



# **Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability**

## **Report on Employment of People with Disability**

**Lack of employment options for people with disability  
in open employment and the lack of awareness  
of the benefits of employing people with disability**

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# Employment Report

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## Background

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In 2012, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability identified employment for people with disability as a priority throughout the annual planning process. Upon endorsement by the Minister for Disability Services of the Council's 2012 Annual Work Plan the Minister indicated a strong interest in the area of employment as well. In September 2012, the Council held an employment focus meeting with presentations from a range of individual and industry representatives. A sub-group of Council then met to discuss the issues and current strategies and identify opportunities.

The following information is in no way an exhaustive list of the issues and experiences of people with disability in gaining employment. The information is based on issues that have been identified through the network of the Council's membership and research prepared by Council members.

## Introduction

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Work generates wages, less reliance on welfare, dignity, a sense of purpose and productivity. People with disability should have the same opportunities to seek and work towards gaining meaningful employment as any other member of the community.

A stronger focus is needed to increase the labour force participation of people with disability. Limited employment options for people with disability can be a major barrier for social inclusion, economic participation and undeniably a person's health and wellbeing.

The employment rights of people with disability is underpinned in Commonwealth and International instruments and aligns with the Western Australian Government's commitment to improve the employment of people with disability.

In June 2012, the COAG Reform Council acknowledged in their third report, assessing progress under the National Disability Agreement, (*Disability 2010–11: Comparing performance across Australia people with disability*<sup>1</sup>) that nationally, there was no significant change in the economic participation of people with disability between 2003 and 2009, which remained significantly lower than for people without disability.

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<sup>1</sup> COAG Reform Council 2012, *Disability 2010–11: Comparing performance across Australia*, COAG Reform Council, Sydney.

COAG did note however, that between 2003 and 2009 in Western Australia there were significant increases in the labour force participation rate (from 54.5% to 62.4%) and the employment to population ratio (from 50.1% to 57.7%) for people with disability.

### **National Disability Strategy**

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) 2010-2020 is a national policy framework agreed to by all levels of government, industry and the community, to develop and implement policy, programs and services. The aim of the strategy is to improve the lives of people with disability living in Australia.

The NDS focuses on six broad outcome areas, resulting from issues raised during an Australia wide consultation process.

The third “Area of Action” within the NDS is Economic Security with the following outcome; **people with disability, their families and carers have economic security, enabling them to plan for the future and exercise choice and control over their lives.**

The policy direction to achieve the above outcome is to: **increase access to employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with disability, their families and carers.**

### **Count Me In**

The Count Me In (CMI): Disability Future Directions strategy outlines a vision where all people live in welcoming communities that actively promote citizenship, friendship, mutual support and a fair go for everyone. The strategy outlines the following priority areas:

1. Economic and Community Foundations
2. Participation and Contribution
3. Personalised Supports and Services

Within these areas employment is fundamental and when achieved it will allow people to gain economic security that will ultimately benefit their whole of life needs. Another pathway is to secure employment in a meaningful way, which is discussed at length throughout this document.

Both the NDS and the CMI Disability Future Directions are aligned to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

There are a number of strategies and initiatives underway at national, state and local government level, and within the business sector, to improve employment opportunities for people with disability. The work being done needs to result in positive outcomes for people with disability and employers. Most importantly meaningful employment with real career pathways needs to be realised.

## **Executive Summary**

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Employment of people with disability can be a difficult area and a number of areas of concern exist. The diversity of disability indicates the need for increased awareness of disability with business / staff, more flexibility in workplace conditions and development of specific strategies to resolve many of the barriers that exist.

Some case studies have been included in the latter part of the report to demonstrate the diversity of some of the issues. See Appendix 2.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### **Section 1: Getting ready for work**

1. Development of a pathway into employment which incorporates on the job training and achievement of a qualification. For further information see Project Proposal 1 at Appendix 1.
2. Further develop effective individual transition planning processes for students with a disability to successfully transition from education and training to employment.
3. Provide support and involvement within the school system, from external support agencies such as the Disability Service Commission, employment support organisations and families when developing and implementing the Individual Transition Plan for students with disability.
4. Develop conversations and examine opportunities with business / employers to be better prepared to support students with disability for work experience training, as has been done in other areas of the Count Me In Strategy.
5. Provide funding for pre-employment programs to employment services that will be assisting people with disability into open employment.
6. Support the Australian Government's 'Inclusive Employment 2012-2022: a vision for supported employment' and partner with FaHCSIA on the elements that support ADE transitioning to more social enterprise and less segregated models.

#### **Section 2: Getting a job and keeping it**

7. Examine the types of employment available and being offered for people with disability to ensure meaningful employment is being realised.
8. Examine whether pathways for further career development exist and are based on skills, experience and qualifications for people with disability as it is for others in the community.
9. Monitor the impending changes to the Fair Work Act that will ensure people with disability and those who have caring responsibilities have the right to request flexible workplace arrangements.

10. Increase awareness of the resources that have been developed by Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Payroll Tax Exemption and other resources and incentives with employers, specifically targeting human resources departments and recruitment agencies. For further information see Project Proposal 2 at Appendix 1.
11. Include a target of 10% employment of people with disability in the WA Government's Disability Employment Strategy and showcase the strategy to employers when it is implemented and fully operational.
12. Monitor the long term results of the WA Government Traineeship Program
13. The Disability Services Commission to liaise with / report to the Council on the progress of the DAIP's 7th Outcome.

### **Section 3: Other issues**

#### **Rural and Remote**

14. Specifically apply recommendations 1 to 5, 10, 16 and 17 in rural and remote locations.
15. Through the Commission's Community and Sector Development Directorate work with providers and other government departments and community services on sharing of transport resources, and building partnerships with disability employment services.

#### **Small business and self-employment options**

16. Explore the possibility of facilitating a number of forums with Small Business Centres to raise awareness of employing people with disability; with the Minister having a lead role in the forum.
17. Provide additional funding through Small Business Development Corporation specifically to assist people with disability in developing their own business and being employed by small business.

#### **Minimal involvement of people with disability on committees relating to employment - Recommendation**

18. Ensure skilled people with disability are represented on committees relating to the employment of people with disability.

## **Employment Issues**

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Meaningful employment is the cornerstone of social inclusion and participation.

People with disability, can often be denied employment or be given menial tasks and receive lower remuneration. There are many examples of how people with a disability are successfully participating in the workforce and have shown that their disability has not been a barrier. People with disability should not be restricted by assumptions and stereotypes about disability.

The following information focuses on some of the issues that people with disability have experienced in their pursuit for employment. They present the views of people with a disability and draw on their experience as current and past employees, volunteers and job seekers. The Council's view has also been informed by consultation with external stakeholders and desktop research.

Some areas are currently being worked on and require monitoring and others require further work.

### **Section 1: Getting ready for work**

Any student nearing the end of their education finds the prospect of leaving school or training and venturing into employment a particularly daunting time. There are many decisions to be made on what they want to do and whether they can achieve or obtain a job for which, they have planned.

This experience can be more difficult for individuals with disability as they may face additional barriers and more careful planning is required. There are a number of options available and appropriate individual planning at a very early stage is of the utmost importance to achieve a successful outcome for the individual.

### **Transition to employment from education and training**

Many of the skills required in the workforce are developed at school. The transition of students with a disability from education to employment is greatly assisted when they are provided with appropriate work readiness skills as part of the school curriculum.

Coordination between teachers, service providers, career advisors and where suitable, Disability Employment Service (DES) providers, is imperative to ensure that a student with disability has the best chance to become meaningfully employed. Clear transition pathways need to be developed, in consultation with the student, to ensure that students are equipped with practical workforce skills and are job ready.

Factors relating to a student's specific needs can also affect the transition from education and training to employment. Some barriers include:

- unproductive and/or mismatched workplace learning opportunities
- expectations and limitations of families, teachers and service providers
- lack of appropriate training courses, which can be due to a lack of funding and support
- ineffective service from employment support agencies
- a lack of family support

### **Capacity Building**

People need to be provided skills training on how to look for work themselves which will likely lead to a job they want. People with disability are unable to use the current funding that they have for support in preparation for employment programs, for example, interview practice and résumé writing. Some agencies will provide pre-employment support as they see it needs to be done; however as an unfunded extra the support is not available to everyone.

### **Training**

In post-secondary education, there is a marked trend to offer Certificate III and above courses, which effectively excludes many learners with disability from participation in vocational education and training. In addition, the Priority Skills List is not aligned with the goals and abilities of some learners with disability. This causes further disadvantage, as do employment services who will only offer funding assistance for full time training courses or courses which are Certificate III and above.

### **Transitioning to open employment from supported employment**

Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) provides supported employment assistance to people with disability who need substantial ongoing support to maintain their employment. ADEs are funded through FaHCSIA and are currently going through a number of changes to implement the Australian Government's 10 year vision for supported employment. A number of issues have been raised on the perceived and actual difficulties of transition from the supported environment into open employment with support. Some of these issues are now being addressed. They include:

- A person used to be unable to receive support from an employment service whilst working in an ADE, this perception is still prevalent.
- A person is able to work a maximum of eight hours in an ADE and be supported in open employment at the same time, but again this is a recent change and the common perception is of two mutually exclusive systems.
- It is unclear how much ongoing support is available to enable a person to work in open employment and as a result many people with ongoing support needs may limit their choice to ADE.
- Some students only get work experience in an ADE, so do not know if they could work in supported open employment.

We support the concepts of the 'Inclusive Employment 2012-2022: a vision for supported employment' initiative and encourage all levels of government to work together in implementing the vision.

### **Work experience**

Work experience, whilst at school, can be a good training ground to prepare students for employment. It is essential and can build networks, skills and confidence.

Reasonable adjustments should be made by educational providers to assist a student to find a work placement that is in line with the student's interests, goals and desired career. Education providers should also engage with the workplace to ensure that the student's reasonable needs can be met. Appropriate funding should be provided to enable students to receive the assistance they need to be supported in meaningful work experience.

Work experience is not just important for younger people with disability transitioning from school, structured work experience programs are also important for people who may want to change jobs or learn new skills. For people who acquire a disability work experience is a way to explore their abilities and help find their way back into employment.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Development of a pathway into employment which incorporates on the job training and achievement of a qualification. For further information see Project Proposal 1 at Appendix 1.
2. Further develop effective individual transition planning processes for students with a disability to successfully transition from education and training to employment.
3. Provide support and involvement within the school system, from external support agencies such as the Disability Service Commission, employment support organisations and families when developing and implementing the Individual Transition Plan for students with disability.
4. Develop conversations and examine opportunities with business / employers to be better prepared to support students with disability for work experience training, as has been done in other areas of the Count Me In Strategy.
5. Provide funding for pre-employment programs to employment services that will be assisting people with disability into open employment.
6. Support the Australian Government's 'Inclusive Employment 2012-2022: a vision for supported employment' and partner with FaHCSIA on the elements that support ADE transitioning to more social enterprise and less segregated models.

## Section 2: Getting a job and keeping it

It has been said that there are a range of benefits to employing people with disability such as loyalty and commitment, length of service and lower sick leave. However many employers may look at a person with a disability and instantly think about what they would need to provide for the person (such as workplace modifications) to carry out the duties of the position rather than focusing on what the person can bring to their business/organisation. It is difficult to know what the main reasons are but it could relate to attitudes and the lack of awareness in the general community of the abilities of people with disability particularly around employment.

Some contributing factors could be:

- whether employers actively promote employment of people with a disability
- disability awareness of recruitment agencies
- how flexible the recruitment strategies and pre-employment processes are
- the culture of the workplace
- diversity and inclusion practice within the workplace
- flexible working conditions
- knowledge of any supports required, such as workplace modifications
- whether the workplace is accessible

Some of the issues above can be addressed through the Employment Assistance Fund delivered through the Australian Government - Job Access. This initiative assists people with disability by providing financial assistance to purchase a range of work related modifications and services. Better ways to access funding for work related modifications and services are required to address the issues around lengthy waiting periods and the timing restriction of funding rounds. Employers also need to be aware of the funding available to meet the needs of their employees with disability.

### **Career Pathways**

Individuals with disability have the same aspirations and dreams that we all do in relation to career progression. There a range of opportunities and options for people with disability to be employed, however there are still issues that remain in ensuring career pathways exist and individuals are able to progress in their chosen career. This should be based on their skills, experience and qualifications and not their disability.

For many people with a disability when they have the skills and are ready to work they still find it extremely difficult to find meaningful employment.

The following quote from a person seeking work highlights this issue: -

*“During this five month process [12 job interviews] it has become increasingly clear to me that a candidate with a disability, no matter how skilled, experienced or qualified, can never beat a candidate without a disability”.*

### **Flexibility**

Flexible job design and flexible workplaces are often a focus in today's employment conditions and can create more opportunities for individuals with disability. For example some people, due to their disability, are unable to work full time or it may be easier for them if they are able to work from home for some part of their working week. People with a mental illness would benefit from workplace flexibility due to the often episodic nature of their disability. However the focus of flexible working arrangements is often on flexible hours / leave / retirement, family friendly practices and in some cases lifestyle. Disability and a caring role are generally not considered.

### **Disincentives**

From an individual perspective there can also be disincentives to look for work. If you lose the ability to access concessions and or funding the increased living costs can outweigh the benefits of earning an income. For example, the inability to access benefits due to income / means testing can mean people will not be eligible for a Concession or Health Care Card and can often be worse off when employed as they now have to pay for their health costs, aids and equipment, etc. In addition, they may not be eligible for the many concessions (utilities, licensing, etc.) that are provided by government.

Transport is another area of concern for some people. When choosing employment options many of us choose to apply for a position due to its location. Many people with disability have limited options for employment and some can spend up-to several hours per day travelling to a job because of limited opportunities to change employers and / or in fact, change the location they reside in. When a person is reliant on taxi's there is also quite an additional cost this can bring.

### **Current Strategies**

A number of strategies and resources are being developed to address a range of issues relating to the employment of people with disability. The following strategies are of particular interest but require further promotion and monitoring:

## **Employ Outside the Box - The Business Case for Employing People with Disability**

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) in Western Australia, and at a national level, have researched and built resources showcasing myths and fears of many employers when employing people with disability. They have also researched and built resources which show the reality and benefits of employing people with disability. Although this resource is available to their members there is a need to raise awareness of these resources with employers across the board. Unfortunately, the commercial reality is that many employers do not understand the benefits of employing a person with a disability. This is particularly so with some of the larger companies in Western Australia, more work is needed to ensure they view people with disability as an employee of choice.

### **Fair Work Act (2009)**

The Australian Government has announced a plan to amend the Fair Work Act to broaden the right of workers to request flexible working arrangements if they need it. This will include employees with disability and those who have caring responsibilities. It is expected that all levels of government will promote and inform employers across Australia of these changes.

### **Payroll Tax exemption**

The WA State Government announced in the May 2012 State Budget the introduction of a payroll tax exemption for the wages paid to employees with disability in their first two years of work as an extra incentive for employers. It is anticipated that the rebate payments will be paid in September 2013 following a reconciliation process by the Office of State Revenue.

It is hoped that this initiative will initially entice employers to employ individuals with disability and consequently increase their awareness of the many benefits of employing a person with a disability. The Council suggests an awareness raising exercise of the payroll tax exemption and how employers will benefit from this initiative.

### **Public sector and local government**

The government sector has a responsibility to lead the way in the employment of people with disability. They provide an avenue to showcase the benefits of employing people with disability to employers and to the community.

The Council has been informed that the Disability Employment in the WA Public Sector (DEWAPS) and the Local Government Disability Employment Strategies have been developed. The Council looks forward to the full implementation of these strategies and will continue to liaise with the Commission on their progress. It is hoped that in the Public Sector targets can be introduced to compliment the reporting requirements and model best practice.

The WA State Government provides a Government Traineeship Program for young people with a disability who want to kick start their career by undertaking a Government Traineeship Program. It would be interesting to explore whether previous trainees have been able to develop meaningful career pathways and advance onto higher levels within the public service or onto other employment options.

**7<sup>th</sup> DAIP outcome - Proposed DAIP Outcome 7 - People with disability have the same opportunities as other people regarding employment practices (recruitment and retention) by a public authority**

A 7<sup>th</sup> DAIP outcome has been incorporated into the Disability Services Regulations. It is anticipated that the above outcome will increase employment opportunities and improve recruitment and retention processes for people with disability in regard to employment within the public sector.

The Council will continually monitor and liaise with the Commission on the progress of this outcome.

**Recommendations:**

7. Examine the types of employment available and being offered for people with disability to ensure meaningful employment is being realised.
8. Examine whether pathways for further career development exist and are based on skills, experience and qualifications for people with disability as it is for others in the community.
9. Monitor the impending changes to the Fair Work Act that will ensure people with disability and those who have caring responsibilities have the right to request flexible workplace arrangements.
10. Increase awareness of the resources that have been developed by Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Payroll Tax Exemption and other resources and incentives with employers, specifically targeting human resources departments and recruitment agencies. For further information see Project Proposal 2 at Appendix 1.
11. Include a target of 10% employment of people with disability in the WA Government's Disability Employment Strategy and showcase the strategy to employers when it is implemented and fully operational.
12. Monitor the long term results of the WA Government Traineeship Program
13. The Disability Services Commission to liaise with / report to the Council on the progress of the DAIP's 7th Outcome.

## Section 3: Other issues

### Rural and Remote

For people with disability in rural and remote areas the barriers to employment are exacerbated by lack of training programs and limited opportunities. There are examples of great employment outcomes for people with disability in regional centres such as Albany (Vancouver Cafe) and Narrogin (local Red Rooster) but they are often limited to one or two businesses willing to take a chance.

In a regional training environment, courses are offered based on the capacity of the organisation, and often there are issues to do with critical mass and economies of scale – there are too few learners with disability to offer specialised vocational training or successfully encompass learners into classes in which they may be able to achieve a qualification. Traineeships and apprenticeships are often similarly inaccessible unless they are specifically offered to people with disability.

Also in small communities, local knowledge can be both good and bad where a person with a disability who is well known and liked may get many opportunities, while a person who is known to have challenging behaviours will get none.

Barriers such as transport are also much more prominent in regional areas where there is no public transport and limited taxi services. Being able to share transport among providers and between community services and with schools becomes very important and does not always occur. There are also barriers where people require a specific support such as Auslan interpreters.

Barriers to open employment are widespread, especially in areas where employment is already low. The person with a disability who is supported to work in an ADE and is supported outside work by the same agency often has no incentive to engage in other forms of employment which may be more relevant to their goals or aspirations. Rural and remote areas see many more congregate supported employment arrangements in pockets than their mainstream counterparts.

Successful employment outcomes have occurred where training providers have been able to connect with local employers for work experience and with other community facilities for work experience like community gardens. There are also opportunities for education institutions to offer targeted skills courses, for example, committee training, in conjunction with support agencies that will link the individual up with community organisations, enabling the person to gain valuable skills in a community environment that may transfer to the workplace.

The possibilities around employment for many people with disability in regional and remote areas are often hampered by the lack of partnerships between disability agencies, including ADE's and disability support organisations. In areas where agencies are often competing for limited funding and fewer clients, effective partnerships are less likely. There have been some good examples of effective partnerships between disability employment providers and local government authorities, but other organisations are less likely to collaborate.

### **Recommendations:**

7. Specifically apply recommendations 1 to 5, 10, 16 and 17 in rural and remote locations.
8. Through the Commission's Community and Sector Development Directorate work with providers and other government departments and community services on sharing of transport resources, and building partnerships with disability employment services.

### **Small business**

Small business can offer great employment opportunities for people with disability. However there are a number of challenges that small businesses face in employing people with disability. Some include:

- Many small businesses use family members (or try to) due to limited financial capacity.
- The bureaucratic red tape and reporting hoops to employ people with disability can be overwhelming.
- Complex industrial awards are common in small business.
- Small Business is not familiar with Open Employment avenues and therefore rarely uses them.

MACD liaised with Mr Tony Watts, Chief Executive Officer from the Small Business Centre, Eastern Metropolitan region. He showed an interest in the area of raising the awareness of employing people with disability with small business. Mr Watts is willing to explore the possibility of facilitating a forum in the Eastern Region for small business. The idea of the Minister playing a part in the forum was of tremendous interest.

The Small Business Centre, Eastern Metropolitan region, often explores ideas with the Stirling Small Business Centre so there may be an opportunity to duplicate strategies across the business centres.

### **Self-employment options**

Self-employment can be a very effective option for people with disability. It can provide a job of their choosing and can often provide job flexibility. Support for people with disability to establish their own small business is needed.

Small Business Incubators, for example within the Stirling Regional Business Centre, can often provide a safe haven for people with disability to develop a business idea they may have. It is an 'incubation' set-up where tenants are only able to stay for three years with a long term plan of moving on once their business is established. The centres provide office space, with no requirement for long lease agreements, along with free business advice all in a supportive environment.

**Recommendations:**

9. Explore the possibility of facilitating a number of forums with Small Business Centres to raise awareness of employing people with disability; with the Minister having a lead role in the forum.
10. Provide additional funding through Small Business Development Corporation specifically to assist people with disability in developing their own business and being employed by small business.

**Minimal involvement of people with disability on committees relating to employment**

There has been discussion that a change in culture needs to occur for people with disability to participate in employment as all of us do. Yet many who have created this culture are still in positions of power and decision making. There are still a host of people sitting around the table discussing how best to improve employment opportunities for people with a disability but there is minimal involvement of people with a disability sitting around that table with them. Where representation has occurred, people with disability and family members have sometimes felt overwhelmed in being a lone voice at the table. It is strongly believed that a group of skilled people with disability, given the same resources as others, could better improve the process of cultural change through increased representation on committees relating to employment.

**Recommendation:**

11. Ensure skilled people with disability are represented on committees relating to the employment of people with disability.

## **Appendix 1: Project Proposals**

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### **Project Proposal 1:**

Recommendation 1: Development of a pathway into employment which incorporates on the job training and achievement of a qualification.

The project would require funding and comprise of a partnership with a large employer organisation, to increase opportunity for people with disability to gain open employment. Suggested steps could include:

- Identification of an employer wanting to be involved in the partnership.
- Identification of a group of 10 people seeking open employment.
- The test group enrol in generic Units of Competence, such as OHS, Communication and Work Readiness.
- The test group undertake work experience and complete the Units of Competence through on the job training.
- Assistance is provided upon completion of the Units of Competence to successfully gain employment.

#### **1. Expected outcomes**

The expected outcomes would be:

- that the students would gain three Units of Competence from nationally recognised training programs
- they would gain valuable experience in the workplace
- employers would become familiar with requirements and benefits of employing people with disability within their workforce
- employment opportunities would be provided

#### **2. Who could be involved**

A partnership approach would be adopted between the:

- Students.
- Student's support networks
- Training provider.
- Host employer.
- Disability Services Commission.

A Memorandum of Understanding would be negotiated to ensure all parties were clear of their roles and responsibilities.

A large employer would provide the work environment and supervision of the student, with the training provider providing the on the job component of the training.

### 3. Timeframes

The expectation would be that the students would complete the three units of competence over a period deemed suitable to both the students and the employer. The employer may prefer one day a week for 15 weeks, or three weeks of full time work. The timeframe would be negotiated.

### 4. Conclusion

There would be an evaluation of the program conducted to ensure the outcomes for all parties involved had been met. Based on the feedback any changes could be made and the program adapted and duplicated with other employers. A graduation for the students could be held, if required.

#### **Project Proposal 2:**

**Recommendation 10:** Increase awareness of the resources that have been developed by Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Payroll Tax Exemption and other resources and incentives with employers, specifically targeting human resources departments and recruitment agencies.

The following proposal is aimed at increasing the awareness of the benefits of employing people with disability among a range of potential employers.

A partnership would need to be developed between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a disability employment provider, and a group such as KPMG or Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC), who have a presence as consultants in the disability sector. Partnering with a group like KPMG or PWC opens up the possibility of accessing a large range of corporations which may not have thought about actively employing people with disability.

The project would be for CCI with the assistance of people with disability and the disability employment provider, to run a series of lunch time forums with Human Resource Departments from a number of the corporations connected to KPMG or PWC and recruitment agencies. The forums would use the material already developed by CCI as well as hearing first hand from a person with a disability. The forums would also explain any incentives available to employers such as Payroll Tax Exemption.

Human Resource Departments or Managers and large recruitment agencies would be the target as they are often the people at the forefront of recruitment and shortlisting.

This proposal is based on a similar model where a group called Inspire have set up a number of boardroom talks for companies on mental health in the workplace called Wellbeing@Work. A partnership arrangement started the project where a large law firm worked with Inspire to promote and run the boardroom talks with their clients.

In this proposal it is suggested the Minister and DSC foster the partnership to happen through their contacts with KPMG, PWC and CCI. A number of conversations may be needed to build the project.

The forum series could be launched with CEO's of companies, CCI, the Minister for Disability Services and the Minister for Employment and Training to lend kudos to the companies involved.

The resources required may be a small grant for coordination of the forums and the presenters, as well as producing information for the forums. The main resource has already been developed with the 'Employing Outside the Box' publication from CCI.

## **Appendix 2: Case Studies**

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### **Case Study 1:**

In her final year of secondary education, Suzie was given an opportunity to be involved in SWEAT (Supported Work Experience and Training) Program developed by a DES provider. The program is designed to assist students with disability to secure a one day per week supported work placement over a 15 week period as a prelude to entering a school based traineeship or apprenticeship.

Suzie chose a business administration placement. As Suzie is a student who is blind she needed appropriate adaptive solutions to assist her. Staff from Suzie's school, the DES provider and the proposed employer designed a work experience program for one day per week for the 15 weeks of the program.

Another staff member at the proposed workplace had developed a work station and office procedures with adaptive solutions such as a screen reader to voice computer output, text to speech scanning software to access printed material.

The other staff member with a similar disability and work experience was able to mentor Suzie. Suzie was soon comfortable undertaking the work tasks she was assigned. In fact, towards the end of the 15 week program the staff member was able to take some leave and have Suzie fill in for him.

The program was a great experience for Suzie, giving her invaluable exposure to work experience in an environment that catered for her needs. The employer was exposed to a bright potential employee and the DES was able to gain further experience with placing someone with vision impairment in a role that enhanced their program.

At the end of the 15 weeks, the employer offered Suzie a part time assistant administration position whilst completing her education. Suzie has now finished her schooling, a Business Administration TAFE course and was offered full time employment at the location of the work experience program.

### **Case Study 2:**

Phil was born in the south west in 1962. When he started school he was struggling in class and was told he wouldn't be able to return to mainstream school due to his learning difficulties.

A big decision had to be made due to his location. It was decided that Phil would go to Albany and become a boarder and attend the Slow Learning School in Albany. It was heart wrenching for his parents but little did they know this was the start of the greatest educational opportunity for Phil to learn skills that would lead him to independence.

At the age of 17, Phil moved to a hostel and started work at Activ Industries, and was the first person with an intellectual disability in Albany to get a job at a panel beaters' (general duties) and live in shared accommodation outside of a hostel. Because Phil has epilepsy he was unable to obtain a driver's license so after teaching him road sense on a push bike he was able to ride to work.

In 1988, Phil moved to Perth to be closer to family. He lived in a group home and attended Activ Industries. From here he moved into property care and learnt a range of tasks.

Phil has difficulties with thought processing, learning, communicating, remembering information, making judgments and problem solving. He cannot read, write or count. When it was suggested that he apply for open employment, we thought this a bit daunting but considering he had worked so hard to understand his environment and develop a range of life skills, when the option was given to him, of course he said "let's give it a go".

We contacted a Disability Employment Service (DES) provider which enables people with disability to establish careers in open employment. They believed that finding the right job is matching the job to the person – not placing them in the first job that comes up. When we had completed the Individual Employment Plan they started looking for a suitable job for him. A Job Coordinator prepared Phil for his new job at a plant nursery. This required skills training for the time to get up, shower, breakfast and make lunch.

The job coordinator stayed working with Phil until the employer was satisfied with his work performance and he was settled in followed by ongoing fortnightly visits. He remained at the nursery for two years but after spending three hours a day on transport it was time to look for something closer to home so he could ride his bike to work. In 1995, they found work at a powder coat factory as a factory hand.

In 2001, Phil started working at St John of God Hospital in Subiaco. It has now been 20 years since Phil said "let's give it a go" and started work in the open employment. Having a regular income every week he was able to move from a group home to renting with another person to renting on his own and then the ultimate, buying his own home and paying it off so that he now owns it outright.

Some issues Phil has experienced include:

- Not getting equal pay.
- Transport
- Lack of awareness of other staff on Phil's capability and knowledge. They tend to leave everything to the DES provider. For example people expect Phil to understand instructions that are not within his daily routine.
- Dealings with Centrelink.

What has made it successful:

- Ongoing support from a DES provider.
- Keeping to a structured routine, takes minimal days off.
- Location enabled Phil to ride a bike to work.

Some suggestions for improvement:

- Maintain the focus on the individual and their needs.
- Government and service providers to communicate and work together.
- Have information on seek.com about employing people with disability.

### **Case Study 3:**

I am a business woman. I love the way that sounds and I love the way it feels. It makes me extremely proud! Like every success I have, my business didn't just happen. My business has evolved from a passion for advocacy and social justice, and a desire for income more than minimal. I work long and hard to make it happen and take every opportunity that comes my way to network, learn and grow.

My circumstance required me to create a career that is manageable. I knew I would never be able to physically sustain working in the same way that others do. I was never going to have the physical stamina to work in an office or anywhere else at fulltime capacity and no one was ever willing to give me a decent and suitable employment position because they were quick to identify my deficits and not recognise my gifts, talents and abilities.

My success could not have occurred until I became completely happy to be me. The day I invited this disability to accompany my journey and not absorb it was the day I opened my own door to life's opportunities.

I could have given up and survived on a pension, but once again the challenge was like red rag to a bull!! I found my passion - advocacy and disability awareness. I threw my hat into the ring, joined Boards, committees and working parties, I gave, and still give countless hours in volunteering roles, until eventually I had created my own niche market business using the credibility that I have built, along with all of my gifts, talents and passions, turning the deficit of disability into a successful marketing tool that money could never buy.

My disability is the platform from which I launch into every day with confidence and knowledge that the work I do is powerful in breaking down the myths of fear that are the biggest barrier between those with disability and those who believe they do not have to consider disability at all. On any day I leave a training session, consultation or guest speaking engagement filled with satisfaction that my customers are pleased with my delivery and work ethics.

So I will continue to build my business and pursue my vision for a community that understands all the while being gainfully employed.

#### **Case Study 4:**

S is employed as a middle level manager in a public service position in a regional government (post secondary education) agency, and has been employed in this position since 2006. S received a formal diagnosis of Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy Type 2i at the age of 23. When she commenced employment with the organisation, she disclosed her disability, however due to it being a degenerative condition she did not use a mobility aid and there were few barriers to employment.

At the beginning of 2012, she instructed her employer through the Human Resources (HR) Department that she would need workplace modifications due to her rapidly deteriorating mobility. She informed them about the existence of JobAccess, a federal government scheme which provides funding for workplace modifications, although nothing was undertaken by the organisation and eventually (upon using a wheelchair) she contacted JobAccess herself to claim for workplace modifications.

For her job S requires a confidential environment and storage for resources. Her current office has no accessible toilet and the closest is over 150 metres away. A managers building, which S sometimes uses, does have toilets that are inaccessible but would be able to be modified within the amount of funding provided by JobAccess.

The JobAccess provider spoke to the HR Department and the solution that was agreed on was that in the interim, S would be provided with a set of powerassist wheels to help her get to the accessible toilet until the inaccessible toilets in the managers building were modified. However, the HR manager advised the JobAccess consultant that this would be difficult, as rebuilding could take up to a year with the state government requirements for different quotes, a tendering process, etc. The JobAccess person stated that the application could only stay open for six weeks.

It took five months for the power wheels to arrive and that was only after repeated emailing. In this time, S had to disclose to the HR manager and her line manager that she had menorrhagia caused by endometriosis and that in the first few days of her menstrual cycle she would need to visit a toilet half hourly. The power assist wheels assist with travel but as she has significant shoulder impairment there is no way she could travel to the toilet on that many occasions without causing some shoulder damage. S then began taking sick leave in the times when she was due to menstruate to compensate for the lack of access.

S spoke to the HR manager in the first few months of this year and told him the power wheels were great and asked him when the toilet modifications would take place. He said they would not be undertaken this year because it was 'not in the budget' and that was the same reason for the delay with the power wheels. S also began to suffer from repeated urinary tract infections.

S remains on stress leave but is due to return to work soon. She has lodged yet another application with JobAccess but does not know what the outcome is. She feels she has had no dignity and no respect for her circumstances.

The story of S is in no way unusual. She knows another post-secondary employee who was told by her line manager that if she needed to use a wheelchair at work (she is partially paralysed and is finding it harder and harder to walk with her cane) then she was clearly sick and not fit to work. She also knows another long term employee who lost both his legs and who did not feel that he was supported during his recovery - he would come home from work with his stumps bleeding. The issue was that there is an inevitable psychological transition during a loss of mobility or disability transitional period and the HR department needs to be supportive through the whole process, not just at one point in time or with their own agenda to return someone to pre injury duties if it is not in the employees' best interest or if they are physically unable to carry out the required work. Eventually he gave up his job. S does not want to be in the same position.

### **Case Study 5:**

Denise is a 37 year old woman with vision impairment. She graduated from Edith Cowan University in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and has held steady employment at a not-for-profit organisation, since 2006. Her present role is a Research and Policy Officer.

Denise has the use of adaptive technologies such as magnification software for computers and magnification equipment for printed material. This equipment makes it possible for her to hold employment. However, her disability has never been problematic for her in undertaking the duties associated with her position.

Denise recognises that gaining entry level employment opportunities comes with challenges and can be difficult for people with disability to achieve. Until now she has been relatively successful in managing to secure positions. However, she believes that one of the reasons for success in this area is because of the low expectations held by employers about the capabilities of a person with a disability. Many employers, in her experience, seem to believe that a person with a disability is a good fit for an entry level job.

Denise's present challenge in the employment market has come as she has attempted to secure more meaningful employment and progress in her career, based on her skills, experience and qualifications. Based on the merits of her written application Denise has been short-listed for interview 13 times in the past five months. They include nine interviews with state government agencies, three interviews with non-government organisations and one interview with a local government authority. She accepts that on some occasions she may not have been the best candidate and was beaten fairly by a better candidate. However, during this five month process she has felt that a candidate with a disability, no matter how skilled, experienced or qualified, can never beat a candidate without a disability.

During some of these interviews she has experienced obvious hostility from members of interview panels and has been subjected to what she can only describe as demeaning and insulting comments and behaviour. In one case she was grunted at by a panel member when discussing her disability. In another she was not spoken to again by a panel member, who also folded their arms and lent back in their chair, for the remainder of the interview following discussion of her disability. Thankfully cases such as these are not the norm.

On some occasions she did not include her disability in her written application as she did not feel that it impacted on her ability to undertake the duties of the position. When she has taken the strategy of disclosing her disability on written applications she has usually not been short-listed for interview. Another strategy she tried was to include with her application a letter of recommendation from her employers outlining the fact that her disability is not problematic in the workplace. She feels that she has implemented every strategy that she can think of in order to achieve her ambition of furthering her career.

She acknowledges that these problems cannot be resolved with a quick fix. However, the first step in finding a solution is admitting that it exists. She believes that these are important issues to raise as they exemplify the wider problem in our community of employment participation for people with disability and the continuing failure of the mainstream within our society to accept social inclusion as a positive and worthwhile pursuit.

### **Case Study 6:**

To all who know him, C is quite a character. He is a young man with a quirky sense of humour who enjoys having as much fun as possible who also has an intellectual disability. Typical for his age, he loves listening to music, watching TV, going to the beach (any time of year) and just hanging out. He is fortunate to live in his own home, is the Principal operator of his own business and is an active contributor in his local community.

Life for C has never been better however, getting to this stage has taken quite some doing. Believing in C, planning using a Person Centred Thinking approach and forming a circle of support have been the three key ingredients bringing about a good life and a safe life for him.

C spent his entire primary and secondary school years segregated and congregated in educational support. C's 13 years of schooling amounted to very little. At the age of 17, he was unsure of what he would do when he left school. His parents were also perplexed as to what he would / could do at the end of his school years. Most people in his life thought that he would leave school and attend a sheltered workshop or maybe spend the rest of his life wandering around our community aimlessly. All the so called professionals advised that C was too challenging and that little should be expected of him or for his future. This was not the life his family wanted for him. They held him in high esteem and expected much more of him and for him.

Four years before he finished school, his family decided that if left to "the system" his life after school may once again take a turn for the worse. At that point there were no recognisable friendships or relationships outside the family in his life. Fortunately C and his family met a number of very creative and knowledgeable people. They attended a meeting to hear about a new idea where you gather a small group of friends and family to assist their family member with a disability to plan for their future. A circle of support, friends, a network, and this idea takes many names but its beauty is in its simplicity. The notion of inviting others to help plan for C's future was the challenge left with them that day. C's parents decided that this idea was exactly what they needed.

Initially the family were apprehensive about asking others for help, firstly because it is difficult admitting that help is needed and secondly, they were scared of being rejected yet again. However, in the true Aussie spirit of a fair go for all, people stepped up to be part of his 'Crew' and they have never looked back.

Using the Person Centred Thinking approach a Planning Day was arranged. Gathered together with family and friends for an afternoon with the assistance of two helpful facilitators they identified all the things that were important to enable C to experience a good life, his goals, dreams and wishes. This group of incredible people have spent many hours helping C create a good and fulfilling life in his community. He now has a number of people that he can call friends and he has also moved into his own home.

C still needs the support of people around him and everyone acknowledges the importance of the paid support in his life however, who amongst us would embrace a life devoid of freely given friendships? Which one of us would like to be congregated and segregated based on a wayward gene developed before we were born? And who would support a system that did not acknowledge, respect and cherish the individual that is you? Remember, anyone of us are a slip in the shower, a motor vehicle accident or sporting injury away from being recipient of services, a disabled person and "a client of the system". What C's Crew wanted for C is what everyone wants for themselves. THIS IS THEIR MISSION.

**---- End of Report ----**