working in the factory warehouse. Within the first two weeks of the participants starting their positions 5 of them had left with 2 not even turning up to their first shift. By the end of the six months only 3 people were working there on a semi regular casual basis.

The reasons these placements were such a disaster were that The Disability Employment Service rushed too quickly to get any people into the position before the end of the month and before the end of the quarterly Star Rating period as they were having a big push to try and hit targets with financial rewards for offices that hit their respective targets.

There was no double holistic approach to whether the person was in the right frame of mind for the job before he or she started.

There was a lack of communication between the labour hire company and the Disability Employment Service.

There was no consultation with the factory warehouses human resources about the new participants that were working there and no disability awareness training or extra training time given to participants.

**Other issues which may result in an unsuccessful placement are**:

The Disability Employment Service has not disclosed the persons disability.

The person has not disclosed there disability.

The person has been placed into the position with little or no training and expected to do the tasks as well as the last person.

The persons mental health condition means they appear lethargic and slow when they are going as fast as they can. Employers see them as slow and unmotivated and do not want them to work for them.

Employers have a lack of understanding about the persons disability and are not interested in trying to accommodate them.

Some businesses only approach Job Active or Disability Employment Services because they are interested in the Wage Subsidy. On numerous occasions a wage subsidy would be paid and then issues would appear with the employees that were not present before the wage subsidy was paid to the employer.

**Issues when looking for work:**

A lot of applications are now online and older people and persons with disability struggle to use computers and cannot create resumes and cover letters that will be noticed by employers. The Disability Employment Service System does not give case workers enough time to spend with individual participants to complete applications and resumes. One application can take between one and two hours.

There are not enough jobs for everyone in Australia so there will always be people unemployed.

There are too many services looking for work for people. In the Albury Wodonga area there are 20 plus service providers looking for work, apprenticeships or work experience for individuals. There is a mass crossover of services approaching the same businesses. Businesses do not have the time or patience to listen to all the services various pros and cons and do not know which one is the best for their company at that time or which ones are the same or different.

Persons under the age of 18 are hired due to the low cost of their salary in many fast food and retail positions.

People looking for work have high expectations and they expect to get there dream position straight away without having to work hard in a less desirable position before making their way up in a company.

People have various qualifications through TAFE and Training organisations but have no work experience so they are overlooked.

Employers are looking more and more for people who can do a bit of everything and are flexible. Disability employment Services are usually looking for specific tasks for persons to do.

**What are the impacts of employment discrimination on older Australians/Australians with disability working or looking for work?**

People have a lack of confidence, social exclusion, poverty, generational poverty and mental health issues.

They have a lack of faith in the Job Active and Disability Employment Service system.

Children grow up with similar issues due to seeing the impacts that not working has on their parents.

People are unmotivated to do new courses as they have numerous qualifications but have been unsuccessful in finding employment.

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they work or are in a job?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

People with disability are perceived as not being able to do as good a job as a person without a disability. I currently work with a person in a wheelchair and have people treat him as a participant rather than a worker and not make him feel valued. Some co-workers can be unhelpful and not want a person with a disability to work in their workforce. Work places are reluctant to accept how much they need to change to accommodate people with a disability and have the attitude that almost enough is good enough.

**Is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

[x] While working in a job

[x] While looking for work

[x] While dealing with recruitment companies

**Please tell us more**

You are seen as a problem worker because of your disability in the workplace. The person who is always looking for help or a compromise.

Many organisations will not employ you if you disclose your disability, particularly government funded organisations and councils. Or they make it as hard as possible to obtain an interview.

Recruitment companies make it difficult to get on their books with numerous tests and fitness assessments which mean you cannot go for any positions that they advertise even if you would be able to do the job.

**What impact does employment discrimination have on older Australians/Australians with disability gaining and keeping employment?**

They cannot obtain employment and they have very low confidence and do not apply for positions they could possibly obtain.

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please tell us more**

The DES program does not generally work. If you had a really close look at the job placements and the participants who have sustained long term employment they have generally obtained the positions on their own merits without any support from the DES system. Very rarely is a position created by a DES which results in continual employment. In the 2 years and 6 months I worked with the DES I think we managed to create maybe only 5 to 10 sustainable positions over that time.

Looking for 8 hours a week for someone with a disability is sometimes too much. If the person has never had a job before or has been out of work for a while working 8 hours a week can feel like a long time to the person. If they were able to start at 2 or 4 hours a week and then increase the hours there would be a higher increase of success. As DES is under pressure to hit targets they do not actively look for work experience or work for less than 8 hours a week.

Wage Subsidies sometimes attracts the wrong type of employer. An Employer who is looking for wage subsidies is generally struggling as a business so when the wage subsidy is finished they are looking for any reasons to dismiss the person who has been on the wage subsidy.

Businesses are fatigued by being approached by the numerous employment services, labour hire companies, recruitment companies, apprenticeship companies and education providers looking for work or work experience and they are rightly confused at what option is best for their business. In Albury Wodonga there are over 20 companies looking to approach businesses to assist them with their employment needs.

Job Active and DES providers do not want to work together for the benefits of members of the public. While working in DES I attempted to create an understanding with other providers in Albury Wodonga that if we had the right participant and they had the right employment position we would transfer our participant to them and vice versa. When I suggested this other organisations managers laughed at me and refused.

Employers need to be actively shown the positives of employing people with a disability. A government ad campaign highlighting the positives could be a way of doing this and compulsory free training for larger organisations.

**What are the incentives and disincentives in employing older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**Incentives**

Reliable, honest workers. Can lead to positive work atmosphere. Community minded. Inclusive practice. Some persons don’t take as much sick leave.

**Disincentives**

Can lead to negative work atmosphere if person is not able to do the tasks others do. More days of sick, particularly people with mental health issues. Takes longer to train people.

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work?**

[x] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

**Please let us know about practices you are aware of.**

While working in DES we managed to assist a participant a position with a line painting and machinery company. Initially the participant was only putting labels on bottle tops for the paint. However over time the person learned new tasks like drilling holes and cutting metal, cleaning the workshop. He recently told me that he has been given his own drill set and tool kit so he can complete tasks without taking other workers tools. This person has succeeded in this position as the manager is very supportive of him and has given him time to learn his tasks and pushed him outside of his comfort zone. Some of the warehouse workers were not overly supportive of his appointment but there attitudes have changed over time when they see the positive atmosphere he brings to the work place. This person had a learning disability and lives independently with support.

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

A percentage of companies’ profits should go to educating their workforce in discrimination training.

If you want to increase participation rapidly then I believe a quota is the only way you will see a dramatic effect on participation for people with Disability. For example if 30% of population have a disability then there should be a push for 30% of people employed to have a recognised disability.

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

If you want to increase participation rapidly then I believe a quota is the only way you will see a dramatic effect on participation for people with Disability. For example if 30% of population have a disability then there should be a push for 30% of people employed to have a recognised disability.

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

If you want to increase participation rapidly then I believe a quota is the only way you will see a dramatic effect on participation for people with Disability. For example if 30% of population have a disability then there should be a push for 30% of people employed to have a recognised disability.