

22/7/2015

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## **People need to be job ready, and where are the jobs.**

Dear Sir/Madam

Hello my name is Owen James. I am currently an advocate with GDA Grampians Disability Advocacy with the head office in Ararat in Victoria. The CEO is Debbie Verdon we meet here in Horsham every 3mths and discuss a number of issues. Most concerning is open employment for people with disabilities.

**Employing People with Disabilities:** Most Australians who have a disability and participate in the open workforce do so at full award rates of pay. But there are some people who are unable to obtain and or maintain employment at full award rates due to the effects of a disability on their workplace productivity. There is a measure in place called Supported Wage System (SWS), which allows these people to access a process of productivity-based wage assessment and related workplace-specific assistance so they can find appropriate jobs in the open workforce. The primary source of support- both financial and otherwise -for businesses wanting to employ people with disabilities is the Disability Employment Network.

**Employing Disadvantaged People:** People with low socio-economic status such as homeless youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, new arrivals/refugees and people with disabilities can experience an ongoing cycle of disadvantage. Low socio-economic status leads to poor health which in turn perpetuates low socio-economic status. Carefully - directed corporate responsibility initiatives can help break that cycle, resulting in more harmonious communities and better health for all. One of the most effective way business can intervene is by providing employment. Encourage people with disabilities, mature-age workers, the long-term unemployed, disadvantaged youth and Indigenous Australians to apply for jobs you advertise- and ensure existing staff members are genuinely open to employing them. You don't have to do it on your own- there are several programs in place to provide support.

**Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People:** There is more support available now than ever before for organisations wanting to proactively employ Indigenous Australians. Driven by mining entrepreneur and Fortescue Metals Group CEO Andrew Forrest, the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) is striving to provide jobs for 50,000 Indigenous people. If you sign up to the covenant as an employer, you recruit staff who have completed AEC-endorsed training programs. Major private sector companies can access funding to develop Indigenous employment strategies and practices through the Corporate Leaders for Indigenous employment Project. Wage assistance provides a financial incentive to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Indigenous Cadetship Project also offers subsidies to employers. Thank you

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Susan Ryan

Age and Disability Discrimination

Commissioner

## **People are Willing to Work, Where are the Jobs, Employment and Disability: a complex problem with no simple solution**

Dear Sir/ Madam

Hello my name is Owen James. I am writing in relation to Australian employers from hiring more people with disabilities. I have been on this DSP since 1980 due to a motorcar accident here in Horsham in 1970. I was knocked of my bicycle and hospitalise for 3 weeks I was unconscious for 48hrs, I suffered a severe head injury, laceractions , to my face and body back injuries. I did not receive any compensation back then as there was no TAC.

Since the accident getting a job in the open market has been very, very difficult indeed. There are that many barriers that stop you getting a foot in the door. Business perceptions and stigma about people with disabilities and older people looking for employment. **A fear of the unknown is deterring Australian employers from hiring more people with disabilities:** Businesses in Australia need to be challenged to increase opportunities for people with disabilities. Businesses are constrained by negative perceptions. "it's a combination of factors- fast-pace and immediacy of our world of economic rationalism; fear of the unknown," Sadly , this means employers often won't commit the time to support and release the talent within these individuals."

At least half of 3 million Australians with disabilities of working age are unemployed according to a report commissioned by the Australian Network on Disability. The report by Deloitte Access Economics, found that increasing workforce participation rates for people with disabilities by one-third would generate \$43 billion in gross domestic product over the next decade. Australian Network on Disability says Australian businesses ranked poorly on a global scale, with only 17 per cent of companies focusing on including people with disability. Australia is ranked 21<sup>st</sup> out of 29 OECD countries in employing people with disability. We need a quota system to compel more employers to hire people with disability, Australian governments could consider . " We may indeed need some more carrots and sticks to help Australian businesses be inclusive".

Australia's poor performance in the employment of people with disability explains their low socio economic status, with 45% living near or below the poverty line. Ironically, it is a costly exercise to keep people with disabilities out of the labour market, with 15 billion worth of Disability Support Pension (DSP) payments made to over 800,00 Australians last financial year alone. 2013

These numbers show that government policy and programs are failing people with disabilities who want to work, and the cost to government is large and will continue to grow. If the government is serious about reducing welfare dependence among people with disabilities, what it needs to do is implement a range of reforms that target the many barriers that people face in finding meaningful long term employment.

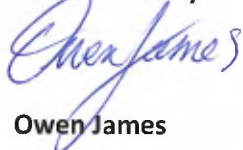
**Reforming employer attitudes:** Employers need to see the benefits of employing people with disabilities and not see it as an impost. Negative attitudes of employers were challenged by Deakin University which found that workers with disabilities take fewer days off and maintain longer tenure. The research also found that employing people with disability does not cost any more than employing people without disability, as funding for workplace adjustments is fully covered by government. There has been little action to champion such impressive findings that challenge the stereotype of people with disabilities being unfit for work. DES can play a role in changing employer attitudes, but much more needs to be done. Other initiatives, such as an information campaign targeting employers, if done effectively, would be a worthwhile investment.

I suggest that the answer to improving employment opportunities lies in developing a better understanding of why employers turning away job seekers with disabilities and ignoring the benefits of a diverse workforce. Before a campaign to change employer attitudes could be launched, however, research must first be undertaken to provide a strong evidence base. As the people with Disability Australia 2013 election platform declared, " We need solid benchmarked quantitative national research into employer attitudes towards people with disability to be able to address the crux of this problem."

**Education reforms:** The rate of school completion for students with disability is a little over half of all Australian students. Educational achievement is vital for workforce participation in a modern economy and people with disabilities will continue to experience disadvantage in the workforce unless they receive adequate support to succeed at school and university. A focus on improving education and training will improve job readiness and make it less likely that it can be used as an excuse to turn away potential employees with disabilities. Thank you

**In Conclusion: " We need innovation and reform to create jobs, not patchwork solutions. These include reforming the Disability Employment Services so people can purchase economic participation outcomes, targets and quotas for the APS, allowing people to hold onto Disability Support Pension for a set period after moving into base level jobs as well as tax incentives plus a greater role for States , Territories and local government especially through accessible procurement policy. We need full implementation of long term reforms like National Disability Strategy and NDIS as well as some signature measures to show government is serious , such as parliamentary internship scheme along the lines of those in the United states.**

**Yours faithfully**



**Owen James**