



**Submission made by
Julia Farr Association's Youth
Group**

**Inclusion for People with Disability
through Sustainable Employment**

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The Julia Farr Youth Group wishes to make a submission on the Discussion Paper 'Inclusion for people with disability through sustainable employment'.

The Julia Farr Youth Group was established in 2008 and are a young group of adults living with disability from diverse backgrounds who are enthusiastic about disability youth issues. The Youth Group meets monthly and discusses issues which are important to them and devises strategies to change thoughts and lives. It is an opportunity for young people living with disability to voice their concerns and to take action for change. One such area of concern for the youth group is supported employment.

The Julia Farr Youth Group support the new ten year vision within a human rights framework where:

- Everyone has the right to work;
- Everyone has the right to work in an environment that is inclusive, supportive and accessible; and
- Everyone has the right to fully participate and be included in Australian society.

The key questions for Government are how they can over the next 10 years:

- Improve access to inclusive supported employment; and
- Improve the experiences of people with disability in supported employment?

The Julia Farr Youth Group would like to take this time to highlight the following concerns around supported employment:

- There is real concern that supported employment can be viewed as 'tokenistic' where a false appearance of inclusion has been created;
- The Youth Group believe that people living with disability want to give back to the community in a positive manner through employment and make a contribution, however often face many obstacles and patronizing comments, for example "isn't it nice you have something to do;"
- There is a real concern about the rate of pay (or the lack of pay) which people with disability receive. FaHCSIA reported that at the end of March 2010 the average gross hourly wage for a supported employee was \$3.61. The Youth Group acknowledges that although people are receiving a pay rate which is based on their productivity there is also concern that this heightens the 'poverty trap', provides limited incentives for people to work and is tokenistic;
- The Youth Group have expressed concern that many people living with disability have a 'fear of the system' and are concerned that if they gain employment then this will affect their medical benefits;

- Many young people living with disability feel that they work hard to get through high school and university and then it all falls apart when they try to enter the workforce due to a lack of support and understanding from employers and the community. Lived experiences from the youth group where a lack of understanding around their disability has caused employment opportunities to fall through;
- The Youth Group are concerned that there is not a lot of choice for young people living with disability around the type of work they enter into. There is a stereotypical image that people living with disability will work in areas such as packaging;
- There can be limited access to some work environments;
- The Julia Farr Youth Group acknowledges that while many Supported Employment participants might express satisfaction with their involvement, the model does not typically involve a fair wage, tends to separate people from their non-disabled peers, and in so doing reinforces a sense of segregation from the wider community. The Julia Farr Youth Group believes that people living with disability and of working age should have a broader range of employment options including mainstream employment with support.

Recommendations

In view of these concerns the Julia Farr Youth Group would like to make the following recommendations around supported employment:

- To work with local businesses, the community, service providers, councils and families around creating more inclusive employment options and support for people living with disability and better understanding of disability and what a person can do;
- To promote open employment options for people living with disability (as well as improved supported employment options) as a means for better inclusion. This could include greater opportunities and encouragement for local businesses in the community to employ people living with disability, through practical work experience program, volunteer work and the opportunity to work alongside an employee to gain experience;
- The introduction of non-disabled employees into supported employment businesses to work towards better inclusion and understanding of disability;
- To provide more funding and incentives for employers to modify work environments so that they are inclusive to everyone;

- To provide greater choice and flexibility within the work environment to suit a person's interest and personality;
- To increase the base rate of pay which a person receives so that it is more equitable and fair;
- To provide practical work experience transition programs for people with disability who are transitioning from high school or university into the work force. To increase the number of careers advisors within schools who are able to assist with a smooth transition for a person into the workforce and who can liaise with and educate employers;
- The introduction of self-directed funding for people who are working in supported employment options. Self-directed funding as defined by Dowson and Salisbury (1999) is "...public funding that is allocated to the individual based on his/her unique strengths and needs, and placed under the control of the individual to enable them to live in the community as a full citizen."¹ Potentially this could mean that for individuals who have control over their funding they could chose to access funds for greater support in the workforce allowing for the opportunity to make the transition from supported employment to open employment, to assist with extra hours within the workforce or to have the opportunity to study an area of interest so that they can further their career;
- For Centrelink employees to have better understanding of disability and information about working (supported and open employment) and the affect this can have on a person's disability support pension. It is also important for the 'system' to not be so hard to access information and confusing. Information needs to be consistent across the board of Centrelink;
- The introduction of 'Circles of Support' within the workforce to assist with job capacity, inclusion and having a better understanding of people living with disability. Circles of Support are a key strategy to make social inclusion work for people living with disabilities, people with mental illnesses and vulnerable people who are struggling with social isolation. By building an intentional circle of support around a person, comprising of friends, employees, neighbours, family, shopkeepers, drivers and support workers, real connections and communities can be built² which in turn can assist with productivity and good working relationships within the workforce;

¹ Dowson and Salisbury (1999)' www.cdds.med.usyd.edu.au, Individualized Funding: Emerging Policy Issues, viewed 27th October 2010

² Community Building National Network; Circles of Support; <http://www.civilsociety.org.au/Circles.htm> Centre for Civil Society 2007-2010 viewed 28th October 2010

- Improved access to employment opportunities and training whilst being a part of supported employment. Encouragement, creativity and planning from staff to assist a person to work towards their goals and where they would like to head career wise. Exposure and choice is critical for people working in supported employment to see what type of work is out there and to allow and support a person to work towards their goals;
- The establishment of good working relationships between supported employers and the open work force so that there is opportunity for employees to transition from supported employment to open employment;
- Ongoing disability training for staff in supported employment so that they are up-to-date with new ideas, programs, available resources, and can assist with inclusion, capacity building and personal authority.

The Julia Farr Youth Group supports the vision that everyone has the right to work in an environment that is inclusive, supportive and accessible and that everyone has the right to fully participate in society.