



# **Submission to the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services ACT Inquiry into the Employment of People with Disability, 26 April 2017**

## **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

The Committee in its call for submissions to this Inquiry is interested in improving the attraction and retention of people with disability in the ACT public service, private enterprise and community organisations and our submission addresses this aspect of the Inquiry.

Recommendations:

### **Address employers' perceptions of cost and risk and build their disability confidence**

1. The ACT Government should draw on research that promotes the business benefits of employing people with disability; provide quality information that responds to 'cost and risk' concerns and work, health and safety issues and encourage employers to tap into free Government funded resources such as JobAccess.
2. The ACT Government should work with a suitably skilled and trusted advisor to build their disability confidence to hire and retain people with disability and encourage other employers to do the same. Proven strategies include reviewing their recruitment processes to remove barriers; developing a workplace adjustment policy and providing disability confidence training for recruiters and supervisors/managers.
3. As part of the ACT Government's updated Disability Employment Strategy, it should consider implementing December 2016 APSC Directive in relation to employment of people with disability as well as set achievable targets for the employment of people with disability, appoint a Senior Champion and ensure sufficient resources to effectively implement the Strategy.
4. The ACT should encourage employers to develop Accessibility and Inclusion Plans which set targets for the employment of people with disability; appoint a Senior Champion within their business and allocate resources to ensure effective implementation.

### **Make it easy for employers and improve job matching of candidates to roles**

5. The ACT Government should urge the Australian Government's Department of Social Services to improve DES services for employers so that they invest the time to better understand employers, their culture, job roles and inherent requirements to improve job matching and long term retention.
6. The ACT Government should create a disability employment hub (possibly within the newly announced Office of Disability or Chamber of Commerce) which could act as a broker between employers and DES providers to reduce the number of approaches to individual employers and create an effective approach to employing people with disability across the ACT. This could involve employers from all sectors – public, private and community. AND would be willing to contribute its expertise in this area





AUSTRALIAN  
NETWORK  
ON DISABILITY

flowing from the NSW Government funded High Growth Jobs Talented Candidates project.

**Support people with disability to have relevant skills and be work ready**

7. As much as possible training provided to DES jobseekers should be linked directly to a vacancy with an employer who is disability confident.
8. The proven *place then train* model should more widely be offered to people in the ACT with intellectual disability to achieve sustainable jobs in open employment.
9. AND recommends that the ACT Government vocational traineeship be evaluated and if found to be successful, could be expanded to multiple Departments and private sector employers. This may also include Commonwealth Departments.
10. AND's proven Stepping Into program could be used by more employers within the ACT for graduate level roles and could be considered as a feeder to the ACT Government Graduate program.



## About the Australian Network on Disability

Founded in 2000, Australian Network on Disability (AND) now serves 180 members from across the public, private and non-profit sectors. Together they employ 1.3 million Australians or approximately 11% of the workforce. Employers join AND to build their capacity to welcome people with disability as customers and employees. Our mission is to create a disability confident Australia.

## About this Submission

This submission is drawn from:

- AND learnings from working with our employer members since AND was founded in 2000 including ACT member organisations.
- AND member consultations in November and December 2016 in four capital cities with more than 75 public and private sector organisations on proposed DES 2018 reforms. These organisations included members with direct experience of using DES to recruit currently or in the past.
- Published Australian research on employers' perspectives on employing people with disability cited in our endnotes and including the 2015 Business Council of Australia survey *Recognising Ability*.
- [Disability Confidence Surveys](#) of 500 small and medium sized businesses commissioned and published by Australian Network on Disability (AND) in December 2015 and 2016.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability, (Willing to Work) May 2016.
- Early Learnings Evaluation of the High Growth Jobs Talented Candidates project, 20 December 2016.
- United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, *Survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities*, Technical Report, November 2008.
- "Ahead of the Arc – a contribution to halving the disability employment gap" UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability, 6 December 2016.
- Attendance at the inaugural [Harkin International Disability Employment Summit](#), Washington DC, December 2016.
- Attendance at the [Zero Project Conference](#), Vienna, February 2017

## Context of employment for people with disability in Australia

Across Australia including the ACT, employers' lack of awareness and confidence in systems that help recruit and retain people with disability. The absence of an effective system to match the needs of jobseekers with disability with vacancies, results in low employment participation by people with disability. The labour force participation rate of people with disability has remained at around 53 percent for more than 20 years.<sup>i</sup> It remains clear that more than 24 years after the Disability Discrimination Act became law, awareness of obligations, opportunities and supports for employing people with disability are poorly understood among the general community and employers.



AND contends that rather than having the wrong attitude, employers remain unaware of what to do and how to go about it, and they don't utilise Disability Employment Services and other government funded supports<sup>ii</sup>, as much as they could, perhaps due to a lack of awareness or because these services do not meet their needs.

"...the worst obstacle that people with disability face in getting employment is employer ignorance; not employer unwillingness, but employers seen simply not to know what, how to hire a person with disability, how to work out whether they're a good match for the job. Once they're hired, how to support them in the role, how to prepare the workplace, how to make sure the employees who will be working with a person with disability understand the situation."

Susan Ryan, former Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, speaking on the preliminary findings of the Willing to Work Inquiry ABC Radio 25/8/15.

Addressing the issues associated with low levels of workforce participation among people with disability will require concerted effort across a range of factors including, but not limited to:

- improvements in education and training systems to ensure people with disability have the skills required for a modern and evolving workforce;
- improved and informed community knowledge about the diversity and abilities of people with disability
- progress to reduce discrimination
- the successful implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- improvements to the Disability Employment Services program funded by the Australian Government.

### **a) Address employers' perceptions of cost and risk and build their disability confidence**

There are more than a million Australians with disability in the workforce and many stories of people with disability taking their place in organisations and forging long term and successful careers. However, there are well documented concerns expressed by employers that hiring people with disability is often associated with increased risk and cost.<sup>iii</sup> Australian data on the business case for employing people with disability is based on academic research published in 1999 and 2007. Our submission to the Federal Government recommends they fund quality academic Australian research that documents the benefits of employing people with disability and addresses perceptions of additional cost and risk, including for work, health and safety and preferably, by industry. We have also recommended that the Federal Government establish a clearing house of successful strategies (perhaps published on the JobAccess website) so that good practice becomes common practice.

Findings from our NSW Government funded High Growth Jobs Talented Candidates program confirm that:

- Amongst employers there is little understanding of the breadth and diversity of disability in Australia.
- Many employers don't have policies and procedures in place to support recruitment and retention of people with disability.
- Employers generally have a poor understanding of the concept of workplace adjustment, sometimes confusing it with work, health and safety issues.



- Position descriptions generally do not clearly identify inherent requirements for the role which impede successful use of workplace adjustment policies if they do exist.
- Online and other standard recruitment practices are often a substantial barrier for people with disability.
- The process to review recruitment policies and develop workplace adjustment policies and practices typically takes many months and requires buy-in and engagement of multiple areas of an employer's business
- Employers need a trusted provider with recognised expertise to assist them to identify and make changes to their recruitment practices and help build disability confidence among hiring managers and supervisors. (This is also supported by the Business Council of Australia 2015 survey *Recognising Ability*).
- Considerable work across multiple areas of the business (preferably co-ordinated by a single point of contact and a dedicated resource within their business) is needed to assist employers adjust their hiring practices to accommodate candidates with disability.
- Disability Employment Services (DES) providers are not currently resourced or skilled to provide the deep level of engagement and education and partnership work required to help large, complex employers become accessible and inclusive.
- Employers also benefit from the opportunity to trial the employment of people with disability. Work experience, traineeships, internships and part-time jobs whilst at school and vacation employment all provide good opportunities for people with disability to improve their work ready skills and assist employers to mitigate fears regarding cost and risk and specific recommendations are included in **section c) below**.
- AND welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to the National Disability Strategy through its Involve campaign. AND notes the announcement of the ACT Government Office for Disability in December 2016 and associated Disability Reference Group. The ACT Chamber of Commerce and other private sector employers should continue to be engaged in this work.

It is noted that the number of people with disability who state they have a disability in the ACT Public Service is 2.2 per cent. AND expects that number would be higher if employees are surveyed anonymously. International and Australian evidence confirms that these numbers will increase when people with disability feel safe to share the information and this sense of trust comes from having accessible and inclusive systems and practices over a long period of time. Sharing good news stories where people with disability have not only been hired but are retained and receive professional development and career progression also helps improve the number of people willing to share they have a disability. Please see AND associated resources including particularly the ANZ case study for more on increasing the number of people willing to share they have disability.<sup>iv</sup>

The ACT Government is a Gold Member of the Australian Network on Disability. In relation to this, recent focus in work with AND has been to:

- ensure employees and managers have access to effective disability resources
- develop a strong Disability Employee Network
- participate in cross-government forums including AND regular roundtables
- participate in ANDs Champion Networks
- provide advice on career development and mentoring for people with a disability.



AND welcomes the targets for employment of people with disability and other measurable outcomes that were set in the ACT Government 2011-2015 Disability Employment Strategy. This includes targets for the employment of people with a disability in the performance agreements of their Senior Executive Officers since 2015. AND also looks forward to contributing to the development of the next ACT Public Service Disability Employment Strategy. This strategy will be enhanced if the ACT Government appoints a highly active and engaged Senior Executive as a Disability Champion as well as adequate resources to ensure it can be implemented. We also note the recent Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Directive of December 2016 which provides a new affirmative measure which gives agencies the flexibility to identify a vacancy as open only to persons who have a disability, or a particular type of disability. The affirmative measure is designed to address the under-representation of people with disability in the Australian Public Service.<sup>v</sup> The ACT Government could consider implementing a similar measure.

### **Recommendation 1**

The ACT Government should draw on research that promotes the business benefits of employing people with disability; provide quality information that responds to 'cost and risk' concerns and work, health and safety issues and encourage employers to tap into free Government funded resources such as JobAccess.

### **Recommendation 2**

The ACT Government should work with a suitably skilled and trusted advisor to build their disability confidence to hire and retain people with disability and encourage other employers to do the same. Proven strategies include reviewing their recruitment processes to remove barriers; developing a workplace adjustment policy and providing disability confidence training for recruiters and supervisors/managers.

### **Recommendation 3**

As part of the ACT Government's updated Disability Employment Strategy, it should consider implementing December 2016 APSC Directive in relation to employment of people with disability as well as set achievable targets for the employment of people with disability, appoint a Senior Champion and ensure sufficient resources to effectively implement the Strategy.

### **Recommendation 4**

The ACT should encourage employers to develop Accessibility and Inclusion Plans which set targets for the employment of people with disability; appoint a Senior Champion within their business and allocate resources to ensure effective implementation.

#### **a) Make it easy for employers and improve job matching of candidates to roles**

The Federal Government contracts Disability Employment Services (DES) to a network of providers across Australia. It aims to help individuals with injury, disability or a health condition to secure and maintain sustainable open employment. The DES program operates under the





terms of the *Disability Services Act 1986*. The Australian Government funds the DES system at a cost of nearly \$1billion annually.

Service providers consider the impact that a participant's injury, disability or health condition has on their ability to find and retain a job, and provide appropriate tailored assistance to job seekers so that they can achieve sustainable employment outcomes. Where required, DES offers ongoing support in the workplace to help participants retain their employment. DES should also be focused on the needs of employers, providing participants with the skills and training to meet employer needs. Providers help support employers to maintain quality and sustainable outcomes for people with disability, including where appropriate, arranging workplace adjustments through JobAccess and the Employment Assistance Fund.

The DES program is currently under review. AND has made a submission to the Australian Government which contains a number of recommendations.<sup>vi</sup> There were 5,437 people participating in the DES program in the ACT at 30 June 2016, with an active caseload of 1,658. More than half of all DES clients receive Newstart Allowance (52 per cent) and a further 27 per cent are in receipt of the Disability Support Pension. There are currently six providers delivering DES services in the ACT.<sup>vii</sup>

AND contends that nationally, the DES system is not performing strongly enough for job seekers or employers. At September 2016, 32 per cent of participants were in employment three months after completing a period of assistance in DES. This figure is down from a high of 38 per cent in 2013.<sup>viii</sup>

For employers getting the right person for the job – the job match – is critical. Employers consistently report concerns that with most DES providers the focus is on the jobseeker at the expense of employer; not enough time is spent understanding the employer's business and job roles/core competencies; there is a failure to refer candidates who can meet their vacancies (poor job match); there are too many employment service providers approaching employers and employers don't know which ones offer quality service; ongoing support for employment is unreliable and ineffective, and the system is difficult to navigate.<sup>ix</sup> Consultations with AND members in late 2016 confirm that common concerns are that DES providers lack credibility, service is "patchy" and they cannot be relied upon to deliver the right candidates for their roles. Employers want a reliable recruitment supplier who understands their business. One AND member recently said the key factors to success for their recruitment process using DES have been:

- Open information sharing with the DES
- The DES working in our workplaces to understand the roles that we have, the pace and the culture
- The DES utilising our job dictionary
- The suite of documents that we have created to gather information from the candidate to ensure we can accommodate their workplace adjustments and ensure they are safe in our workplaces
- The job matches by the DES is critical to sustainable employment.

Strong performing DES providers who invest deeply in employer engagement and form partnerships are having success. Those taking a transactional approach are not having success. AND has long advocated for a demand-led approach where DES providers have a dual customer approach, focusing equally on the needs of employers and job seekers with



disability. A recent US study of more than 100 employers associated with the successful Marriot Foundation Bridges from School to Work Program documents the importance of this approach.<sup>x</sup>

## **Recommendation 5**

The ACT Government should urge the Australian Government's Department of Social Services to improve DES services for employers so that they invest the time to better understand employers, their culture, job roles and inherent requirements to improve job matching and long term retention.

### **Brokerage between employers and DES providers**

AND is currently deeply involved in a demand-led initiative, the High Growth Jobs, Talented Candidates (HGJTC) project which links business to people with disability with employers seeking candidates to fill roles in high growth areas in NSW. It is designed to increase employers' capability to employ people with disability, while at the same time helping to better prepare candidates with disability for the jobs of the future. The project focuses on the needs of employers and candidates, ensuring an effective and sustainable job match.

Delivered by the Australian Network on Disability (AND), in partnership with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, HGJTC is working with eight businesses employing around 57,000 staff nationally. Participating employers to date are Australian Unity, Life Without Barriers, Uniting (Health and Social Assistance), IAG, Fujitsu, Infosys (Knowledge) and Accor Hotels and Compass Group (Food and Accommodation Services).

HGJTC starts with employers: building their disability confidence through expert training provided by AND. Workplace adjustment and recruitment processes are also reviewed to ensure they are accessible and inclusive and if not, AND works with relevant parts of the business to develop and implement revised practices. AND then works as a broker between employers and high-quality DES providers and disability specialist organisations to ensure that the right person, with the right skills and attitude is found for available roles.

In terms of job matching, the HJGTC project has found key elements include:

- site visits to understand the employer (including job role; employer's business and culture)
- job analysis to identify inherent requirements of identified roles;
- short pre-employment training co-designed and delivered by employers and providers;
- skilled matching of candidates to the available roles;
- single point of contact for post placement in-work support.

Please see the [Sydney Morning Herald's article, 'I no longer need to hide my disability from the boss'](#), for a case study from this project.





## **Recommendation 6**

The ACT Government should create a disability employment hub (possibly within the newly announced Office of Disability or Chamber of Commerce) which could act as a broker between employers and DES providers to reduce the number of approaches to individual employers and create an effective approach to employing people with disability across the ACT. This could involve employers from all sectors – public, private and community. AND would be willing to contribute its expertise in this area flowing from the NSW Government funded High Growth Jobs Talented Candidates project.

### **b) Support people with disability to have relevant skills and be work ready**

Work experience, traineeships, internships and part-time jobs whilst at school and vacation employment all provide good opportunities for people with disability to improve their work ready skills and assist employers to mitigate fears regarding cost and risk DES providers. AND supports the principal that as much as possible training provided to DES jobseekers are linked directly to a vacancy with an employer who is disability confident. The demand-led brokerage outlined in **section b) above** should inform and support this.

## **Recommendation 7**

As much as possible training provided to DES jobseekers should be linked directly to a vacancy with an employer who is disability confident.

### **People with intellectual disability**

AND supports the principle of open employment for all people with disability, including people with intellectual disability. When fully operation in 2019, the NDIS in the ACT is expected to support 6,900 people and will include a significant number of people with intellectual disability. There is strong evidence that under the DES system a number of providers are able to achieve extremely high outcomes (in excess of 70 per cent with 26 week outcomes) using the place then train model which works closely with employers and jobseekers to customise roles. This approach should be adopted widely so that individuals have an effective choice between sheltered and open employment.<sup>xi</sup> AND notes also there is evidence that open employment delivers better outcomes for people with intellectual disability than either sheltered employment or day care programs.<sup>xii</sup>

## **Recommendation 8**

The proven *place then train* model should more widely be offered to people in the ACT with intellectual disability to achieve sustainable jobs in open employment.

### **Students with disability in the vocational education system**

AND notes the ACT Government has introduced a traineeship program for people with disability and that they received over 200 applications for nine positions offered in 2017. Key indicators to track for this program would be: number of trainees who complete; number of trainees who transition to a paid position in the ACT Government or elsewhere upon completion of the



traineeship. If the program is successful on these indicators AND would recommend that it be expanded so that more people studying a vocational course can receive work experience and transition to employment.

### **Recommendation 9**

The ACT Government vocational traineeship should be evaluated and if found to be successful, could be expanded to multiple Departments and private sector employers.  
Undergraduates with disability

Graduate research<sup>xiii</sup> tells us that tertiary students with disability find it more difficult to secure employment opportunities after graduation. 56 per cent of students with disability report being in full time employment, four months after completion. That is 13 per cent lower than the average statistic for all graduates (69 per cent).

AND's Stepping Into program is a paid internship scheme that matches talented university students with disability with roles in leading Australian businesses. It has been operating since 2005 and more than 700 undergraduates with disability have been successfully matched with a paid internship during this time.

For students, it's a chance to gain vital work experience during study. For business it is a talent pipeline that helps cultivate an inclusive and diverse workplace culture. AND coordinates attracting talented students, assessing eligibility, managing student and workplace briefings and the evaluation process and feedback.

Please see AND's website for [Stepping Into success stories](#). AND notes that the ACT Public Service is committed to "*building a culturally diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace and as part of this commitment they strongly encourage people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, or People with Disability, to apply. Some of the positions within the Graduate Program are designated to be filled with people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and/or People with Disability.*"<sup>xiv</sup> The Stepping into Internship program could become an important feeder into this Graduate Program.

### **Recommendation 10**

AND's proven Stepping Into program could be used by more employers within the ACT for graduate level roles and could be considered as a feeder to the ACT Government Graduate program.



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> ABS 4430.0.10.001 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, first results released 29/4/16.

<sup>ii</sup> For example [JobAccess](#)

<sup>iii</sup> For example: Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), Recruiting people with a disability: an employer perspective, Research Report, August 2011. DEEWR, Employer perspectives on recruiting people with disability and the role of Disability Employment Services, August 2011. NCVER, What would it take? Employer perspectives on employing people with a disability, Peter Waterhouse, Helen Kimberley, Pam Jonas and John Glover, Group Training Association of Victoria, 2010. Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ACCI's plan for the employment of people with a disability, 2008. 2007 Employer Survey Papers: Employer Attitudes towards Recruiting and Retaining Job Seekers from Particular Equity Groups. Paper by TNS Social Research for the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Department of Family and Community Services, Report of the Review of the Employer Incentives Strategy, March 2003. Peck, B & Kirkbride, 'Why businesses don't employ people with disabilities', in Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol.16, no.2, pp.71–5. 2001.

<sup>iv</sup> [AND website Info Sharing](#) and [Info Sharing Success Stories](#)

<sup>v</sup> [APSC Directive December 2016](#)

<sup>vi</sup> See [AND Submission to DES Reform 2017](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [DES providers in the ACT](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Labour Market Assistance Outcomes, September 2016](#)

<sup>ix</sup> Employment of People with Disability, 29/10/15. DEEWR employer survey cited in Minister Ellis Review of Employment Services Issues Paper, December 2012. DEEWR, Employer perspectives on recruiting people with disability and the role of Disability Employment Services, August 2011. NCVER, What would it take? Employer perspectives on employing people with a disability, Peter Waterhouse, Helen Kimberley, Pam Jonas and John Glover, Group Training Association of Victoria, 2010

<sup>x</sup> *Employer Preferences in Hiring Youth with Disabilities* by Simonsen, Monica; Fabian, Ellen and Luecking, Richard G. Journal of Rehabilitation. Jan-Mar 2015.

<sup>xi</sup> See Inclusion Australia, Designing Evidence Based Transition-to-Work and Open Employment Support for People with Intellectual Disability, submission to DEF Issues Paper, June 2015.

<sup>xii</sup> See for example Foley, K., Jacoby, P., Einfeld, S., Girdler, S., Bourke, J., Riches, V., & Leonard, H. (2014). Day occupation is associated with psychopathology for adolescents and young adults with Down syndrome. BMC Psychiatry: MS ID 2209894761098404, JWF MS ID: 12888\_2014\_266.

<sup>xiii</sup> [GradStats 2015](#)

<sup>xiv</sup> [ACT Government Graduate Recruitment](#)