



ADDE Newsletter March 2008

Quote of the month:

*“Vision without action is like daydreaming. Action without vision is a nightmare.”
W.B. Prescott*

This months newsletter highlights the exciting work being done by ADDE including the research project on employment of people with disability in the disability agency sector and the business plan project. Both of these projects have provided ADDE members the opportunity to partake in paid work with professional mentoring and guidance. For some of them this is the first paid work they have had in many years. It seems to be a given that once you are in paid work it is easier to find more work – this is the case for some of the members involved who have gone on to further employment. This is a side benefit of their involvement in ADDE. Do you, or do you know of anyone who has a passion for the employment rights of people with disability? Yes! Become involved in ADDE and you might be able to expand your work opportunities too.

After experiencing difficulty finding employment as a mature age job seeker with hearing loss I have set up a partnership and started a mobile coffee business. (See advertisement in this newsletter). It has grown to the point where it is now fulltime and so my involvement as Newsletter editor is coming to an end. The new editor is Ania, who will introduce herself to you in the next newsletter. For those who may remember I am taking my case of discrimination to a hearing at HEREOC soon. I will keep you posted on the outcome of this action for the cause of improving recruitment practices of the federal government.

Many thanks for your readership and contributions over the last 12 months –

Kathy Leitch

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ADDE/ACL RESEARCH PROJECT

Disability in employment in the disability services sector in Victoria

In 2007 the ADDE and Action for Community Living received a grant from the Reichstein Foundation to conduct a research and advocacy project into the employment of people with disabilities. The overall project aim is to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the not-for-profit disability service sector in Victoria.

The Equity Research Centre was contracted to conduct the research project. Forty-five disability support and advocacy organisations participated in a survey and a literature review has been completed. The project is now in its final stages and is conducting a number of case studies with organisations who are emerging as leaders in the practice of employing people with disabilities, among them AFDO, VCOSS, Vision Australia and MS Australia.

It is anticipated that disability advocacy groups can use the results of this research to debate and showcase some employment practices in the disability sector, and to lobby for more action on breaking down barriers to employment of people with disabilities.

Key findings from the participating disability service and advocacy organisations in Victoria indicate that large disability organisations do not often make efforts to discover the proportion of staff who have disabilities. For that reason much of the data in this area was simply unavailable. It is anticipated that the case studies with disability agencies will bring out more detailed understanding about the ways in which employers in the sector are dealing with disability employment practices. From responses we did get however, it was clear that:

- Although the majority of the 45 disability organisations surveyed had action plans, strategies and recruitment policies in place, few employed people with disabilities in managerial, professional or technical roles.
- Many boards of disability organisations have little or no representation from people with disabilities
- The challenges of employing people with disabilities were mainly framed in terms of mentoring, training and other support requirements.

Barriers to employment are widely reported to be largely, although not solely, related to employer attitudes, lack of employer information and lack of employer experience in employing people with disabilities. The literature review revealed that, although there are some examples of good practice

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arising from the survey, employer behaviour in pockets of the disability sector is reflective of broader employer behaviour outside the sector:

- In 2003 people with disability had a 53% workforce participation rate overall compared to 81% of people without a disability. Those with profound disability had a participation rate of 15%.
- Employment of people with a disability by the Australian Public Service has actually decreased by 20% since 1997.
- In 1998, 3.6 million people in Australia had a disability (19% of the total population). 1.3 million were restricted in schooling or employment because of their disability.
- The severity of a person's disability affects both the level of labour force participation and the unemployment rate. 48% of people with a psychological disability reported being permanently unable to work, compared with 28% of those with a sensory disability..
- People with disabilities and low educational attainment have a much lower rate of employment than their peers without a disability.
- While evidence suggests that tertiary education and training does indeed improve access to employment, tertiary graduates with disabilities continue to experience lower levels of employment than their peers without disabilities.
- People with disabilities who are employed earn significantly less on average than those without a disability. In 2003, the median gross personal income per week of people of working age with a disability was \$255, compared to \$501 for those without a disability. Within this, the income of people with sensory and mobility disabilities is higher than that of people with psychiatric disabilities
- The unemployment rate of women with disabilities has increased in the last five years while that for women without disabilities has decreased significantly.
- Small organisations are the most likely to employ people with disabilities in both management and administration.
- Medium organisations are the most likely to employ people with disabilities in full time positions, casual positions and generalist positions but least likely to employ people with disabilities in administration.
- Large organisations are least likely to employ people with disabilities in full time, casual and generalist positions.
- Disability organisations in Australia service a significant group within the population. One in every 100 Australians uses a disability service organisation. 10 000 Victorians put 'Disability Worker' down as their occupation in the latest census.

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ADDE BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

The Department of Victorian Communities recently funded the development of a business plan for ADDE under the department's "Social Enterprise Program". ADDE recruited the services of 'Diversity at Work', a leading consulting agency to oversee and facilitate the process. This process is now underway and the completion of the first business plan draft is targeted for end of February, with final completion in early March.

'Diversity at Work', employed as research consultants five ADDE committee members. They have diverse backgrounds with first hand experience of disability. They bring to the table skills such as financial planning, marketing, research, broadcasting, IT, multimedia and Braille. The project team is using a powerful and transparent project management tool called 'Basecamp', developed by 37signals.com. This tool enables all participants to collaborate virtually over the Internet regardless of where they live and the type of disability.

The project team will be presenting a research report to ADDE outlining the viability, budgeting models and next steps in the marketing of all ADDE products and services. All the services are targeted towards provision of advocacy, training and consulting support for "Disability and Employment".

ADDE acknowledges the services of 'Diversity at Work' in not only facilitating the business plan, but also helping to hone the skills of the ADDE consultants to work independently and to take the business plan into the future.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

Traditionally important considerations in obtaining employment involve having sufficient human and cultural capital. The term 'capital' in this context refers to resources used to gain benefit, advantage, or profit. "Education, expertise, skills and abilities are a form of capital which resides in the bodies and minds of the individuals"; hence it is called human capital.

Writing an effective resume, interview skills, locating job opportunities and knowing office "culture" (e.g. attire, business etiquette) are examples of elements that make employment more likely and improve success at the job. These factors are what sociologists call cultural capital.

Having sufficient human and cultural capital applies to people of all abilities. Today, in a more connected society, researches are emphasising the importance of social capital. This is not a new concept, but in a world of virtual reality, instant SMS, 'Facebook' and 'Myspace', people are discovering more creative methods of finding work; and persons with disabilities have an advantage when it comes

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to using technology. These technologies can be used to acquire new skills, augment existing skills, to mask or overcome deficiencies and more importantly for social 'networking'. Research findings on the importance of social capital for the disabled is presented in a journal article by Blyden Potts, entitled 'Disability and Employment: Considering the Importance of Social Capital' (The Journal of Rehabilitation, Vol. 71, 2005).

The concept of social capital adds a positive spin to the societal view of disability. This view, as opposed to the traditional medicalised view, states that "...many of the problems disabled people face are caused not by their impairments, but rather because society is organised in a way that does not take their needs into account..." Ironically, it seems, the very factor that marginalises the disabled, the society, can be used to maximise employment opportunities.

Potts's article identifies several ways to maximise social capital. For instance, job contact networks can be built through participating in clubs, civic and religious groups, and other social activities. Past work and educational experience are rich sources. Keeping in touch periodically with old bosses, coworkers, teachers, professors, and fellow students. Potts also identifies volunteering as a way to meet people, but warns to avoid becoming trapped in only volunteer work for long durations. More importantly, Potts advises not to overlook anyone. "...People a person already knows but may not think of as job contacts are sometimes the ones who know of a job opportunity. Anyone may be a "weak" tie that could be a job reference..."

"For those with communication or mobility impairment, the internet can provide an alternative context for meeting some people". In addition, having an online resume and your 'Facebook' profile accessible as part of your resume, enables your potential employer to see your popularity or your 'connectedness index'. Connections are valued by most businesses and regarded important for establishing a client base.

A recent example that highlights the power of connectedness and networking is teenager Corey Worthington's, now world-renowned party. While his parents were away on holiday, Corey was able to invite, with short notice, 500 guests to a private party by online and instant messaging services. Within a very short time Corey got worldwide notoriety, 52,200 hits on 'Google' and job offers from commercial event and party promoters. Corey's exploits cost the taxpayer \$20,000, therefore I'm not endorsing this method of gaining employment. As Potts in his article has highlighted, there are several less costly options available for increasing ones social capital.

Contributed by Asitha Gurusinghe

Reference: Blyden Potts 2005. 'Disability and Employment: Considering the Importance of Social Capital' (The Journal of Rehabilitation, Vol. 71).

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EULOGY

Funeral of Beth Johnston was held at St Stephens church on Monday 15 January.

Beth who died of cancer was totally blind wrote an article, which appeared in our December 2006 edition of ADDE newsletter about her fight to gain accessible computer software while working for the Victorian Department of Human Services.

I first met Beth about eight years ago, at the World Blind Union conference at a workshop on how to increase employment opportunities for people with vision loss.

She told me that she had come out from the U.K, and that she had been offered a senior job in the Department of the Prime Minister. The same week as she received that job offer, Beth had also been offered the chance to migrate to Australia to live with her husband, who was an Australian citizen. What a choice?

Beth had a lot of good things to say about how the public service in the UK had implemented many pro-active policies and strategies to build up the percentage of people with disabilities working in Government. Some examples I can recall she mentioned included recruitment agencies being asked to seek people with disabilities to apply for positions, granting people with a disability an automatic interview, and not putting people with disabilities through group interviews.

The outcome of our meeting was that we decided to form a working group to try and get some of these changes happening in Australia. This working group was the seed, which a couple of years later led to the formation of ADDE.

Beth we hope your inspiration and determination to get better employment opportunities for people with disabilities will inspire us to carry on the fight, and achieve success.

Rest in peace.

Peter Rickards.

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Kokoda Kafe @ 1000 Steps (NOW OPEN)

A great destination for your program

Call by to enjoy a coffee/cold drink and something to eat, and then take a walk up the 1000 steps in the beautiful Ferntree Gully National Park. (Melways Map 74 H5).

We are there Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays 9am - 2pm, every weekend 8am – 4pm and most public holidays.

Ring Kathy (0413 311 636) Peter (0407 509 117)

Would love to see you soon.

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