

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

St. John of God Health Care Submission December 2015

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About St. John of God Health Care

St John of God Health Care is a leading provider of public and private hospitals, pathology, home nursing and social outreach services, throughout Australia, New Zealand and the wider Asia-Pacific region.

We operate 23 facilities across Australia and New Zealand including 17 overnight hospitals, four day hospitals and two long-term care facilities.

Totaling more than 3,000 beds, our facilities include medical-surgical hospitals, psychiatric and drug and alcohol hospitals, and a rehabilitation hospital.

Our Vision

To live and proclaim the healing touch of God's love where we invite people to discover the richness and fullness of their lives, give them a reason to hope and a greater sense of their own dignity.

Our Mission

To continue the healing mission of Jesus Christ through the provision of services that promote life to the full by enhancing the physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual dimensions of being human.

Our Values

St. John of God Health Care has five guiding values which inform both its decision making and behaviours:

Hospitality - A welcoming openness to all; to the familiar and the mystery of self, people, ideas, experience, nature and to God

Compassion – feeling with others in their discomfort or suffering, striving to understand the others experience with a willingness to reach out in solidarity

Respect – the attitude which treasures the unique dignity of every person, and recognises the sacredness of all creation

Justice – a balance and fair relationship with self, our neighbour, all of creation and with God

Excellence – giving the optimum standard of care and service within the scope of available resources

What is your experience of recruiting and employing Australians with disability?

In July 2013, as part of the organisation's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, St John of God Health Care made a conscious decision to create processes and systems that would better support people with disability access employment opportunities within the organisation. This approach entailed a 12-month partnership with the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator, which supported a recruitment and selection review, the establishing of ongoing partnerships with Disability Employment Services (DES), information forums for managers and the implementation of a new recruitment approach ensuring that people with disability accessed interviews.

Our experience of recruiting into vacant roles has been a positive one accessing sound applicants from Disability Employment Services and also from the general community. St. John of God Health Care recognises the inequity faced by many with disability in their search for employment and actively seeks to redress this imbalance through actively advocating for greater inclusion (please refer to Press Release page 6) and supporting other organisations to create the culture for change.

Do you think Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job in your business/industry?

Even though St John of God Health Care has implemented an effective approach to supporting people with disability access interviews, it is fair to suggest that such a practice is not replicated across the business world in Australia to the degree required. For many people the natural inclination regarding purposefully including disability within their work appears to create nervousness based on a limited view of disability per se

and the (erroneous) perceived increase in risk (especially around OH&S). Personal negative experience of disability can often cloud thinking and the willingness to engage in the possibility of employing a person with a disability is severely reduced.

However within St John of God Health Care there is evidence that understanding and practise regarding disability employment is changing. There is greater awareness that the capacity to meet inherent requirements of a role is not diminished through having a disability and a confidence that the organisation has the necessary processes to provide the supports as required ensuring the ongoing success of appointments of people with disability.

Good practice

Are there examples of good practice and/or workplace policies for employing and retaining Australians with disability in work in your business/industry?

To ensure that St John of God Health Care reached its goal of increasing the number of people with disability accessing interviews a new recruitment and selection practise has been introduced. Simply put, should a person registered with a DES apply for any vacant role (and meet the inherent requirements of the role) we ensure that at least one of these applicants is included in the interview process. This approach is a direct response to feedback given to us from job seekers with disability. We were informed that for many with disability access to interview was a significant barrier. A further practice of earmarking positions for people registered with a DES has also proved successful. The adoption of these two processes has seen a marked increase in the number of people with disability apply for vacant positions and from there a significant number interviewed and appointed into positions.

Since July 2013 St John of God Health Care has received 186 applicants through DES. Of these applicants, 122 have been interviewed with 53 receiving offers of appointment.

Although these figures are relatively small they are indicators of significant attitudinal change and the embedding of effective practice and process that better support people with disability.

Please tell us examples of good practice in employing and retaining Australians with disability in work in your business/industry that you are aware of.

I refer you to the link below and in particular the video and 'Pauline's Story'

http://www.sjog.org.au/careers/disability_employment.aspx

Solutions

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

It is evident that a significant amount of taxpayer's money is spent on promoting greater understanding of disability within the community and within the work environment. Many organisations exist to promote equal opportunities for people with disability and support businesses achieve greater inclusion. However, until businesses purposefully decide to include people with disability then those individuals who have the capacity to work will remain on the margins of employment opportunity.

To this end St. John of God Health Care is actively gathering significant organisations to work together in Bendigo Victoria. The purpose of this collaboration is to promote and share resources, stories and processes that will further increase already established mechanisms for including people with disability into employment opportunities. It also seeks to

influence surrounding business in the Bendigo region to purposefully engage in employing people with disability. Although in its early stages should this approach prove successful this collaboration engagement model may be replicated throughout Australia where there is a St. John of God facility.

I would also like to see a government initiative engage businesses who demonstrate commitment in employing people with disability receive funding so as to engage with other businesses in this recruitment practice. Through this mentoring style approach they would be funded to share their resources and stories, building up capacity and understanding, so as to support an organisational culture that confidently includes people with disability access employment opportunities on a regular basis.

Press Release

What follows is a press release made by St. John of God Health Care on 3rd December 2015 regarding disability employment and part of its advocacy activity for disability employment.

SJGHC REMOVING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

**By Neal Murphy, Group Coordinator Social Justice Advocacy
St John of God Health Care**

We all know how important work and in particular paid work is to us. Through work we get to pay our never ending bills, chip away at our

mortgage, save for that dream holiday. We buy the clothes we like, the food we enjoy and the odd gift we like to share. On a somewhat deeper level, work becomes the vehicle in our lives to grow and develop into the people we want to become.

We study and we train, we invest and we sacrifice so that the occupations we engage in reflect our talents, our aspirations and create for us a deep expression of who we are. Through our work we discover a deep sense of purpose and satisfaction.

There is however a significant number of people in Australia who are excluded from the work place and therefore also from that sense of deep purpose and satisfaction that work offers. Should you have a disability, and in particular a mental health issue, the opportunity to find employment is restricted. This restriction is not due to the lack of talent or capacity but the poor thinking and attitude displayed by a number of organisations to employing a person with disability. The result of such thinking is that few organisations engage in the issue and therefore few opportunities emerge.

St John of God Health Care recognises the difficulties of those who have a disability to find employment. Two years ago we took the decision to create a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan that, amongst other things, sought to increase opportunity for people with a disability to access interviews. Further to that, if they are the preferred candidate and are appointed, they can develop their careers with us while receiving the appropriate understanding and supports.

The path we took to becoming a more disability confident organisation was simple and direct.

Step one was to partner with the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator. Through this partnership we reviewed recruitment and selection processes to better engage and support people with a disability to access opportunities.

Step two was to provide ongoing formation for the whole of our organisation of disability awareness so that all our executive and managers developed an informed understanding of disability and in particular that it is not a barrier to employment.

Step three was to partner with a number of Disability Employment Services ensuring that they understood what success looked like from St. John of God Health Care's perspective and with the resources provided by them ensured that our managers were well supported.

Step four was to introduce two new practices to our recruitment process

1. Access to interviews

Recognising that for many with disability a significant barrier to employment is actual access to interviews, we made it a policy to interview at least one person registered with a Disability Employment Service who applied for a vacant position that meets the inherent requirements of the role.

2. Earmarking positions

Occasionally instead of going to the open market first for applicants for vacant roles we enlist the help of the Disability Employment Services and use them as a recruitment agency. Should there be no suitable

candidates for interview registered with them we then move on to the open market.

Step five was to continually liaise with our disability employment partners to maintain good working relationships in the pursuit of the same outcomes.

Through adopting these five simple steps St John of God Health Care has significantly increased the number of people with disability accessing interviews and consequently employment.

We have grown in our confidence to engage better with people who, yes have a disability but also possess the excellence we seek. There is still much to do, but we have started and started well.

I now encourage you to contemplate what more can be done? More to the fact, what more could you do? A good start is to ask the question of employers, "Why aren't you purposely seeking to employ people with disability?"

People with disability have the skills, they have the talents, they just don't have the opportunity.

I encourage you to contact the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator or speak to your local Disability Employment Service. They will help you. Have the subject as an agenda item to be discussed at all levels of your organisation. Seek out those organisations that already purposefully employ people with disability and learn from them. They too will help you.

What I have discovered through driving this recruitment process within St John of God Health Care is that there is in fact very little prejudice in real

terms when it comes to employment of people with disability. What there is though is an abundance of fear and misinformation which unwittingly adds to the already insurmountable barriers faced by people with disability in seeking employment.

If there is to be real change for people then we have to commit to real purposeful engagement with those who can support such changes to occur.

People with disability deserve to experience the deep sense of purpose and satisfaction that employment.