

Common myths and misconceptions

Tina Zeleznik, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Works Australia

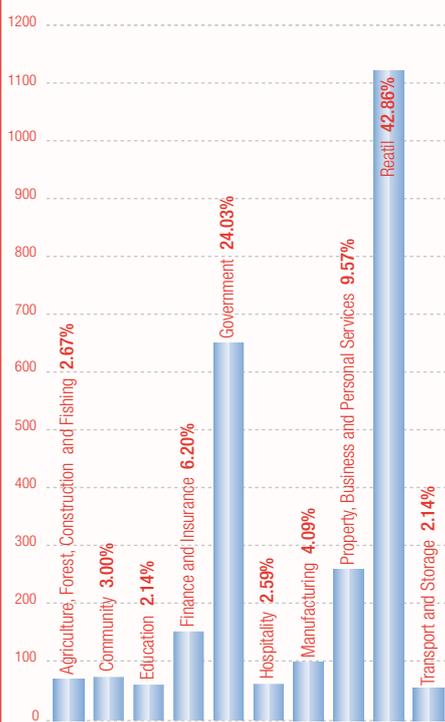
Most people make assumptions about the abilities of people with a disability which are unfounded. People with disabilities have a range of skills and abilities to offer employers just like everyone else. The common assumptions we experience include:

“The type of work available in our industry does not suit a person with a disability”

Employers often claim vacancies in their organisation could not be filled by people with a disability. In fact, with the correct qualifications and experience, the right person with a disability can perform any job but in some instances may require appropriate supports and modifications to be accommodated.

In its first three years of operation DWA assisted employers to recruit more than 2,500 people with a disability to help build their businesses. The majority of these workers are now employed for more than 30 hours a week and are working in fields including education, finance, hospitality government and manufacturing.

FIGURE 1
DWA Placements by Industry
(Jan 2004 - Dec 2006)



NAB builds on diversity support

Disability Works Australia (DWA), National Australia Bank (NAB) and Federal Minister for Workforce Participation Dr Sharman Stone signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Melbourne recently aimed at improving the employment prospects of people with a disability.

NAB first signed an agreement with DWA in April 2005 and, with support from DWA, has been working on creating a workplace culture which embraces people with a disability.

This work has seen people with a disability employed in various roles across Australia, including customer service roles and in technology.

NAB recently re-signed a MOU with DWA, agreeing to continue to make use of the services provided by DWA to increase the number of its employees with a disability.

DWA chief executive officer Tina Zeleznik said the re-signing of the agreement would continue to assist more people with a disability to enter the NAB workforce.

“More and more large employers like NAB are seeing that it makes good business sense to have a workforce that reflects the diversity in our society and their customer base.”

“We are thrilled when employers maintain a commitment to working towards increasing the number of employees in their workforce with a disability.”

“We are thrilled when employers maintain a commitment to working towards increasing the number of employees in their workforce with a disability.” Tina Zeleznik, DWA, CEO

“DWA can support the employer to ensure their recruitment processes are accessible for people with a disability, provide disability awareness training, coordinate workplace modifications, provide a pre-screening service and support by providing a single point of contact for recruiting people with a disability,” Ms Zeleznik said.

NAB Australia Chief Executive Officer Ahmed Fahour said the bank had been working hard to increase the level of diversity within its workforce.

“We are committed to creating a work environment where people can succeed based on merit, that individual talents are recognised and special needs are accommodated,” Mr Fahour said.

Dr Stone said DWA was in a position to assist NAB in the area of disability recruitment and the retention of existing employees with disability.

“This MOU with NAB today, will lead to more jobs in the finance industry for people with disability,” Dr Stone said.

“Since 2005, NAB has employed close to 100 people with a disability, with the number employed increasing each year.

“With skill shortages, an ageing population and strong economic growth, it is vital that employers such as the NAB consider how people with a disability can become part of their recruitment solution,” Dr Stone said.



NAB ceo Ahmed Fahour, DWA ceo Tina Zeleznik and Minister for Workforce Participation Dr Sharman Stone signing the agreement.

No extra risk for employers

A recent Australian study has proved workers with a disability are not an increased occupational health and safety risk.

The report *Are People With Disability at Risk at Work?* was undertaken by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) earlier this year.

The 2005 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report *WORKability 1: Barriers* identified concerns about Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) risks as an obstacle for people with a disability entering and remaining in the workforce.

HREOC's Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graham Innes said employing people with a disability was a positive experience, yet there was an unfounded concern about OHS risks for business when employing people with a disability.

"Employer concern about increased risk of occupational injury for this group of people meant the perception of increased risk needed to be reviewed and I commend the ASCC for undertaking that assessment.

"Employers cite an increased risk of workers' compensation claims as a major barrier to employing people with a disability, yet there is no evidence to support this concern," Graham said.

At the release of *Are People with Disability at Risk at Work?*, ASCC chair Bill Scales said the research found that workers with a disability have on average, a lower number of OHS incidents and have lower workers' compensation costs, in comparison to other employees.

"Contrary to common perceptions by employers that people with a disability pose an increased OHS risk in their workplace, our research shows that the opposite is true," Bill said.

He noted that the research also shows that if the workplace needs to be modified for workers with a disability, the cost of workplace modification is quite low and the economic benefits of employing people with a disability exceeds the cost of the workplace modification.

It is estimated that over two million working age Australians have a disability, representing 17 per cent of working aged Australians.

Common Myths and Misconceptions *continued from page 1*

"People with a disability cannot fill positions within our company"

DWA placed people with a disability into various positions, such as secretaries, forklift operators, call centre assistants, retail managers, administration officers, bank tellers, warehouse assistants and computer programmers.

This success is thanks to employers having forethought and being open-minded about their employment strategies.

Figure 2 shows the range of occupations people with a disability have found work in with the assistance of DWA.

"People with certain types of disabilities are too big of a risk to employ"

People with all types of disabilities have been employed under the DWA system. The employability of a person with a disability is not dependant on the type of disability that person has, it is instead dependant on their qualifications, experience and enthusiasm for the job. A person's disability is always specific to that person and no assumptions can be made about a person's abilities based on their disability.

About a quarter of people employed through the DWA service have physical disabilities, about a fifth have intellectual disabilities and a further fifth have psychiatric disabilities.

Figure 3 shows the broad range of the disabilities of people placed by DWA.

"Employing people with a disability causes extra work for my staff and costs me more"

The Commonwealth Government provides many free services to support the employer and the job seeker with a disability. They include the services provided by

DWA, Disability Employment Network (DEN) providers and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS):

- DWA services are an important part of the disability employment industry but have a markedly different role in comparison to other providers of service in this sector. DWA supports large employers by providing a coordinated "one-point" of contact for the recruitment of people with a disability.
- DEN providers are a national network of 240 community and private organisations that provide expert support and services to employers and job seekers with a disability.
- VRS focus on job seekers needing specialist vocational rehabilitation to re-enter the workforce due to an acquired disability.

All the services listed above can assist employers with information and advice about appropriate modifications and current available government incentives to purchase or hire equipment if required. For more information go to www.dwa.org.au or www.jobaccess.gov.au

Employers working with DWA are often surprised at the adaptability of people with a disability. But it is worth remembering that many people have had their disability their whole lives and have learnt how to adjust a task to suit them.

The first step toward becoming a disability confident organisation is to recognise that people with a disability can do any job.

People with all types of disability can work successfully in all fields, as proven by DWA's quality service which includes pre-screening and job matching all applicants to ensure employers are provided with the best person for the job.

FIGURE 2
DWA Placements by Occupation
(Jan 2004 - Dec 2006)

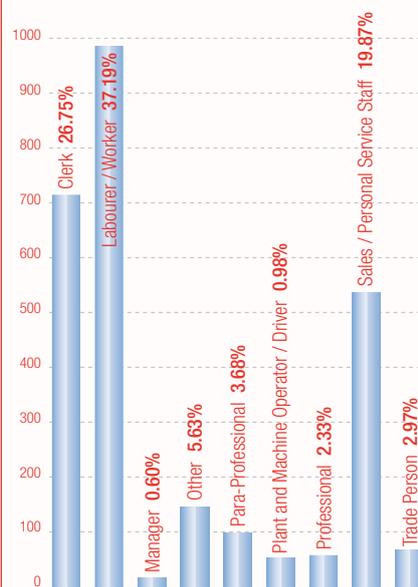


FIGURE 3
DWA Placements by Disability Type
(Jan 2004 - Dec 2006)





Target workers Daniel Rugari and Grace Taylor filling the cardboard compactor with supervisor Troy Miigge looking on.

Workers hit the spot at Target

Imagine handling and processing 8-12 tonne of cardboard every week.

The two staff that the DWA process has assisted in placing at the Adelaide Target Offsite Reserve don't have to imagine – they do it every week.

The reserve receives stock and distributes it to Adelaide's 14 Target stores. Any stock the stores can't display is sent back to the reserve for storage.

Between four and five semi-trailers full of stock is unloaded and re-distributed at the reserve every day and all of the cardboard it is packed in is processed and recycled by Daniel Rugari and Grace Taylor.

Working at the reserve is Daniel's first job after he completed year 12 last year.

The 18-year-old drives his car to work at the reserve and was looking forward to a holiday in Melbourne to visit his cousins.

Daniel said his parents were really pleased he was working at the reserve and the people there were "nice to work with".

Daniel works at the cardboard compactor from 8am until 12noon when the job is taken over by Grace Taylor.

Animal-lover Grace has been working at the Reserve for several months and said she has been enjoying earning money to go shopping for clothes.

"My mum thinks it is good that I am out at work now because I was just sitting at home before," Grace said.

The 19-year-old has made new friends since starting work and, as she is forced to catch two buses and a train to get to work, has learnt new skills around travel and cash handling.

Both Grace and Daniel were referred for their roles by Disability Employment Network provider Personnel Employment.

Personnel Employment specialises in people with intellectual disabilities and supports both Grace and Daniel if they encounter any problems with their work.

Complex Manager Troy Miigge said the pair seemed to enjoy working on the cardboard compactor but as they progressed could move on to other areas.

"We have another person with a disability working here who started out on the compactor and is now working unpacking clothes and hanging them on racks," Troy said.

He said the pair had fitted in well with the 45-strong team at the reserve.

"They seem to be talking more to the other staff here now and I know Grace went to the show with a workmate on the weekend so that is good," Troy said.

He said he would not hesitate to employ other people with a disability through the DWA service.

"If another vacancy came up and we could accommodate another person we would definitely look at it," Troy said.

'Family' of workmates in warehouse

Disability Works Australia (DWA) operates to assist in ensuring employers have the right person for the job because people with disabilities can be all ages and have all sorts of abilities.

DWA has an agreement with large industrial hardware suppliers Selectrix Industries. This partnership has resulted in a pilot program which has seen two people with a disability employed at the company's Melbourne warehouse.

Feedback from Selectrix Industries staff was that Matthew Crosina and Barry Were fitted in perfectly with the team at the Selectrix warehouse and this has satisfied DWA staff that good job matches were made.

Matthew, who suffers from depression, was referred to DWA for the warehouse assistant job by his Disability Employment Network provider, Northstar and has been working at the warehouse for nearly a year.

The 27-year-old said he enjoyed the variety of working at the warehouse, where he completes a range of tasks.

"For example today I have been making up orders, which includes drilling holes and putting parts together, then

He said he has formed good friendships with his workmates and the team were like "brothers".

picking up orders and this afternoon I have been helping the guys at the front counter on the computer.

"I like being able to help them pump more orders out if the pressure is on," Matthew said.

He said has formed good friendships with his workmates and the team were like "brothers".

"If they see I am down about something, they will stop and ask if I need to talk even if we are really busy," Matthew said.

Barry has been working in the warehouse for about six months and also enjoys the interaction with the other staff there.



Matthew Crosina and Barry Were fit in well with the team at the Selectrix warehouse.

He is "nearing retirement" and has physical disabilities that restrict his work options.

The father of two, who works full-time hours but is employed as a casual, said the warehouse was close to home and the other staff were very easy to get along with.

"If I lift too much I start loosing my breath and my workmates tell me to ease up because they don't want to have to give me mouth to mouth," Barry joked.

No modifications were needed to accommodate either staff member's disability but his part time hours allow Matthew to attend doctors appointments if necessary.





Recruitment Made Easy

Employer or preferred supplier notifies DWA of forthcoming job opportunities.

DWA broadcasts vacancies to attract applicants with disabilities.

DWA receives applications and pre-screens applicants.

DWA provides the employer or preferred supplier with details of suitable applicants and advises about any potential supports or modifications required.

Employer or preferred supplier keeps DWA informed of changes or delays in the recruitment process.

Employer or preferred supplier decides which applicants to interview.

DWA contacts and arranges interviews with suitable applicants.

DWA notifies any applicants the employer has decided not to interview.

DWA contacts the employer or preferred supplier to discuss interview results and gain feedback to provide to the applicant.

DWA provides the employer with continued support for employees with a disability.

Partnership works for all

Many large employers make use of professional recruitment firms to meet their human resource requirements.

Disability Works Australia (DWA) can form agreements with an employer's preferred recruitment firm and these employers can then access the free disability recruitment service offered by DWA.

The long-standing agreement between DWA and specialist recruitment consultancy Hudson demonstrates the effectiveness of this system.

Hudson is a leading provider of recruitment, talent management and managed services, and works in partnership with employers across all industries to attract, select, engage, develop and retain the best people.

DWA is funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide a single point of contact for large private sector employers seeking information and advice about employing people with a disability.

DWA and Hudson have developed an employment process to ensure diversity in the workplace while providing the employer with a single point of contact for both mainstream and disability recruitment.

Hudson national client relationship manager Melissa Tinworth said Hudson and DWA had developed key contacts in each State to ensure continuity of service across Australia.

"DWA liaise directly with candidates with a disability to ensure questions around workplace modifications and government-funded subsidies and training are correctly provided,"

Melissa Tinworth, Hudson



Deborah Watson was one of 14 job seekers who were recently put through their paces in a call centre assessment training course.

The partnership between DWA and Hudson has allowed two groups of people with a disability to complete call centre assessment training, which gave participants the skills to secure jobs in the growing customer service industry.

Several of these participants have been placed into work since completing the training.

Melissa said the process developed between DWA and Hudson offered employers a different method of sourcing a pool of candidates, which was a benefit in the current candidate market.

"The process developed by Hudson and DWA could be easily transferred to other organisations to assist more people with a disability into work,"

Melissa Tinworth, Hudson

Under the DWA contract large employers are defined as having locations in three or more States or Territories or more than 100 employees. Recruitment firms acting for employers that meet these criteria are able to access the National Disability Recruitment Coordination Service provided by DWA.

