

Policy Document (Draft)

Australians for Disability and Diversity Employment Incorporated (ADDE INC.)

ADDE Inc. Policy -DRAFT

Employment of people with disability – Federal, State and Local Government

“I would like to live in a global society where people with disabilities and other disadvantages are treated fairly and the idea of social inclusion is a complete reality” ~ Michael Merrett, ADDE Inc. Member, and living with the aid of a mobility device (scooter).

Policy at a glance:

- Employers to adopt pro-active “Disability and Diversity Employment” policies and practices
- Awareness raising and coordination of information and resources; a “One Stop Shop”
- Halt the decline and increase employment of people with disability in the Public Services
- Government service and supply contracts to be tendered to businesses which have proactive disability employment practices
- Consultancy services on disability issues to use people with disability as paid trainers and consultants
- Government and government funded disability service providers to work towards staff targets
- The Business sector to emulate examples of best practice employment through awareness raising workshops and to be shown the business case for employing people with disability.
- Support a coordinated approach to disability employment advocacy
- Bipartisanship between all political parties on disability employment policy – party politics has no place here.
- Innovative practice on work readiness to be encouraged
- Disclosure of disability should be the norm in recruitment and in the workplace. This will only happen if recruitment agencies and places of work are supportive of and proactively employing people with disability.
- People with disability can enliven the workplace and act as conduits to diversity by being encouraged by their employer to educate the staff on life with a disability.
- A universal Measurement tool for data collection to be created so that targets on employment of people with disability can be established and measured.
- As of August, 2009, Australia is a signatory to and has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. We have also signed and ratified the Optional Protocol which ensures that complaints received indicating grave or systemic violations of the Convention will be inquired into and actioned. In doing so, Australia agrees to the legally binding policies within the document which will ensure employers and management will mainstream disability in all their activities with the understanding that discrimination will not be tolerated and in fact is against the law.

- Income support payments also need to be geared so that where possible they encourage people who choose to seek employment to do so, rather than creating new barriers.
- Encourage innovative approaches to employment of people with disability such as social enterprises, or initiatives to assist people with disability establish their own small business.

Comments/Additions

Attitudinal barriers

"I found so many barriers to getting back into the workforce....." Peter Rickards, President, ADDE Inc. and living with vision impairment.

- Employers often look at the negatives of employing someone with a disability such as extra cost, lack of flexibility, less productive because of health issues. However, organizations which pro-actively employ people with disability such as Coles, Brisbane City Council, ACT Government, Telstra and IBM Australia have measurable data which shows that less sick leave is taken by employees with disability than by able workers, they stay in the job longer, value their jobs more and often work harder. By employing a person with disability, the workplace can be enlivened by the diversity it will bring, for example workplaces where non-disabled staff are being taught Auslan, as a result of employing deaf staff.
- Managers think that employing someone with a disability is taking a risk, and unless they are supported by senior management and the Board to employ people from disadvantaged groups, they are unlikely to do so.
- Most organizations believe that stating they are an "Equal opportunity employer" implies openness to employing people with disabilities or with other disadvantages. However often an applicant with a disability has to be much better than other applicants, to have an equal opportunity to be employed. Usually employers will give other reasons for that person not being successful, and all source data can be destroyed after an appointment is made. There is a big difference between non-discrimination (equal opportunity), a minimalist approach and having a pro-active approach to a diverse work force.
- Recruiters responsible for short listing candidates for interview will usually see someone declaring they have a disability, as having a negative attribute which will eliminate them from the short list. The prospective applicant with a disability is consequently afraid to disclose their disability. Without a supportive environment in both recruitment practice and places of work, disclosure will not occur.

Comments/Additions

Structural barriers

“In addition to experiencing barriers to my age I also believe I have been excluded from at least one position, which I was short-listed for, due to my hearing disability.”

Kathy Leitch, ADDE Inc., Development Officer and living with hearing impairment.

- People with disabilities may not have the same level of experience or skill as other applicants because of fewer opportunities in the past. Even while at school or university people with disabilities have more difficulty gaining part time or casual employment.
- People with disability tend to stay longer in the same job because of greater difficulty in changing jobs, and greater fear of not finding other work if they leave their present job. It is, therefore, much harder to have a competitive resume.
- Organizations which use recruitment agencies to source a short list for positions are most unlikely to have any applicants with disabilities short listed for interview.
- Often computer software systems used by organizations are not accessible to screen reading software used by people with vision impairment.
- Work places are often not accessible to people with mobility problems or in wheel chairs.
- Many work locations are not accessible by public transport especially bus and tram, making it difficult for people with mobility issues to get to interviews and access prospective workplaces.
- Often key selection criteria require having a drivers license when travel may be required to other sites or locations, when this may not be an essential part of the job or can be worked around by a creative approach.
- Many people with disability have no incentive to look for work because they are likely to loose their benefits, financial as well as concessions to services and supports.

Comments/Additions

Solutions – Big picture

“I personally am looking for some paid part-time work this year, knowing what a change to my life it is going to make. It will only re-enforce for me that paid employment is possible to a disabled person and that I am a worthy part of society.” Jason Anderson, Member, ADDE Inc. and living with MS

- The fundamental strategy to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities needs to be in convincing employers to adopt pro-active “Disability and Diversity Employment” policies and practices.
- This means that employers will actively seek to employ a percentage of their work force as people with disabilities. The percentage should be 11.2% (this is the Australian

Bureau of Statistics figure for the Australian population of work force age with disabilities). This can be achieved in stages ie. 5%, 8%, 11%.

- Large organizations which are able to adopt diversity employment policies should also have employment targets for other disadvantaged groups including mature aged, youth, indigenous people, and people from culturally diverse back grounds.
- It is important that attention be also given to providing promotional and career opportunities for people with disability. Failure to do so increases the chance that people with disability will be stuck in low paid and less challenging roles. One strategy which can be adopted is to give them an opportunity to act in more senior positions during periods of staff leave of absence.
- To achieve success in Diversity Employment there are several key elements required:
 - A top down commitment to the process (from the Board and senior management)
 - The setting of achievable targets and measurement tool to be in place with data collection
 - Line management to be accountable for achieving targets and to regularly report
 - A high level of training and awareness
 - Establishment of an Equity and Diversity unit in the HR Department

Note: Although the Federal/State Disability Agreement puts employment as the responsibility of the Federal Government, State and local Governments have an extremely important role to play in providing employment for people with disabilities and other disadvantages. The same criteria should apply as to the Federal Government.

Comments/Additions _____

Government responsibilities

Selling the Disability and Diversity Employment message

- Government should allocate resources to sell this message to provide information and referral to State Governments, local Governments, the business sector and the Not for Profit sector. The message should be that:

“It makes good business sense as well as making the organization a good corporate citizen to adopt Disability and Diversity employment policies and practices.” HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) National Inquiry into employment and disability, 2005

Comments/Additions _____

Coordination of information

- Employers who wish to employ more people with disabilities often do not know what to do, what supports they can get, and what models of best practice they can adopt. There are so many different organizations and supports involved in part of the process, that it is very confusing.
- Governments should work together to establish a “One Stop Shop” similar in nature to INDUSTRY TECHLINK. This service could take initial enquiries and refer to the organization/agency best able to meet the employers need. As with INDUSTRIAL TECHLINK an important part of the function of this service would be to promote that it provides information and referral services.
- The Federal Government has established a “One Stop Shop information website called JOBACCESS”. A lot of resources have been spent on this web site providing interactive learning on disability. Research shows however that this type of learning does not change attitude towards disability in the work place. It further shows that only direct involvement with a person with a disability, as part of a training process will change attitudes in a positive way. Therefore resources need to be allocated to providing paid training opportunities for people with disabilities to change attitudes in the Public Service, and all other Government organizations and agencies.

Comments/Additions

The Public Service

- The percentage of people with disability in the Federal Public Service has dropped over the last ten years from 6.8% to just 3 %. Governments MUST adopt disability and diversity employment policies in the Public Service to increase employment of people with disabilities in line with best practice (11.2%) This can be achieved in stages ie 5%, 8%, 11%. Diversity policies should also cater for other disadvantaged groups including mature age, youth, indigenous, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Most state and local governments and other large organizations do not have measurable data on the percentage of people with disability in their workforce. Unless baseline data is established there is no way of measuring success or otherwise of any of the policies or strategies implemented to improve employment outcomes.
- Targets should be set and achieved over a term of office. Measurement and data collection will ensure that progress is taking place. Until Governments lead from the front they will have no credibility in trying to convince anyone else.
- All employment agencies used by Government should be given guidelines to seek people with disabilities and people with other disadvantages for job interviews

- All job advertisements should have the wording “people from disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply”.
- If the job advertised is assisting to provide services to people with disability or has the word “Disability” in the title or job description, then the words “people with disabilities are encouraged to apply” should be in the job advertisement.
- Because many people with disability have difficulty accessing job advertisements in newspapers, all jobs should be advertised through Disability Employment Services and the internet

Comments/Additions _____

Government service and supply contracts

- Large suppliers of Government services and goods should be required to have pro-active employment policies for disadvantaged people
- These requirements would be seen as giving preferred supplier status along with price and quality etc.
- It is important that there is an auditing mechanism to ensure what suppliers say they are doing is actually occurring.
- **Consultancy services on disability issues.** In order to promote self employment opportunities for people with disability, it is important that a pro-active approach is taken by encouraging people with disability to undertake these consultancy services. The tendering process should stipulate, “Submissions from people with disabilities are encouraged”, and organizations which employ PWD to undertake this work should be preferred tenderers.

Comments/Additions _____

Government funded disability service providers and agencies

- These organizations are at the front line of providing services and supports to people with disabilities and are in the business of helping people with disabilities to find work and to retain work. These organizations should be leading from the front in showing how to employ people with disabilities by employing them on staff.
- Research has been done by ADDE Inc. entitled, “Leading from the front?” which shows that this sector is largely not setting a good example of employment of people with disability on staff. Further research should be undertaken to determine what levels of employment of PWD exist in these sectors, and to develop some models of best practice.

- Very few of these organizations, both 'for profit' and 'not for profit' appear to have a measurable percentage of their work force employed as people with disabilities.
- Research shows that it can be strongly argued there should be a condition of their funding grants which requires specified progress in employment levels for people with disability for these funded agencies to be eligible for future funding from Government.
- It is a fact that unless this matter becomes "top of mind" by the Board of Directors and management, change is unlikely to occur.
- Disability service providers to be encouraged to have people with disability on their Boards. People with disabilities who are not working full time should be paid to be on Boards.
- Disability service providers to have policies and strategies which transition people with disability who are working as volunteers to paid roles within that organization. Too often employed able-bodied people are working alongside people with disabilities, who are volunteers doing unpaid work.
- People with disability are often so well trained and have so many certificates that the only thing that is lacking is the opportunity to get paid work.

Comments/Additions _____

The Business sector

- Many examples of good employment practice exist for small businesses even though they don't have disability and diversity employment policies; however it is important that medium and large organizations be strongly encouraged to adopt "Disability and diversity employment" policies and practices. By adopting such policies and practices, research shows that organizations achieve greater efficiency, are more innovative, achieve a better profit, and provide a better service to customers.
- The media can be used to sell this message, and resources could be allocated to conduct forums for business leaders. The best message comes from those organizations which are already doing it and can measure the outcomes.
- Work place modification funding should also be available to people with disability who are running their own small business, or are starting a small business through a training program such as NEIS (New Enterprise Incentive Scheme).

"After my accident on the building site, I did a course to help me get a job in the building game working in an office providing quotes, costing, etc. I sent out over 350 applications without any result. In the end my brother and I had to start up our own business managing a motor vehicle repair business. It was tough at first but we are doing very well now." (Disability Council of NSW, 2008)

* www.un.org/disabilities

Comments/Additions _____
