27.02.04

Dear Julie,

Thank you for your kindness and support during my attendance at the Productivity Commission Hearing on the 21.2.04 in Sydney.

For me it was a worthwhile experience, even though there was an upsetting incident regarding derogatory comments towards deaf people made by one of the participants. However I am confident that procedures will be put in place to prevent that ever happening again.

I am really pleased I made the effort to attend the Hearing in Sydney. It gave me the opportunity to answer questions about my submission and to explain about some of the other discrimination issues I face on a regular basis.

It was disappointing that the Audio Loop did not work. However we mere mortals do not have any control over electronic interference.

I would like to clarify something about Audio Loops that I may not have explained fully at the time.

Some people with a hearing loss are able to use the Infra-Red Loop Systems. However there are many more people who access information via the Audio Loop System. The Audio Loop System works very well in most situations.

It should not be assumed that one system suits all. It is also important for me to inquire as to which system is in place whenever I am to attend conferences, cinemas etc.

I would also like to add some more information about the Council that I had dealings with in my discrimination claim.

A counter loop had been installed in the reception area years ago. On two separate occasions last year I tried to access it but the staff did not know anything about it, even to the point of not knowing how to switch it on. When it was eventually switched on, it was discovered it did not work. I have been assured that a new counter loop will be installed when the counter is redesigned to accommodate people in wheel chairs. I volunteered to talk to the staff about hearing loss issues and the counter loop but that offer has never been taken up.

I think this is an example of how information programs are desperately needed on a broad scale about the Disability Discrimination Act.

I would also like to try and explain a bit more about why I felt that it wasn't a level playing field in the process of the discrimination claim I made against the Council with the help of HREOC.

Socially.
Society in general tends to undervalue people with a disability. The common thought is that there is something 'wrong' with them. This attitude means that most people who are disadvantaged have no confidence in themselves and are unlikely to speak up about discrimination and/or access issues. I don't see myself as disabled but I am disadvantaged because I cannot access information in the same way as hearing people do, but there is nothing 'wrong' with me.

Financially
Disabled people are always disadvantaged financially because in most cases they need special items of equipment that are not free. In my case I have had to pay for a special phone, an expensive VCR that has the ability to tape the captions on a teletext television. A receiver to access the Audio Loop Systems.

In regard to my discrimination claim, the Council had all the facilities on hand to get their case together. No employee of the Council had to pay for anything personally, all the council's expenses come out of the government purse.

I am on a pension and had to fund my discrimination claim myself, which included the expenses involved in getting the information I needed and driving myself to the conciliation meeting.

Emotionally.
I was one person against a government body. I had to have the confidence to take on the Council and endure the emotional and mental strain that goes with taking such action. To me the Council's attitude and actions was an obvious case of discrimination. Why did I have to go through such an ordeal to achieve my basic human right? Equal Access! In my case I still think notification from HREOC to the Council should have been enough to have the Council comply with the DDA.

If possible I would like this document to be added to my original submission.

Yours faithfully

Yvonne Batterham