



Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

INQUIRY INTO EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPATION
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

15th April 2005

SUBMISSION BY:

MANPOWER SERVICES (AUSTRALIA) PTY LTD

Executive Summary

Each week Manpower places over 6,500 Australians into paid employment. As one of the country's leading staffing solutions providers, Manpower is well placed to comment on the participation of individuals in the workplace.

It is widely acknowledged there are many factors preventing or discouraging individuals with disability from participating in the workforce, or obtaining full employment once in the workforce. These factors include both individual circumstances and wider barriers.

Our submission identifies a number of issues we believe either prevent or discourage individuals with disability from maximizing their participation in the workforce. These include:

- People with disabilities often experience a feeling of being disconnected from the working world, often caused by long periods of unemployment.
- They may experience a lack of educational opportunities.
- Financial issues
- A lack of support both in finding employment and during the first critical weeks of employment.
- Lack of flexibility of employers in adapting working patterns
- A specific lack of awareness about disability in the workplace
- A lack of employment opportunities

In Manpower's view, it is necessary for both government and business to work collaboratively to address the issues raised. Coupled with commitment from employers, it is important to ensure that the participation rate is at an appropriate level to sustain the economic growth needed by Australia in the 21st century, people with disability are a valuable source of skills and should not be overlooked.

Manpower would like to thank the Standing Committee for considering our submission, and we would be happy provide whatever other information we can to assist the enquiry. Please contact Vicki Nock, General Manager – Marketing, Knowledge & Innovation on 02 9246 8936 or vnock@manpower.com.au.

Educational and training challenges for people with disability.

People with disabilities often experience a lack of self-confidence, demoralisation, low self-esteem and a feeling of being disconnected from the working world, often caused by long periods of unemployment. In addition, they can experience a lack of educational opportunities. Financial issues are often barriers to education and transport costs for them to attend interviews and training opportunities are often much more onerous.

Observations

The system of state benefits received does not freely allow for the gradual adaptation to working life (ie, the benefits stop as soon as employment starts and if the job doesn't work out, financial difficulties may result)

As a result individuals may find they lack of support in both finding employment and during the first critical weeks of employment.

In addition, access to adequate technology in order to access on line/ e- courses may be problematic due to lack of funding.

Recommendations

Raising of awareness of forums for the various groups involved in promoting, placing and the training of disabled people to share knowledge and best practice.

The formation of working groups to look at the following initiatives: employment, mobility/accessibility, e-accessibility and cultural issues.

Manpower provides free access to all registered diversity organizations within NSW to access, Direct Training, our on line learning centre. Direct Training, boasts over 1800 on line self-development courses. Unfortunately often due to lack of adequate technology at the Users end, courses take a long time to download.

Manpower recommends the creation of a singular website where information and training tools can be accessed and made freely available to all relevant parties.

Creating awareness through initiatives

The provision of assistance to people with disability can take many forms, however key to the inclusion of people with disability into the workforce is the challenge to make businesses more aware of the opportunities and benefits of reaching into this largely untapped skilled sector. Manpower has representation in 67 countries throughout the world and has participated in a number of private sector initiatives.

Observations

Within Australia the success stories in employing people with disability is seemingly limited to a few committed local organisations and essentially the multinationals who are required to report on diversity initiatives at a global level. We believe is coupled with the lack of visibility and education that is given to disability as a business issue within Australia.

Manpower Case Study - The European Year of People with Disabilities

In 2003, the European Commission launched the European Year of People with Disability, EYPD, in order to highlight the 37 million people with disabilities in the European Union.

The Commission's objective was to highlight barriers and discrimination faced by disabled people and to improve the lives of those of us who have a disability. As part of the launch of the campaign a bus travelled throughout Europe gaining significant media coverage to support the plight for the incorporation of people with disability into mainstream employment.

Within each country, disability communities were required to organise events along the bus's route. As part of this programme 12 large companies with representation in a large majority of the countries were approached to participate in a corporate sponsorship programme. Manpower was approached to become involved and we saw it as a unique opportunity to put the spotlight on disability issues while at the same time intensify our own activities in this field.

The opportunity for Manpower to become involved in the EYPD allowed us to improve our ability to provide access to work opportunities for people with disabilities in three main areas of activity:

Awareness Raising

- To improve the awareness of disability issues with Manpower staff
- To improve awareness of disability issues with Manpower customers
- To carry out a research study
- Helping us to identify how we can improve the employability of people with disabilities
- Helping us to identify common barriers and recommend solutions

Vocational training

- To provide free vocational training to people with disabilities
- To break down barriers to training

Accessibility

- Access to services and job opportunities provided by Manpower branches
- Access to customers work environment

Recommendations

Manpower encourages and supports the need for a similar event to be held here in Australia in order to increase visibility and public awareness.

The building of partnerships and awareness is imperative in order to increase the awareness for the need for disability action plans to be part of an organizations or businesses recruitment plans.

Barriers to employment for people with a disability

Over 20% of Australians have some form of disability. Research shows that employee retention levels among disabled persons is up to 73% higher than that of the rest of the workforce.

The Disability Discrimination Act of 1993 was set up to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to reduce rates of dependence on the social security system. Irrespective of the success of this act, business has been somewhat slow in tapping into this resource pool.

Irrespective of the efforts to date made by government to promote the employment of people with disabilities there is not much evidence that the Disability Employment Act has succeeded in the employment area.

Observations

A vast array of barriers remain for these people, which include but are not isolated to the following:

Lack of freely available information for employers on work adjustments for people with a disability, and support for disabled people participating in the recruitment process.

Support for the placement of these people by the recruitment industry is negligible, with no guidelines or standards provided and a general lack of consideration for this work sector.

Incorrect perceptions of disabled people (i.e. disability linked to low performance expectations among employers).

Stereotypes/perceptions of people with a disability.

Lack of information and support around recruitment practices.

Recruitment providers are not skilled in disability – no guidelines/standards within the recruitment industry for people with a disability.

Lack of awareness of the abilities of people with a disability (low expectations)

Fear around disability issues – doing/saying the wrong thing and causing potential embarrassment

Lack of understanding of reasonable adjustment for people with a disability

Businesses' perception that the employment of people with a disability is hard and time consuming.

Employers are unaware of what Government incentives exist for employing persons with a disability, including subsidies to offset costs for modifications or adjustments to existing work environments

Recommendations

Manpower recommends the support of organisations such as Employers Making A Difference (EMAD), which actively work towards educating business on the employment of people with disability.

Manpower recommends the publishing of a set of guidelines on how to get candidates with disability into the work force.

Manpower recommends that industry associations, such as the RCSA, together with EMAD and other employers, work towards promoting a federally sponsored best practice employer award.

This singular major recognition programme would unite all the sub categories. Sub categories that include people with disabilities, women, migrants and diversity in the workplace. The awards would be a singular programme that recognises best practice employers, to be judged at state and national levels.