

# **An Australian Access to Employment Scheme:**

## **Removing the Employment Discrimination That Exists for Profoundly Disabled Australians**



### **Contact Person Details**

Peter Darch (BPsych)

# **Executive Summary**

## **The Problem**

- The current disability employment schemes in place in Australia discriminate against profoundly disabled people at both state and federal level by refusing to provide access to full-time employment
- support work hours to allow access to employment for profoundly disabled Australians are currently not provided at state level, and inadequately provided at Federal level
- current employment schemes discriminate between disability categories
- physical activity restriction is responsible for the unemployment of 73% of people with disabilities in Australia
- the provision of support workers to assist with physical, communication or sensory assistance for employment of profoundly disabled people would provide employment opportunities for 722,000 profoundly disabled individuals in Australia

## **The Solution — The Australian Access to Employment Scheme**

- The scheme is based on The Access to Work UK scheme which has cost effectively reduced barriers to employment for profoundly disabled people by allowing allocation of support workers to help with 100% of the restricted tasks in the workplace
- the Disability Services Commission Combined Application Process and use of an Independent Priority Assessment Panel is to be used to allocate funding, with approval determined upon approving a Collaborative Access Plan, developed between the Disability Employment Network Provider, the Employer and the Employee.
- Funding should favour Collaborative Access Plans with a) employees who have used their initiative to make progress towards a career e.g. training and education, b) employers who have implemented strategies to meet the needs of their disabled employee e.g. technology provision and work from home allowance, and c) Disability

Employment Network Providers who have utilised all existing employment support sources

- funding will then be provided to The Disability Employment Network to manage the administration of the support workers as per the Collaborative Access Plan
- recurrence of funding will be approved annually depending on the successful completion of the outcomes addressed in the Collaborative Access Plan

### **Benefits of the Australian Access to Employment Scheme**

- the general model, based on the Access to Work UK scheme, has been proven to generate \$.50 to every dollar spent for the Government, making it cost-effective
- the scheme would provide access to employment for up to 722,000 unemployed people with profound disabilities
- the scheme would reduce the current employment inequality between a) profoundly disabled and disabled people, and b) disabled and not disabled people
- the approval process would reduce the current inequality of funding between disability categories and be a true reflection of the wider context in which funding is sought, therefore rewarding Employers, Employees and Disability Employment Network Providers for their employment outcomes
- the scheme would significantly improve the disgraceful mental health problems facing people with disabilities by allowing fulfilment of the most valued social role

## ***My Story (Peter Darch)***



Since 2002 I have been a high-level quadriplegic with only limited movement of my left arm. I am dependent upon others for almost all physical activities and am permanently reliant on an electric wheelchair for my mobility. However, my cognitive abilities and communication skills are intact.

I just finished a psychology degree and have worked part-time as a youth officer at the Billy Dower Youth Centre since 2006 thanks to the provision of a support worker by forest personnel, a Disability Employment Network provider. The support worker has helped me by performing under my direction the physical tasks required of my position, enabling me the ability to successfully use my education and interpersonal skills.

My many achievements have been recognized through being a finalist in the Western Australian Youth Awards three times, in which I won a highly commended award in 2009. I was also deemed the Southwest Community Services Worker of the year under the age of 35 for inspiration in 2009.

The programs I have developed and facilitated have attracted funding in excess of \$50,000 from the Department of Youth, the Department of Crime Prevention, the Department of the Attorney General and the private sector, with The Young Men's program a finalist in the Western Australian Community Services Industry Awards for best practice in 2009.

I recently completed a BPsych (4 year) psychology degree at Murdoch University and plan to expand my already successful community development career by working full time. The Billy Dower Youth Centre and City of Mandurah has encouraged me to apply for full-time positions and will continue to support me to do so.

Six months worth of reviewing funding options has led to the discovery that there is no current funding scheme at Federal or State level in Australia to provide support workers for my ongoing employment, and that my previous support worker was funded directly by forest personnel. Such direct funding is not sustainable, and after two years has been withdrawn as of June 30, 2009. *Rather than being able to extend upon my career and education through full-time employment, **I am going to be unemployed indefinitely should there not be an initiative made for people with disabilities like myself to have funded support worker to assist with physical needs necessary for us to work.***

## **Background**

The current state funded "Alternatives to Employment" funding scheme (Disability Services Commission) for people with disabilities in Western Australia and the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is discriminating against individuals with profound disability like myself attempting to enter the workforce.

At present, there is not a sufficient scheme for the provision of support workers for individuals with profound disabilities to access and maintain full time *open employment* through the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The Workplace-Based Assistance Scheme, Under Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Guidelines is only able to fund up to 10 hours per week of support work assistance. There is however funding available for support workers to provide assistance for individuals with profound disabilities to access *alternative* social and recreational activities under the Western Australian Disability Services Commissions Alternatives to Employment funding scheme. This alternative to employment funding *cannot* be used for employment purposes. Therefore, no scheme exists at Federal or State level to fund support workers for full-time open employment, making it impossible for many people with profound disabilities to be employed.

Refusal to allow access to employment on the grounds of profound disability is discrimination, and this discrimination exists because of the problematic assumption by government departments that profoundly disabled people are realistically unable to work. I am proof to the contrary of this assumption. This false assumption identifies a discriminatory trend of State and Federal government initiatives to inadvertently create barriers to employment for profoundly disabled people. The proposed *Access to Employment* scheme, borrowed from the Access to Work scheme in the UK, would enable people with more profound disabilities to access support workers to assist them in the workplace, enabling for them full scale *open employment*.

**Note:** *open employment refers to the individual with the disability being free to choose employers and careers based on their educational, personal and physical strengths*

The scheme is financially viable as it will:

- Reduce pension costs
- Meet personal-care requirements which would otherwise be funded elsewhere
- Reduce age pensions – working individuals contribute to superannuation funds
- Increase career paths and ability for individuals with a disability to earn and in turn contribute to private health insurance
- Reduce Medicare costs incurred by people with disabilities
- Increase tax contributions - from both the individual with a disability and support worker; and
- Increase disposable income for people with disabilities to stimulate the economy

From a social point of view, the proposed Access to Employment scheme would:

- Address the appalling mental and physical health conditions of people with disabilities
- Reinforce and motivate individuals with a disability to achieve their goals
- Reduce discriminatory employment attitudes and create more positive community perspectives and employer attitudes than those which currently exist in Australia.
- Maintain and enhance independence through skill development and competency
- Develop and maintain valued social roles
- Facilitate exposure to positive experiences
- Improve participation and inclusion in the local community; and
- Develop natural support networks and relationships.

In doing so, the proposed Access to Employment scheme provides a sustainable solution for the Rudd Governments National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy, which aims to "outline how policy and programs across portfolios and state, territory and Commonwealth governments can work together to help people with disability and mental illness gain and retain work" (NMHDES Terms of Reference, 2008). I ask that joint legislation be developed to adopt the proposed Access to Employment Scheme for all Australians with profound disabilities, creating equal employment opportunities nationwide and improving the lives of all people with disabilities and their families.

## **Current Funding Schemes**

Current funding schemes relative to the unemployment of people with disabilities exist at a state level (Alternatives to Employment Scheme, Disability Services Commission) and federal level (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations). The purpose of each scheme is significantly different. Furthermore, the process of allocating funding under the Alternative to Employment scheme (Combined Application Process) is drastically different to that of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (Job Capacity Assessment, Disability Pre-Employment Instrument). Each has significant limitations for the employment of profoundly disabled people.

### **Western Australia — Disability Services Commission**

#### ***The Combined Application Process***

The Combined Application Process (CAP) is the method used by the Disability Services Commission's Service Purchasing and Development Directorate (SPD) to allocate recurrent funding to people with disabilities. The types of funding available through CAP are:

- Accommodation Support Funding (ASF);
- Intensive Family Support Funding (IFS); and
- *Alternatives to Employment (Adults) Funding (ATE).*

The Combined Application Process provides the opportunity for a blended solution involving these different funding initiatives. It also provides one single application point to make it easier for applicants and those assisting them.

An Independent Priority Assessment Panel assesses all CAP applications. The Panel includes at least three non-DSC people (a person with a disability, family member of a person with a disability, a representative of a disability advocacy organisation, a representative of a service provider organisation) and one senior officer of the Commission. The Panel is currently chaired by a person independent of the Commission and who is currently the

Professor of the Centre for Social Research at Edith Cowan University. The Panel reports funding recommendations to the Director General of the Commission for approval, and policy issues to the Individual Funding Management Committee for resolution.

### *Alternatives to Employment Funding*

Alternatives to Employment Funding is applicable to both Alternatives to Employment [Post School Options Program] and the Alternatives to Employment [Adult] Program. It provides opportunities for school leavers and adults with severe or profound disabilities to participate in activities as an *alternative* to employment. To do so, it funds the allocation of support workers for the individual in need. Programs will be developed based on the needs and goals of individuals.

The main purpose of Alternatives to Employment Funding therefore, is to seek to ensure that people with disabilities who *require an alternative* to paid employment have access to a range of opportunities during work hours that incorporate:

1. skills development;
2. valued social roles for the person with a disability;
3. the provision of a positive experience for the person with a disability; and
4. choice of support provider.

Hours vary depending on the individual's skill level and support needs. For example an individual with very high support needs could receive a minimum of 15 hours of support per week. These hours are dependent on whether programs include individualised (1:1) or group activities. Funding is ongoing and tied to the individual until the individual no longer requires the support. There is no need to re-apply annually.

The Alternatives to Employment [Post School Options] Program provides support to school leavers with disabilities:

- with high support needs;
- with no option of returning to school;

- who cannot realistically pursue full-time employment (that is, 20 or more hours a week of employment);
- who apply for funds within two years of leaving school; and
- Who are not undertaking full-time study or full time training?

The Alternatives to Employment [Adults] Program provides support to adults:

- with significant disabilities and high support needs;
- who cannot realistically pursue full-time employment (defined as 20 or more hours a week of employment);
- who are not undertaking full-time study or full-time training;
- whose carer(s) will benefit from the respite effect of the services; and
- who have not been able to access the Post School Options program due to age or late onset of a disability. (Note that in this context, a late onset of disability refers to an onset under the age of 60.)

*Alternatives to Employment Funding* is discontinued in the following situations.

- The individual gains full-time employment (that is, 20 or more hours of employment).
- The individual undertakes full-time study or full-time training.
- Funding is no longer required due to changes in the individual's circumstances.
- The individual no longer chooses to use Alternatives to Employment funding.

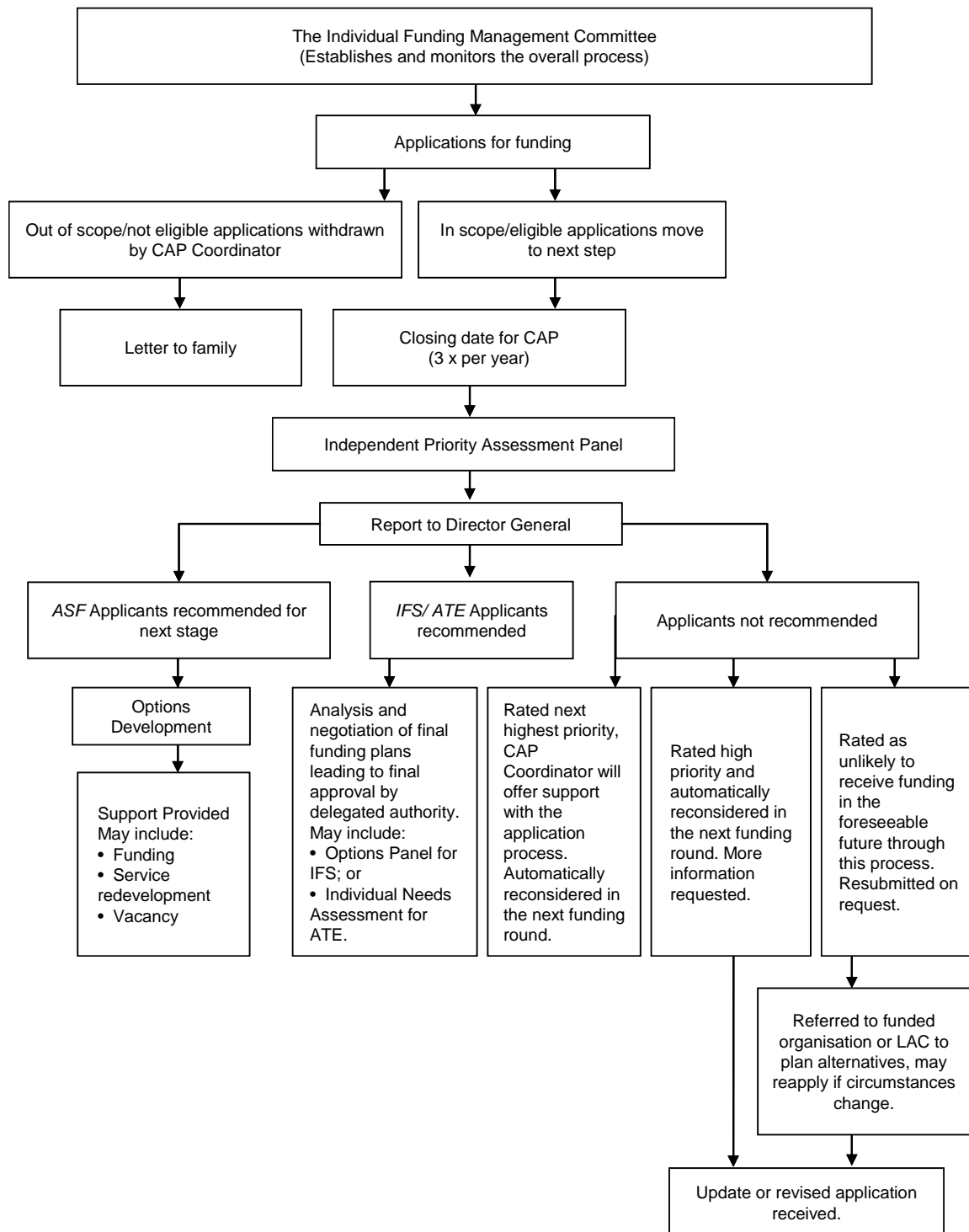
### *Alternative to Employment Scheme Limitations*

The purpose of the Alternatives to Employment scheme to provide an alternative to working reduces the capacity of people with profound disabilities to reach employment by assuming they are realistically unemployable. Rather than rewarding the actions of people with disabilities to strive for employment, it produces barriers by refusing funding for those looking to be or currently employed, and in fact rewards individuals for unemployment. Such a scheme would not be tolerated for any other demographic in Australia, as is evident by the current work for the dole schemes and changes to youth allowance. Therefore, why

is it acceptable to promote unemployment and, more importantly, prevent access to employment because of profound disability.

A further limitation of alternative to employment funding is the assessment of capacity to realistically pursue full-time employment. The provision of funding for employment purposes would mean that only a very minor number of Australians could be deemed realistically unable to pursue employment. However, at present, if an individual requires a support worker to assist with employment duties they are deemed unemployable. Ridiculously, this then makes them eligible to receive a support worker to provide them access to alternatives to employment funding, which would be withdrawn should they use it for employment. It is clear that the Alternatives to Employment funding scheme is actually responsible for its ability to deem individuals realistically unable to pursue full-time employment by forfeiting their right to employment.

Finally, by preventing the use of alternatives to employment funding for employment it reduces the capability of the scheme to reach its goals. It is obvious that employment would be more able to increase skills for a person with a disability. These may be social skills brought about by interacting in the workplace or task related educational skills such as problem-solving brought about by being challenged in the workplace to do a particular task. It is also obvious that employment is a strongly valued social role, and therefore by simply allowing the individual to be employed would undoubtedly allow the individual to meet a valued social role. Thirdly, being employed provides a sense of responsibility and ability for the individual by allowing them to meet social and occupational roles, therefore meeting personal needs and achieving related satisfactions. Such experiences can only be deemed positive and are more substantially achieved by enabling employment than by creating alternatives to it.



## *Alternative to Employment Funding and Me*

When I investigated this funding source as a solution to my imminent unemployment I was told I was not eligible. The access criteria of this funding dismissed my skills and education and assumed I was realistically not able to work. However, this is obviously not the case. My previous work history illustrates the error of judgement made in the creation of such alternative to employment funding. I am able to get a support worker during work hours under this scheme if I choose not to work, and it is a fact that if a support worker was able to assist me with my employment (i.e. removing unemployment as an eligibility criteria) it would enable me to retain my job as well as find full-time employment. I could then continue to be a valuable contributor to the community in which I live and meet the existing rules of the scheme. I feel like I am expected to fail and do nothing, and it is made easier for me to simply give up than it is to enter the workforce and achieve a healthy, prosperous life for myself and my family.

## The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Processes

### *Job Capacity Assessment*

The first step for a person with a disability getting supported in the workplace is for them to get referred for a Job Capacity Assessment. Job Capacity Assessors refer people with disabilities and other barriers to work to appropriate employment and support services, and their reports are used for Centrelink decisions about capacity to work. A Job Capacity Assessment is an appointment with a qualified Job Capacity Assessor who assesses your capacity to work, based on the information you provide during the appointment and other relevant information, such as doctors' reports. Job Capacity Assessors are allied health professionals, such as rehabilitation counsellors, psychologists and physiotherapists. Wherever possible, you will be referred to services that can help you find and retain work.

People with disabilities are then referred by the job capacity assessment organisation to a disability employment network if they are deemed to:

- have a permanent (or likely to be permanent) disability and
- have a reduced capacity for communication, learning or mobility and
- require support for more than six months after placement in employment

In addition to these criteria, a job seeker will be referred to DEN if they require specialist assistance to build capacity in order to share the financial, social and personal benefits that employment offers.

### *Disability Employment Networks*

The Disability Employment Network is a national network of community and private organisations funded by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations that provide help and support to employers of people with disability. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations monitors the way employment services are delivered and all Australian Government employment service providers must meet the standards of service and behaviour set out in the Australian Government employment service providers Code of Practice and Service Guarantees.

Case Based Funding provides funding to service outlets on the basis of each individual job seeker/worker's disability-related employment support requirements. There are two assessment and classification processes that address the job seeker/worker's support needs at different stages:

- Employment Assistance – the Disability Pre-employment Instrument, (DPI) is used to determine the level of funding while the job seeker is finding a job and reaching an employment outcome.
- Employment Maintenance – the Disability Maintenance Instrument, (DMI) is used to determine the level of funding while the worker is supported to maintain employment beyond the 26 weeks employment outcome.

The total score produced for a DPI or DMI assessment translates to one of four funding levels. A range of scores fit within each level and so each level represents a range of support

needs. The lowest scores translate to the lowest funding level i.e. Level 1. Higher scores are distributed along the continuum to the highest scores at Level 4. The tools are not intended to equate to the exact cost of assisting job seekers/workers. Funding can be used on the needs of each job seeker/worker so long as it complies with the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations guidelines. Funding does not have to be acquitted against individual job seekers/workers. The service provider can move funding between job seekers/workers to suit changing needs and to balance the 'overs and unders' that occur.

The Disability Employment Network Provider is then able to apply for the cost of workplace modifications necessary in the workplace from the Workplace Modifications Scheme, with the cost of workplace-based assistance provided relative to the level obtained by the DPI and DMI.

A limited amount of workplace-based assistance support can be offered under the Workplace-Based Assistance Scheme. This amount of one-on-one support worker hours able to be delivered by The Disability Employment Network Provider is also relative to the level obtained by the DPI and DMI. Under these guidelines, a maximum of 16 hours of support work can be funded for level 4 clients. Support workers must have a level 3 TAFE qualification. Funds are managed by the Disability Employment Network responsible for the management of the person with the disability.

### *Workplace Modifications Program*

The Workplace Modifications Scheme pays for the costs involved in modifying the workplace or purchasing special or adaptive equipment for eligible employees with disability. It is also available to existing employees if they have a change in duties, career progression, change in disability or a new modification becomes available that would increase their productivity.

All employers of people with disability are potentially eligible for provision of workplace modifications. In order to qualify for assistance an employer must employ a person with

disability for at least eight hours a week in a job that is expected to last for at least three months. In addition, the employee will:

- have an ongoing disability that has lasted, or is likely to last, for two years or more
- have a disability that results in a limitation, restriction or impairment affecting their everyday activities that requires a work-related adjustment
- be an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- be employed under a legal industrial arrangement that complies with the minimum standards established by federal, state or territory law.

Workplace modifications are directed toward improving the tenure, conditions of employment, capacity and opportunities of people with disability for work. Assistance must be clearly directed to the specific needs of the worker with disability. The Workplace-Based Modifications scheme can help workers with disability by contributing to the cost of lease, hire, purchase, manufacture, establishment and initial training with the special or adaptive equipment that enables a worker to perform at his/her full potential and/or maximise his/her income, which would not normally be provided by the employer. Assistance is approved where funds are available.

In furthering the aims of the WMS, applicants must in applying describe how the requested Assistance will:

- reduce an existing barrier to employment;
- addresses an individual Worker's identified need with employment;
- enhances employment conditions;
- complement employment and training strategies that have been considered or may be implemented;
- improve the Worker's productivity in the proposed position.

If such demands are over \$25,000, a workplace assessment is to be carried out to help with describing how the assistance will address these issues.

## The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace

### Relations Processes

#### Limitations

The first limitation is the multiple levels of referral needed to access a Disability Employment Network Provider. The process relies on referral, and without a referral it is not possible for an individual with a disability to receive services. Multiple referrals and assessments makes the task of receiving support to gain employment more difficult for people with profound disabilities due to the variety of different locations they are required to visit. This makes it harder rather than easier to find work and support on the basis of profound disability.

Secondly, the DPI and DMI discriminate against physical disability by giving greater weight and in turn more funding for support to individuals with multiple disabilities. These instruments falsely conclude that individuals with multiple disabilities are less able to perform work-related tasks and in turn require more funding to support them. For example, an individual with a profound activity restriction because of a physical disability but with perfect intellectual and cognitive abilities may not be able to perform any physical tasks whatsoever, yet would be deemed less disabled and receive less funding because of their cognitive abilities. This creates a barrier to employment because the person with a physical disability, whilst having perfect cognitive ability, may not be able to perform as many tasks as a person with multiple disabilities although would receive less funding for support.

Finally, the Workplace-Based Assistance Scheme does not provide enough hours for support work assistance. Providing the maximum 16 hours per week restricts the amount of work an individual can attend to, and as a result the more profoundly disabled individuals who require a greater percentage of assistance are able to perform less work. This reduces the ability of these individuals to progress in their career, making it difficult or impossible to maintain employment by creating limited workloads, a task made even more difficult by the discrimination between disabilities that exists using the current DPI and DMI levels.

## *The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Processes and Me*

After a period of work placement necessary to fulfil University requirements, using my personal support carers I was asked if I would like a part-time position at the youth centre. I accepted it, and then contacted the local Disability Employment Network seeking support in the workplace. I was told I could not access the services unless I was referred by CentreLink to a Job Capacity Assessment organisation, who could then refer me to my Disability Employment Network Provider. This process was long and painstaking and I feel made the assumption I was unable to perform such tasks on my own accord. Because of my impeccable cognitive abilities and communication skills my DPI score was level 2, however my needs at work were profound. This same score was obtained for my DMI. The amount of funding necessary to support my physical disability was therefore insufficient. Given the importance of my position and the outcomes I had already achieved, this provider allocated me a support worker for more hours than could be funded at my level. However, upon completion of my university I explored the possibility of full-time employment and it became obvious that because of the funding restrictions and lack of support work funding for full-time employment, my Disability Employment Network provider was going to be unable to assist me over my eligible 5 hours per month as per the DMI. I was told that forest personnel could no longer directly pay for a support worker as it is a not-for-profit organisation, and that unfortunately no funding scheme existed for my eligibility level to provide the necessary hours of support worker assistance. As a result, I will be restricted in my ability to perform the tasks required of my job indefinitely as of the next financial year. As such, I will be unemployed.

### **Access to work UK - A Model of Best Practice**

The UK Access to Work scheme introduced in June 1994 offers help to people with a disability or health condition that affects the way they do their work. The scheme provides vital support to both employers and disabled employees. Currently, following application to the scheme and assessment, within strict guidelines, all approved costs for additional

support needed by eligible disabled employees are met by AtW. These might include support workers, fares to work and communicator support. Other requests for AtW, usually for equipment and alterations to premises, are addressed by a cost sharing arrangement between AtW and the employer. AtW commits to funding up to 100% of support worker or other costs for eligible applicants.

To be eligible for access to work funding, the person must be:

- in a paid job
- unemployed and about to start a job
- unemployed and about to start a Work Trial: or
- self-employed

If a person is likely to be eligible for Access to Work, they will be sent an application form to fill in and send back. When the completed form has arrived back, an Access to Work adviser will contact the person. The adviser will speak to the individual and the employer to reach a collaborative decision about the best support for all parties. In most cases, this can be done over the telephone, but a visit can be arranged if necessary. Individual jobseekers, employers or Disability Employment Network agencies are all able to apply on behalf of the individual with a disability to Access to Work, with all applications going to the Access to Work centres situated in the UK.

Sometimes specialist advice may be needed, which the Access to Work adviser will help arrange. For example, the adviser may arrange for a specialist organisation to complete an assessment and recommend appropriate support. In this case, a confidential written report will be sent to the Access to Work adviser, who will use this information to help them decide on the right level of support necessary to allow the person with a disability to access and maintain their chosen career.

The Access to Work Plan agreed-upon is then submitted to the Job Centre to be approved or disapproved by a panel of Independent Priority Assessors.

Following approval of an Access to Work grant, funds are directed to the Disability Employment Network or directly to the employer. For smaller grants, employers may be reimbursed. The disability employment Network or employer are then responsible for ensuring that funds are distributed as per the agreed Access to Work plan between the employer, the individual with the disability and the Access to Work adviser.

After between one and three years, each individual is reviewed and a decision made as to whether funding will continue.

The individuals access to work plan can be adjusted and more or less support provided according to changes in workplace circumstances at any time.

## **Access to Employment Australia - Addressing a Community Need**

### *Employment Inequality*

The unemployment rate for all Australians of working age for April 2009 was 5.3% (Labour Force Australia, 2009). The overall unemployment rate for the 3.2 million Australians with a disability however is around 45%, with a ludicrous unemployment rate of 95% for 722,000 individuals with a profound core activity restriction because of their disability (Yearbook Australia, 2006). However, approximately half of all unemployed people who indicate that they would like to work have a disability (Access to Work for Disabled People, 2004). This demonstrates a markedly higher motivation of the 1.6 million unemployed Australian people with disabilities to want to enter the workforce than Australians without disabilities.

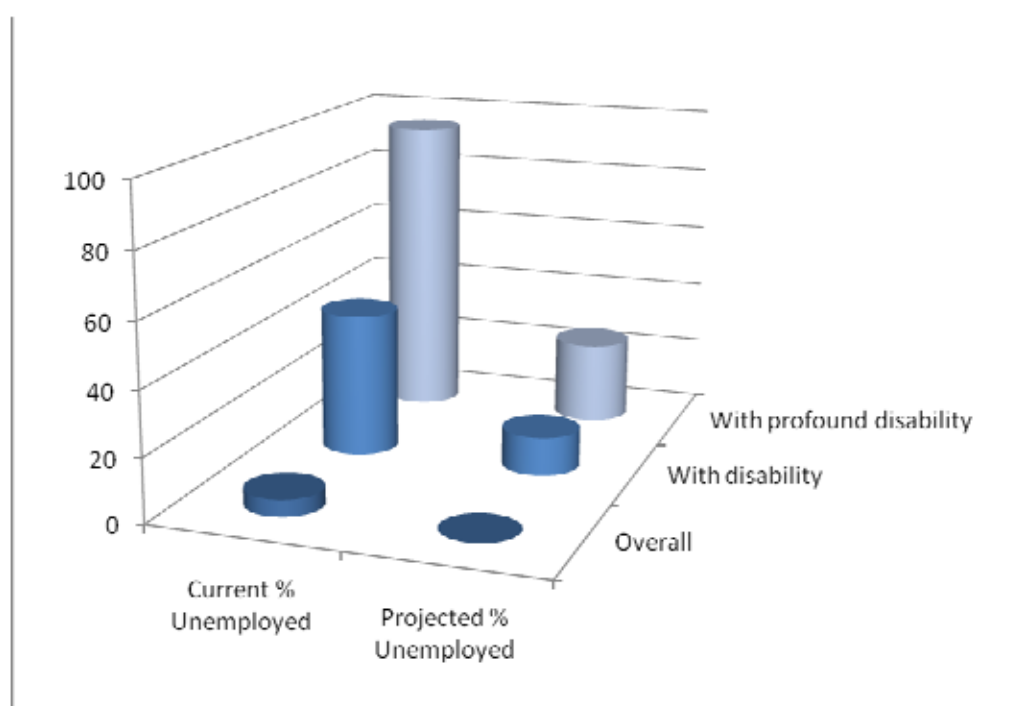
It has been found that motivation to work results in greater job performance (Diversity at Work, 2009) and it is evident that the 1.6 million person labour force of people with a disability in Australia would make a more productive contribution to the workforce than other less motivated Australians if given the opportunity.

The most significant explanation for this inequality is physical handicap. Physical handicap accounts for 73% of activity restriction responsible for inability to be employed (Turner and Turner, 2004). Provision of support workers to help perform the physical activities necessary for the person with a profound disability to utilise the educational and personal skills required in their choice of workplace could provide employment for this 73% of disabled people. Such assistance, under the instruction of the person with a disability, may include (to name but a few):

- retrieving papers from printers
- hand writing documents
- driving to and from necessary locations required of the job
- communication
- turning on computers
- opening doors
- administrative and financial duties such as filing of invoices
- job-related shopping
- handling money
- turning pages of documents
- retrieving objects from others, and
- entering codes, security numbers or using swipe cards to access and secure the place of employment

By rectifying these physical barriers to employment with the proposed Access to Employment scheme, it could provide employment for 1,168,000 unemployed Australian people with disabilities interested in working. More importantly, it could also reduce by 73% the more severe discrimination of those 95% of unemployed people with disabilities with a profound physical activity restriction and enable them the opportunity to become employed. This would result in far greater equality between unemployed Australians with and without a disability, as well as the margin between profoundly disabled and disabled individuals.

**Figure 1: Current and Projected Differences in the Level of Unemployment for the Overall, Disabled, and Profoundly Disabled Australian Populations Given the Implementation of Access to Employment Support Workers**



### *Mental Health Inequality*

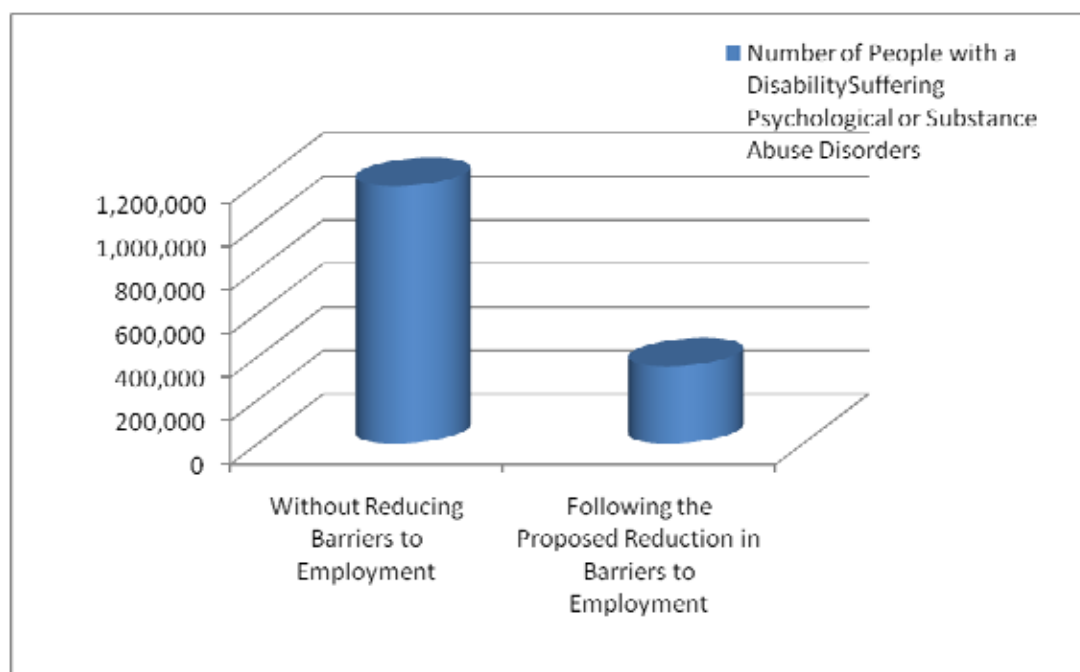
The prevalence of mental health problems amongst people with disabilities is appalling. Research indicates that 37% of people with a confirmed disability will suffer from a psychological or substance abuse disorder, which is twice that of the nondisabled population (Turner, Taylor and Lloyd, 2006). In Australia, this means 1,184,000 people with disabilities having a psychological or substance abuse disorder.

Equally as disturbing is that psychological and substance abuse disorders are 45% more likely to persist or re-occur amongst people with disabilities (Turner and Turner, 2004; Turner, Taylor and Lloyd, 2006). The prevalence of any depressive disorder for disabled men (5.68%) and women (8.39%) is five times higher than that of nondisabled men and women. The prevalence of any anxiety disorder for disabled men (9.40%) and disabled women (9.27%) is 10 times higher than that of nondisabled men and women (Turner and Turner, 2004). Such inequality is socially and ethically unacceptable.

When put in the context of employment, mental health inequality for people with disabilities can be better understood. The evidence that people with a disability are at

increased risk for depression is considered associated with the fact that disability causes a diminished capacity to perform social and occupational roles and, therefore, to meet personal needs and achieve related satisfactions (Turner and Turner, 2004: Turner, Taylor and Lloyd, 2006). This suggests that the widespread unemployment may substantially explain the unsatisfactory mental health problems of people with disabilities. Studies have been conducted which indicate that unemployment is a more significant indicator to prescribing psychological or substance abuse disorders than disability. Unemployment is found to explain 70% of increased levels of mental health distress among people with disabilities, with disability only explaining 30% (Turner and Turner, 2004). Therefore, by allowing employment for people with disabilities it is theoretically possible to reduce mental health problems amongst this population by 70%. This means reducing mental health distress for 828,800 Australian people. By doing so, the inequality between nondisabled and disabled mental health can be reduced and, most importantly, the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families can be improved dramatically.

**Figure 2: The Theoretically Supported Reduction of Psychological or Substance Abuse Disorders Possible by Implementing Access to Employment Funding and Reaching Employment Capacity for Disabled Australians**



## *Financial Viability*

The Commonwealth outlays in excess of \$6 billion per annum to provide income support for people with disabilities and the people who care for them. The main types of income support provided by the Commonwealth for people with disabilities and their carers are given in the following table.

<b>Income Support Payment</b>	<b>Funding 2000–01</b>
Disability Support Pension	\$5 849m
Wife Pension	\$446m
Carer Payment	\$481m
Carer Allowance (adult and child)	\$533m
Sickness Allowance	\$95m
Mobility Allowance	\$59m

Department of Family and Community Services, *Annual Report*, 2000–01.

The Commonwealth also provides approximately \$7 million per annum to provide various incentives to employers to employ people with disabilities and approximately a further \$279 million is provided for employment assistance and other services.

Access to Employment schemes like that of Access to Work UK have been shown to raise revenue for the government by reducing welfare costs and increasing taxable income for the person with a disability and support worker, as well as reducing reliance on other personal support services (Access to Work For Disabled People, 2004). The proposed scheme to increase access to employment for individuals with profound disabilities by providing support workers would potentially provide employment for all profoundly disabled people, reducing the number of disabled people requiring the Disability Support Pension by 722000. Comparison of this reduced expenditure with expenditure for a paid support worker at \$18 per hour for 100% of the time the disabled person is at work is at worst equal.

Considering the tax contribution of the person with a disability and support worker and the reduction in pension, direct government expenditure is around \$4680 more expensive for each profoundly disabled individual per year when providing a support worker for every hour worked during part-time employment (19 hours each week, based on Australian average income). Most significantly, provision of a support worker for every hour worked for an individual with a disability to work full-time is only \$577 more expensive each year (38 hours each week, based on Australian average income). Therefore, it would only cost \$12 more each week for 100% support worker assistance to provide full-time open employment for a person with a profound disability.

**Table 1: Maximum Government Expenditure To Provide Support Workers 100% Of the Time An Individual At Work**

Individuals Employment Situation	Disabled Individual Amount of Tax Paid	Support Worker Amount of Tax Paid	Disability Support Pension Expenditure	Support Worker Expenditure	Total Government Expenditure
<b>Unemployed</b>	\$0	\$0	\$12,378	\$0	\$12,370
<b>Part-time - \$24,450 p/y</b>	\$5,408	\$3484	\$7,191	\$18,720	\$17,020
<b>Full-time - \$49,000 p/y</b>	\$13,572	\$9,152	\$0	\$35,568	\$12,844

In the UK, 84% of people with a disability are able to access and maintain employment with access to work funding of less than \$500. This would equate to \$1197 of revenue being raised each year for individuals receiving \$500 support to work part-time and an amazing \$22,724 of revenue being raised each year for individuals receiving \$500 support to work full-time.

**Table 2: Average Government Revenue Raised For The 84% of People with a Disability Who Can Reach Employment with \$500 or Less Access to Work Funding**

Individuals Employment Situation	Disabled Individual Amount of Tax Paid	Support Worker Amount of Tax Paid	Disability Support Pension Expenditure	Support Worker Expenditure	Total Government Expenditure
<b>Unemployed</b>	\$0	\$0	\$12,378	\$0	\$12,370
<b>Part-time - \$24,450 p/y</b>	\$5,408	\$3484	\$7,191	\$500	<b>\$-1197</b>
<b>Full-time - \$49,000 p/y</b>	\$13,572	\$9,152	\$0	\$500	<b>\$-22,724</b>

The amount of revenue raised by the 84% of disabled people requiring less than \$500 funding to maintain full-time employment is significantly greater than the amount of expenditure required to fund support workers for full-time open employment for profoundly disabled individuals. Therefore, an access to employment scheme in Australia would be able to self fund itself due to the revenue raised by the employment of people with disabilities.

Such direct expenditure does not take into account the financial advantages which cannot be measured directly, such as:

- meeting personal-care requirements which would otherwise be funded elsewhere
- reducing age pensions – working individuals contribute to superannuation funds
- increasing career paths and ability for individuals with a disability to earn and in turn contribute to private health insurance
- reducing Medicare costs incurred by people with disabilities, and
- Increase disposable income for people with disabilities to stimulate the economy
- These things considered, it is accurate to conclude that an Access to Employment scheme is financially viable and sustainable. It is cost effective to provide support workers to enable profoundly disabled people to access full-scale open employment under this scheme.

## **The Proposal - Access to Employment Australia**

The purpose of the Australian Access to Employment Scheme is to provide support for up to 100% of the needs for people with a profound disability or health condition that limits their ability to access full-time open employment. The scheme provides vital support to both employers and disabled employees.

Types of support funded might include:

- support workers,
- fares to work, and
- communicator support

Requests for equipment and alterations to premises will continue to be addressed by The Workplace Modifications Scheme.

### *Allocation of Funds*

Funds should a) be allocated using the Combined Application Process or equivalent, b) recognize collaborative creation of an access plan with input from employers, employees and the Disability Employment Network Provider, and c) be outcomes-based with recurrent funding requiring successful achievement of collaboratively determined employment outcomes outlined in the Collaborative Access Plan.

*Combined Application Process:* a combined application process is desirable for allocating funding for people with profound disabilities to enter the workplace under the proposed Access to Employment scheme for several reasons. These include:

- providing one single application point, making it easier for applicants and those assisting them and reducing marketing costs
- strengthening blended solutions for the individual, reducing personal care funding reliance costs by implementing financially sustainable combined employment and personal care packages

- Reducing inequality of funding between disabled categories as evident by DPI and DMI reliance, and
- recognizing that various types of employment require a diverse range of support plans

*Collaborative Access Plans:* a Collaborative Access Plan is necessary during the allocation of funding for people with profound disabilities to enter the workplace as it ensures greater cost utilisation and employer/employee responsibility. It does so by:

- ensuring support addresses the needs of all stakeholders
- ensuring support is relevant to a variety of different jobs
- ensuring all possible avenues of cost reduction have been explored with the employer and employee, such as working from home options and assistance possible from the Workplace-Based Assistance Scheme, and
- producing direct communication networks between Disability Employment Network Providers, Employers and Employees to ensure all relevant support has been obtained

A Collaborative Access Plan should outline the steps The Access to Employment Adviser, The Employer, the Employee and the Disability Employment Network in receipt of the funds have taken/will take to ensure shared responsibility and the outcomes the Employer, the Employee and the Disability Employment Network Provider have met/intend to meet.

*Outcome Based Recurrence of Funds:* recurrence of funds each year should be reliant upon the achievement of the outcomes outlined in the Collaborative Access Plan submitted before receipt of initial and subsequent recurrent funds. Doing so would:

- reward individuals for achieving employment related goals
- ensure value for money for employers and increase employability of people with disabilities
- reduce mismanagement of funds, and
- improve mental health benefits obtained by reaching goals and raising self-esteem

### *Provision of Funds*

Upon the approval by CAP of the Access to Employment support determined as necessary in the Collaborative Access Plan, funds should be provided to the chosen Disability Employment Network Provider outlined in the Collaborative Access Plan. Using the existing Case-Based Funding provided by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Disability Employment Network Provider can manage these funds and be responsible for the individual with the disability and the employer achieving the predetermined outcomes and supports.

### *My Story Continued...*

In June 2009, the Access to Employment Scheme was implemented in Australia. In collaboration with Forest Personnel, the Billy Dower Youth Centre and myself we developed a Collaborative Access Plan and applied through the Combined Assistance Program for funding for a support worker.

Through collaboration with the Billy Dower Youth Centre, it was agreed that one day per week should be worked from home using the voice recognition computer technology and computer provided by the Workplace Modifications Scheme. During this day, I would manage all my documents, e-mails and the like and anything requiring physical attention such as printing was saved on a USB stick provided by my employer. They also covered my phone calls and directed any correspondence to a mobile phone they had provided me.

The Access to Employment Scheme provided the additional 30 hours per week of paid support work necessary for me to implement my programs and do my job. The funding was managed by Forest Personnel.

Because of the diversity of my programs and possibility of support workers interrupting the young people I assist, it was agreed In the Collaborative Access Plan that flexibility was needed in the employment of support workers. As a result, support workers are to be recommended by my employer and myself before being placed on the payroll at Forest Personnel.

As a result, I maintained full-time employment and achieved all the goals required of me by The Billy Dower Youth Centre. My funding was made recurrent and I was approached by another employer, who offered me a slightly different but better paying job. We modified slightly The Collaborative Access Plan, and because the new position is in management, I was able to reduce further the amount of hours required from my support worker.

I am providing for my family, achieving my goals, paying for my own future and have never been happier and healthier.