

Why hire? Benefits for employers of recruiting people with a disability.

Tina Zeleznik, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Works Australia

Working in the disability employment field you hear all sorts of excuses and reasons why employers are reluctant to explore the possibility of employing people with a disability.

Many employers are convinced employing people with a disability will increase cost, lower productivity, disrupt the workplace and raise safety issues. Some employers are also worried that there might be additional costs and legal risks involved in employing people with a disability.

But these pre-conceived notions are nothing more than myths.

Studies have found that there is a strong business case to support the employment of people with a disability

www.jobaccess.gov.au:

- Over 90 per cent of employers who had recently employed a person with a disability said they would be happy to continue to employ people with a disability.
- In relation to the cost benefits of workplace accommodations for employees with a disability, 65 per cent of employers rated the financial effect to be cost neutral and 20 per cent identified an overall financial benefit.
- The cost to business of absenteeism and sick leave for employees with a disability can be as low as 34 per cent of the cost incurred by other employees.
- Fewer accidents at work and significant lower recorded workers compensation incidents – people with a disability were found to have only four per cent of the workers compensation costs of average employees.
- Lower absenteeism, 39 per cent lower than staff without a disability.

People with a disability often have higher retention rates than other staff, and as an employer, your legal obligations when employing people with a disability are no different to those involved in employing anyone else.

When you consider one in six Australians have a disability it makes good business sense to employ people with a disability to accurately reflect the diversity of your customer base. It is also worth noting that employing people with a disability is often viewed positively by co-workers and customers alike.

The current skills shortage means many employers are looking outside mainstream sources to find people with the necessary skills and experience to fill vacancies. There are more than 131,000 Australians with a disability who are ready to work and tapping into this previously overlooked pool of applicants shows astute business judgment.

Many large employers have already recognised hiring people with disabilities can be good for business. Businesses which understand the benefits of employing people with a disability include: Australia Post, National Australia Bank (NAB) and The Coles Group.

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The face up team on one of their regular early morning starts – from top – Andrew McKenzie, Ben Ryan and Bernie Holden.

Rewarding experience for workmates

The Coles Group took out the National Employer of the Year Award at the Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Awards at Parliament House in Canberra on August 9.

Accepting the award from the Minister for Workforce Participation Dr Sharman Stone was The Coles Group diversity manager Katie Spearritt, who thanked Disability Works Australia (DWA) for its contribution.

"Without the close partnership Coles has formed with DWA we would not have been able to take a national approach to employing people with a disability," Ms Spearritt said.

The award is presented annually to an organisation operating in two or more Australian States or territories for its valuable contribution in providing employment opportunities for people with a disability.

More than half of all Australians start their careers working in retail so it makes sense that many people with a disability also secure their first job in the retail field.

The close relationship between The Coles Group and Disability Works Australia (DWA) has seen more than 1200 people with a disability secure jobs with the retail giant in the past three years.

The shelves in the Coles Supermarket in the Melbourne suburb of Chimside Park have been kept spick and span, thanks to a face up team which includes two people with a disability employed with the assistance of DWA.

The early starts of 6am have not deterred the workers from embracing their first jobs and maintaining excellent attendance records at the store.

Ben Ryan has been working at the store for about four months and enjoys the disposable income the job gives him to invest in his hobby of playing his computer games console.

Ben, who lives at home, said his parents were impressed that he was getting himself off to work every day, particularly as it was so early in the morning.

"My dad works in Melbourne city so he has to get up at around the same time as me to go to work," Ben said.

The 19-year-old, who has autism, has been saving up to attend an upcoming computer game convention.

Working alongside Ben in the store is car and truck enthusiast Andrew McKenzie, who has made excellent progress in his four months as part of the team.

Andrew has been using his income to pay for truck driving lessons and has already secured his medium rigid truck licence.

"The important thing is that I can do this job and I am going to upgrade my truck licence to a semi-trailer licence with the money I am earning," Andrew said.

The 20-year-old, who has Asperger syndrome, said the early starts did not bother him and he often got up before the alarm went off.

"The anticipation of having to get up is usually worse than actually getting up and I don't like the sound of the alarm going off so I often get up at about 4:30am," Andrew said.

Both Andrew and Ben were initially provided with intensive on-the-job support by Disability Employment Network provider Working Arrangements.

One of the key elements to the success of the small team is the support provided by team overseer Bernie Holden, who said the progress made by Andrew and Ben was "astounding".

"Customers comment on a daily basis about how nice it is to see Coles employing people with a disability to work on the shop floor," Bernie said

She said working with the pair was both challenging and rewarding, with the rewards "far outweighing" the challenges.

"Ben is proud to be able to take a customer all the way to an item they are looking for and Andrew's social interaction has come ahead in leaps and bounds since he started working with us," Bernie said.

She praised the management of Coles Supermarkets for committing to opportunities for people with disabilities and increasing general acceptance in the community.

Help finding staff available

Employers now have access to a new one-stop-shop to help them look outside the square to fill job vacancies.

Employers are being encouraged to look into less traditional employment avenues and recruit people with a disability, mature age people, parents returning to work and people who have been out of work for awhile.

The Australian Government has launched the Need Staff? campaign to promote these often overlooked avenues for recruiting staff because of a record low unemployment rate of 4.2 per cent.

Various services to employers, including those provided by Disability Works Australia, will be promoted during the five-week campaign.

The Australian Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Joe Hockey, said the campaign would help ensure employers have everything they need to grow their businesses.

"The campaign will encourage employers to look beyond their traditional recruitment channels and details the range of government services available to help them find staff," he said.

"These measures will inform and educate employers about the benefits of tapping into a wider, more diverse workforce," Min Hockey said.

The campaign will include advertisements and a direct mail-out nationally to more than one million employers to tell them about the government services and incentives available.

Need staff? – call the employer hotline on 13 17 15 or visit www.australia.gov.au/needstaff.



Minister for Workforce Participation Hon Dr Sharman Stone, Savings & Loans Credit Union chief executive officer Greg Connor and Disability Works Australia chief executive officer Tina Zeleznik at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Savings & Loans signs on the dotted line

Federal Minister for Workforce Participation, Hon Dr Sharman Stone was in Adelaide recently to co-sign an agreement between Disability Works Australia (DWA) and Savings & Loans Credit Union.

Savings & Loans Credit Union signed a Memorandum of Understanding with DWA, and agreed to make use of the services provided by DWA to increase the number of its employees with a disability.

Speaking at the signing, Savings & Loans Credit Union chief executive officer Greg Connor said his company had already been working hard to increase the level of diversity within its workforce.

"We've already put programs into place to encourage mature age workers, and people from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Now we're looking to encourage people with disabilities to come on board and see what we have to offer," Mr Connor said.

He said Savings & Loans Credit Union was introducing disability awareness training to staff, which aimed to show what people with disabilities could do rather than focussing on the obstacles they faced.

"More than just encouraging people with disabilities to apply for roles with Savings & Loans, we're committed to supporting them throughout their careers."

"This is an ongoing program and we're committed to working with our staff and Disability Works Australia to make sure it's a success," Mr Connor said.

DWA board Chairperson, Andrew Rogers, said the agreement would help pave the way for more people with a disability to enter the Savings & Loans Credit Union workforce.

"More and more large employers like Savings & Loans Credit Union 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 get on board and commit to working towards increasing the number of employees in their workforce with a disability."

"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," Mr Rogers said.

At the signing Sharman Stone told those attending how her own family had been touched by disability. Her father was badly injured while fighting in World War II but continued to farm the family property regardless.

"Services like those provided by Disability Works Australia are essential to give people with disabilities every opportunity to continue working," Dr Stone said.

She congratulated Savings & Loans Credit Union for recognising that people with a disability can make a valuable contribution to a business by focusing on their abilities.

Savings & Loans Credit Union provides ample employment opportunity for people with a disability with more than 560 staff in 25 branches in South Australia, the Northern Territory, New South Wales and regional Victoria.

Savings & Loans Credit Union has joined many other large private sector employers who have agreed to support the employment of people with a disability by signing agreements with DWA.

Best job ever - best person for the job



Bendigo Bank Call Centre team leader Sian Williams in the Bendigo Call Centre with banking consultant Paul Ellis.

When you deal with about 100 different people on the phone everyday, you need exceptional people skills.

And that's exactly what Paul Ellis has got.

Paul has been answering customer enquiries from all over Australia as a banking consultant in the busy Bendigo Bank Call Centre for the past six months.

He landed the job after chronic arthritis forced him out of the more physically-demanding fields of printing and rubber manufacturing four years ago.

Paul and several other people with a disability have achieved jobs with Bendigo Bank after the regionally-based banking giant signed a formal agreement with Disability Works Australia (DWA).

The agreement firms up Bendigo Bank's commitment to employ people with a disability and guarantees the support of the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator, DWA, throughout the employment process.

The 34-year-old, father of three could not be more enthusiastic about his work in the busy Bendigo Call Centre, which, with the support of Bendigo Bank's Ipswich Call Centre, answers 1.2 million calls from customers every year.

Paul said most of the customers he encountered on the telephone were "really great to deal with".

"Everything about this job is good, there is a great atmosphere and the other staff are really friendly" Paul said.

"I would go so far as to say it is the best job I have ever had and I hope to make a career out of it."

He said the stability of the job had allowed him to buy a house, which would not have been possible while he was unemployed.

After seeing the banking consultant job advertised by DWA, Disability Employment Network provider Bendigo Access Employment suggested Paul was suitable.

Before referring him to Bendigo Bank for the role, DWA pre-screened Paul and found he had the necessary people, information technology and telephone skills to do the job.

Bendigo Access Employment manager Paul Costigan said the new recruit had many skills which were easily transferred into a call centre situation.

"Paul has great customer service skills, and given his ability to talk and engage people, we decided he would be suitable for a number of fields," Paul Costigan said.

Bendigo Bank Call Centre team leader Sian Williams praised Paul's development since starting work, saying the banking consultant role he was performing was difficult under any circumstances.

"He has definitely got people skills, he is really good at creating a rapport with customers on the phone and he gets along really well with all of his peers," Sian said.

She said since starting work Paul's self-assurance had grown and he was now managing several tasks at the same time with confidence.

Bendigo Bank has accommodated Paul's disability by allowing him to move and stretch when he becomes stiff and sore and the company has relaxed the uniform code to allow him to wear formal sandals to work.

Why hire?

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These employers have noticed the positive effect employing people with a disability can have on a business.

When employers make the decision to hire people with a disability they are often confused by the hundreds of disability-specific employment agencies offering job seekers with a disability. Disability Works Australia (DWA) makes it easy for employers by providing a single, free and effective contact point for recruiting and the provision of information on disability employment issues.

Business savvy employers are already making use of the free services provided by DWA which are available to all employers that have agreements with DWA and include:

- The revision of existing employment process.
- Suggesting system, policy and process changes to remove potential barriers to the employment of people with a disability.
- Training and professional development on disability awareness for staff.
- Information about available employer incentives and work subsidies.
- Circulating vacancies to Disability Employment Network providers.
- Pre-screening and assessing employment candidates with disabilities and providing profiles of suitable duties, supports and workplace modifications.
- Assisting employers to raise their corporate image nationally and at a local level through promotion.

The Australian Government also provides various incentives for employers to hire people with a disability, which can be particularly useful for those in small business.

Incentives vary according to the individual circumstances of the job and employee chosen, but may include wage subsidies, on-the-job support, workplace modification subsidies and the supported wage system.

For more information about employing people with a disability head to the DWA website www.dwa.org.au or the Australian Government Job Access website www.jobaccess.gov.au.



Employer Incentives

When employing a person with a disability the following incentives from the Australian Government may be available to employers:

Work Experience Placement program

The Work Experience Placement program can meet the cost of work-related insurance (personal accident and public liability insurance) for eligible job seekers to help overcome one of the main problems when organising work experience.

Wage Subsidies

May be available for up to 13 weeks; the amount varies depending on a number of conditions and eligibility.

Workplace Modification

Subsidies are available to employers to cover purchase or lease of essential equipment.

On-the-Job Support

Approved Disability Employment Network providers offer free employment training and support to people with a disability and their employer, until the employee has sustained the agreed productivity and quality of work.

Supported Wage System

This scheme makes it legal for an employer to pay a productivity-based wage if an assessment shows it is appropriate. While the assessment is being conducted, the employer pays the employee a minimum amount of \$64 per week. Employers may be eligible to receive a one-off payment to help offset the cost of employing a new worker with a disability.

Traineeship

Employers can receive subsidies of up to \$2000 per trainee and extra support.

Assistance to Apprentices with Disabilities

A wage support payment at the rate of \$104.30 a week or pro-rata for part-time apprenticeships, tutorial and workplace modification assistance are available.

Auslan for Employment programme

Financial assistance for employers to support deaf employees and their co-workers in the workplace with Auslan interpreting services and training.

Information correct at time of printing

Graduate aims high

Working as a computer programmer is no mean feat but achieving success in this highly competitive field is an outstanding achievement for a person who is totally blind.

Chris Baillie is a man who has accomplished this.

The agreement signed between Disability Works Australia (DWA) and the National Australia Bank (NAB) ensured NAB had adequate support when employing Chris.

The Swinburne University graduate was one of 1100 people who applied for a role within NAB's graduate recruitment program and one of only 25 who passed through the bank's extensive screening process to secure a job.

NAB then contacted its diversity partner DWA which offers a free, single point of contact for recruiting and the provision of information on disability employment issues to large, national employers.

DWA conducted disability awareness training for NAB staff and, in partnership with Disability Employment Network provider, Vision Australia, completed a workplace assessment.

The assessment and consultation with Chris found the only workplace modification he required was JAWS assistive technology which reads back what is on a computer monitor via headphones.

His guide dog Flint also needed access to a nearby park which Chris said he "usually does not need to visit during the day".

Chris has completed the one year graduate program and has now moved on to become a fully-fledged computer programmer.

He works in a team of 11 developing and maintaining the software used by staff in most NAB branches around Australia.

The 26-year-old newlywed said he really enjoyed the variety offered by the job.



Chris Baillie, with guide dog Flint, outside NAB's head office in Melbourne.

"The work is different all the time, particularly when we are working on small projects, there is something different every month or so," Chris said.

He said he believed people with a disability should come to employers with some ideas about how to solve any issues their disability might create.

"Instead of saying 'here I am, look after me because that's what the law says' people should say 'this is what I have done in the past and this is what I am capable of'".

"Staff at NAB have a very open mind to employing people with a disability, which is vitally important," Chris said.

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