

## **Disability Employment Services Review.**

### **Introduction.**

People with disabilities want to work and those people with disabilities who are in the workforce consider it a privilege to have a job. As a result people with disabilities are very productive workers.

People with disabilities need to work to obtain an improved income that will cover the cost of their disability (equipment, medication, housing) as well as for their level of self esteem. No one can live on the Disability Support Pension. However, it is the extra benefits of medical benefit card and reductions in cost of other services that allow people with disabilities to survive on this pension. It would assist more people with a disability if there was an **allowance for disability costs** paid to people with disabilities while they work. Eg similar to the blind and vision impaired allowance.

The number of people receiving the Disability Support Pension is really quite low in comparison with the percentage of the population who have a disability. i.e. 16.6% of the Australian working age population. The greatest advantage of having people with disabilities in the workplace is to increase the awareness to the majority of the population of the contributions that people with disabilities make to society.

PWD ACT Inc agree that the themes that emerged from the Employment Services Review of reduced complexity and red tape, improved flexibility and better support for vocational education and training are essential for change in any new arrangements.

One of the most important aspects for people with disabilities to gain knowledge of disability employment services is better and greater **promotion of information about employment services in suitable formats**. There are many issues in employment services that most people with disabilities know nothing about. Eg. Job seeking allowance.

The other difficulty that PWD ACT Inc has encountered this year is the lack of a **complaints mechanism about the disability employment services**. We were able to recommend The Australian Government's Job Access Complaints Resolution and Referral Service and the Commonwealth Ombudsman but for many people this process is a daunting process because of the extra complication of the problems of disability. If there was a formal mechanism for complaints it may assist with the improvement in the quality of the service provision from disability employment services.

It would be an advantage if **people with disabilities were given some of the funding e.g. the Job Seekers Allowance**, rather than the funding going to the disability employment services. Unfortunately, the Job Seeking Allowance Funds often ends up in the general revenue of the disability employment service and the person with a disability misses out on the funding that could help to obtain a job. Eg "in Control" program in UK which is being discussed in Australia at present by other funding bodies in Australia.

There are some **workplace modifications that people with disabilities could take with them from workplace to workplace** to assist them easily and readily change from one place to another. Eg Assistive technology.

**People with head injury are missing out on the support in their workplace in the ACT.** PWD ACT Inc has had drawn to its attention the difficulties faced by people with a head injury in obtaining employment. It would appear that the Rehabilitation System was not giving enough support for them to understand the employment services system or how to gain support in the workplace.

PWD ACT Inc would like to draw to the attention of this review the issues that people with disabilities have faced under the present disability employment services model. We will use the elements of the existing programs to highlight the issues and attempt to give some solutions to the issues as presented to us.

### **Eligibility:**

It has been reported that people with intellectual disabilities have not been given an eligibility assessment because they did not look as though they have an intellectual disability.

If the Access to Employment Training was able to be given before the person with an intellectual disability left school the eligibility criteria may not be necessary. It can often be a negative process where a person's disability is more important than his/her abilities. Often there is a problem with schools co-operating to allow this Training to occur while the student is still at school. Without this training the Work Experience situation can become impossible for the employee and the employer.

### **Assessment.**

PWD ACT Inc believes that it is difficult to question the disability employment service about the accuracy of assessment of a person. It may be important for the disability employment service to regularly review the assessment to retain the validity of the assessment.

The assessment documents that PWD ACT Inc has seen are too formalised and do not reflect the individual's abilities. A more personalised document that genuinely demonstrates the person's capacities would be more conducive for future employers.

### **Flexibility of service delivery.**

People with disabilities who have tertiary qualifications have greater difficulties in being given an appropriate work position, especially those people with a vision impairment. One visually impaired client was asked to travel 4 hours to a job.

There are problems for people who have brain injury because they are not aware of eligibility criteria or the purpose of the disability employment services. It would appear that Vocational Rehabilitation Services( possibly only in the ACT) are not able to provide the same level of support for people with head injury.

### **Funding models**

People with disabilities lose their positions after funding for their support stops and there are not provisions in place for continuing support.

Short term support for the person with a disability has led to the person experiencing failure in the workplace. When this short term support occurs again, the failure is compounded and the person with a disability loses their confidence.

The funding models and accountability to government lead to a person with a disability whose requirements are more complex, taking much longer to get a position because the disability employment service will receive more funding.

### **Linkage with other programs**

The system is incomprehensible for many people. There are too many departments and groups involved. It is not only difficult for people with disabilities to understand the extra provisions but employers do not have the time or resources to put the benefits in place.

Workplace modifications take too long and the person with a disability becomes frustrated and feels discrimination. Many employers do not know how the system works, eg the ACT public service took months to acquire suitable software for a new employee.

Where possible, people with disabilities should be able to take their work modifications with them. In particular, software that assists people to read text on computers or other assistive technology.

### **Incentives for employers**

The best incentives for employers are those incentives that are mutually beneficial to the person with a disability and the employer. The extra training that is available for people with disabilities in the Technical Education System will also give the employer a better skilled worker.

A payment to the employer to employ a person with a disability is only a short term measure and it will induce the idea of people with disabilities being only commodities rather than as useful and productive workers.

### **Performance management, program assurance and contract management**

There is no clear complaints mechanism for people with disabilities to register their complaints about the disability employment service.

Many people with mental illness are set up to fail because there is no ongoing support.

Agencies receive more money if the person has greater difficulty in getting a job. People are often left on books because they are difficult to find jobs for.

The quality of the staff in a disability employment agency is most important. If the person with a disability is supported and valued by the staff, there will be a better result for employer and employee.

When there is continuity between a person with a disability and a staff member of a disability employment agency it is more beneficial to the person. Often there is a high turn over of staff in disability employment agencies.

Poor staffing will also cause immeasurable harm. Eg A young woman in a wheelchair was left outside an employment place by a staff member of an agency and was expected to introduce herself and initiate her own work position.

### **Vocational education and training**

Unfortunately PWD ACT Inc has been informed of training for a person with head injury that has caused loss of self esteem and feelings of inadequacy rather than providing increased potential as an employee.

Once again, there is not enough promotion of the variety and extent of training that is available for people with disabilities.

Training for employment for young people leaving school needs to be negotiated with the schools before the young person with a disability attends work experience and job placement. This early intervention will assist the young person to retain appropriate skills.

### **Purchasing systems.**

Disability agencies get paid by the quantity of job placements and not by the quality of the placement