

Good Morning Jenny

I have decided to send my presentation to you as I will deliver it on Thursday, all though I may digress occasionally this is the basis of my presentation.

I Thank you to the chairperson for giving me this opportunity to be of some assistance in reviewing the Disability Discrimination Act as it currently stands.

1) Introduction, my age at contracting Hydrocephalus (16)and some background on events that took place at that time of my life in terms of discrimination that were to set the pattern for my future. I basically overcompensated and was a high achiever, especially in my late 20's and 30's, until I again was struck down again with a malfunctioning ventricular peritoneal shunt, with infections and shunt blockages.

By the way I didn't tell you how I came to acquire hydrocephalus / Aqueduct Stenosis at that age. I was raised by a my Mother & a stepfather who took delight in hitting my around the head when the opportunity arose. I have been told medically this is probably and more than likely why my condition occurred. If this had happened in this day and age he would have be dealt with by the law.

2) Work / Career background, again a period where I was well and functioned at a high level and rose to Mid Level Management with Yellow Pages Australia, managing Branches around N.S.W. at various times and as my Salary package included a late model Motor Vehicle, and overseas Travel incentives each year based on performance as well as at that time a very generous salary, my life and I thought my future were assured.

3) It was during a business trip in 1988 to Coffs Harbour, that my problems started to occur, and whilst it seems funny now. At the end of the conference I got in my car thinking I was heading home, when in fact I was headed for Brisbane, feeling unwell I stopped and rang my wife and arrangements were made for someone to come and get me. It was 1988 and at that time my shunt failed and I spent the next 6 months straight in Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

I had lost my power of speech, I was immobilised and needed a wheelchair to move around, I had developed severe short term memory loss. I developed Parkinsonian symptoms (Tremor) and a condition called blethraspasm, which is constant uncontrollable blinking. Over the next 12 months I underwent a lot of rehabilitation but my former employer was forced to offer me early retirement at the age of 35. The next year I approached them to see if I might be able to return to work in some capacity and once they made me I sign a document that gave up 60% of my superannuation payout to the insurance company M.L.C. I commenced working again 2 1/2 years after I had stopped.

However 6 months later my shunt again failed and more hospitalisations and brain surgery followed.

I know at this point I should have given up, in fact my wife had decided to eventually move to the South Coast to "retire" which believe it or not I still didn't want to do. But even though I have now entered a different area where discrimination seems to occur,

now being age 51. I still know I have a lot to offer an employer, given the right opportunity to suit and fit around my disabilities.i.e part time or home based.

It was at this point that I approached Centrelink with a view to re entering the workforce to utilise my skills in a productive way. Whilst prior to this I had been judged by many people who I came into contact with, as being not quite normal because of the scars on my body, in particular my head . It was Centrelinks own disability officer who I sat in front of in 1994 attempting to gain meaningful employment where my skills could be utilised and to be rewarded accordingly, that I suffered the most alarming discrimination, when he referred me to a Job Network Member who dealt with Psychiatric disorders, knowing quite well that my condition was a neurological disability, he sent me to that organisation (PEP) based on the Central Coast. I was not only offended but confused, was this the only means of dealing with a client with a Neurological disorder ? After discussion with my wife we decided not to attend and to return to someone more Senior in Centrelink and explain the situation, which led to me being referred to a general job network member "First Contact" but they were unable to offer me anything considering my condition still required some medical assistance (which has now increased to 5 occasions per week however this is administered by my wife , as I deal with the scar tissue damage caused by the many Brain surgeries over the years.

Despite my difficulties I still feel that I can make some meaningful contribution to society , through paid employment, which if nothing else would have some impact on my self esteem, which has suffered as a result of the abovemnetioned experiences over the years, and I feel sure has had a similar impact on disabled people right around the country.

In summary I must say the worst experience among many is the feeling of being judged and categorised unfairly as being "finished" in terms of my working life when in fact I intellectually knew & know different.

I thank you for your time this afternoon and hope that what I have had to say may assist others who will find themselves in a similar position to me in the years ahead. And hopefully they will not find themselves being judged because they have a neurological condition, the same or similar to mine of which there are many not the least of which are those caused by Motor Vehicle Accidents, which can leave the victim of a head injury dealing with very similar problems as those experienced by me.

Mark O'Dwyer (J.P)