



**Brotherhood  
of St Laurence**

*Working for an Australia free of poverty*

**Submission to the Human Rights and Equal  
Opportunity Commission**

**National Inquiry into Employment and Disability**

**Brotherhood of St Laurence  
April 2005**



# 1 Introduction

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is a welfare organization based in Melbourne with a vision of 'an Australia free of poverty'. It has a strong 70-year history of advocacy and innovation. The BSL provides a disability open employment service, GAPCo, funded by the Commonwealth government and also works with people with disabilities in many of its other employment programs. It also has a strong focus on social security and employment issues in its research, policy analysis and advocacy.

Unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, is the most significant cause of poverty and disadvantage in Australia. Employment opportunities are essential to overcome disadvantage and build cohesive communities. Through research and advocacy, the BSL works for reform of policies that fail to prevent poverty and further isolate people already disadvantaged by lack of work, disability or exclusion.

The BSL supports the various legislative and welfare interventions (such as the Disability Services Act 1986, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and disability employment services and programs) that were introduced by the Hawke government and continued by the present Coalition government. However we share HREOC's concern that these reforms have not made a great impression on the overall picture of socio-economic exclusion and disadvantage for people with disabilities (Ozdowski 2004, Clear 2000, Ford 1998).

We welcome the HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability as a timely source of policy analysis and recommendation to government. This submission is based on our knowledge of relevant research and BSL's experience as a service provider, and has been informed by staff and consumers of GAPCo.

## 2 Current socio-economic disadvantage

### Employment experience

People with disabilities have a higher unemployment rate than the rest of the population; 8.6 per cent compared to 5 per cent for people without disabilities. Based on the 2003 ABS Disability, Ageing & Carers Survey figure of 3.4 million working age people with disabilities, this equates to 292,400 people with a disability officially unemployed. These unemployment rates are higher for those with severe (9.5 per cent) or profound (13.9 per cent) disabilities.

People with disabilities have a lower labour force participation rate of 53.2 per cent compared to 80.6 per cent for people without disabilities. This has fallen from 54.9 per cent in 1993. As the HREOC background paper shows, in 2003-04 people with disabilities made up 3.8 per cent of ongoing Australian Public Service positions, down from 5.8 per cent in 1995.

There are around 1,147,900 people without sufficient work, a 'labour force under-utilisation' rate of 11.1 per cent. The unemployment figures do not accurately reflect this figure since about half (578,300 people) are employed part-time but want more work (ABS 2005a). The proportion of people with disabilities without sufficient work is therefore likely to be up to twice the rate of official estimates, or up to half a million people. Some have even estimated it as high as 70 per cent for some groups, such as people living with mental illness (Crosse 2004)

## **Lower educational levels**

Only 30 per cent of people with disabilities have completed Year 12 compared with 49 per cent of people without disabilities, and they also have lower participation in vocational education and training, with 2.4 per cent compared to 11 per cent for people without disabilities participating in this sector. People with disabilities also have lower pass rates (74 per cent versus 80 per cent) (ANTA 2000).

## **Lower income/wage levels**

The average income of people with disabilities is about half of those of other Australians (\$255 per week compared to \$501 per week). Having a disability reduced the average gross weekly wages of females by \$110 (24 per cent) and males (17 per cent) in 1998. Indeed Australia has the lowest average personal income for people with disabilities – 44 per cent of the income of people without disabilities – of any OECD country (OECD 2003).

## **Disability Support Pension recipients and employment**

About 700,000 people were receiving Disability Support Pension (DSP) in Dec 2004. It is worth noting that from 1998 to 2002 the proportion of people of working age in receipt of social security payments fell by one sixth, mainly due to growth in full time jobs (ACOSS 2005d) suggesting that we do not have a 'welfare dependency crisis' as is sometimes asserted. By OECD standards the number of people on disability pensions is about average. However, of these DSP recipients only 9 per cent have income from employment as opposed to an average of around 30 per cent for other OECD countries (ACOSS 2005d).

The wage-earning activities of DSP recipients can be gleaned from FACS annual 'Characteristics of DSP Customers' which reports that of 63,238 people in part-time employment in June 2004, only 21 per cent were earning more than \$300 per week while 53 per cent earned less than \$100 a week. Furthermore only 6 per cent of DSP recipients were participating in employment programs. This employment program participation was better than the UK and USA (2-3 per cent) but much worse than many European countries (15-20 per cent in France, Sweden and Austria). In 2002-03 this 6 per cent of DSP recipients (42,353 individuals) was spread across four main programs: 26,313 in Disability Open Employment Services; 5,539 with CRS Australia; 6,500 in Job Network Intensive Assistance (only 2 per cent of total Job Network numbers of 280,000) and 4,000 in the Personal Support Program (ACOSS 2005a).

## **Disability employment services**

There is a wealth of statistical information on open employment service provision and employment/wage outcomes available from FACS' annual Disability Services Census (1993-2004) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's analyses of Open Employment Services (Anderson & Golley 2000, 1999, 1998). In 2003-04 68,873 people with disabilities received a federally-funded employment service with 45,717 in Open Employment Services (OES); this is an increase from 2000-02 when there 64,639 service users and 41,863 in OESs and from 199-97 when out of a 35,054 total there were 18,669 OES users. These figures show the results of increased investment in OES services, and also that these services have been taken up by people seeking work as places have become available.

Of equal interest is the number of these services-users in jobs and their wage levels. At the end of the 2001-02 financial year 68.5 per cent were employed with 48.5 per cent (21,475) in an open employment setting; only 24 per cent of the latter earned a weekly wage of more than \$400 while 42 per cent earned less than \$200 and 17 per cent less than \$100 per week. A major reason for these wage outcomes was that just 27.5 per cent of these workers were in full-time permanent jobs; a not surprising result given the recent realities of job creation. While the ABS reports that between 2002-2005 477,800 full-time jobs and 249,300 part-time jobs were created (ABS 2005b), of the 885,000 new jobs created in the 5 years up to February 2004 87 per cent paid less than \$26,000 a year (\$500 a week) with half of those paying less than \$15,600 (\$300 a week) (FACS 2005, Brokensha 2005).

## **Effectiveness of employment services**

FACS reports on OES outcomes have consistently shown that around 50 per cent of service-users are in jobs; in 2001-02 39 per cent of these employed consumers were working more than 30 hours a week. ACOSS has recently estimated that there is a less than one in five chance that an average DSP recipient would obtain 'ongoing fulltime employment in a mainstream job (that would take them off social security) within twelve months of participating ' in an employment program (ACOSS 2005a). It is harder to analyse Job Network results, as though DEWR claim 14 per cent of their service-users have a disability (FACS 2003), they tend not to differentiate employment and training outcomes.

DEWR's DSP Pilot Interim Evaluation Report noted there were 16,829 DSP recipients involved in the Job Network as at June 2004, but did not present nor discuss overall Job Network job placement results (DEWR 2004). Another government report states that 'in 2001-02 the Job Network, CRS Australia and OES providers assisted approximately 245,000 people with disabilities to find jobs and to stay in the workforce' (FACS 2003) but this figure appears to exceed the total number of clients actually receiving an employment service.

## **Under-investment in employment potential**

For every dollar spent on DSP payments, five cents is spent on disability employment assistance (\$295 million according to the FACS 2003-04 report). Mark Bagshaw has presented an economic case for an inclusive society, based on Deakin University research, at many a conference – the government spends \$11 billion on paying people not to work, there is \$41 million in lost potential productivity to the Australian community and only around \$500 million dollars is being spent on targeted measures to increase employment for people with disabilities including relatively miniscule amounts (less than \$10 million) on employer incentives like wage subsidies, workplace modifications and supported wages (Ozdowski 2004, FACS 2003). OECD research suggests that higher spending on active labour market support is associated with increased economic growth (Arjona et al, 2002), supporting the case for increased investment in employment assistance.

## **3 Barriers to Economic Participation**

'Payments and services for people with disabilities do need reform. Many people with disabilities want to work but face employer discrimination, waiting lists for employment services, access issues and financial disincentives in the social security system. These are complex issues that cannot be tackled alone, only together and disability, welfare and employment agencies are willing to assist government through this process' (Maurice Corcoran in ACOSS 2005b)

The structural and attitudinal barriers to greater economic participation have been made abundantly clear over the last 20 years in various government reports and articles by disability policy analysts and advocates (DCS 1985, DCSH 1990, DCHHCS 1991, DHH 1996; Goggin & Newell 2005, Clear 2000, Hurd & Johnston 2000).

It is inaccessible environments, inadequate services, inflexible work practices and discriminatory attitudes that perpetuate the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in gaining and retaining open employment. HREOC have also delineated these as the major categories of barriers. Clients of BSL's disability employment service highlight similar issues.

## **Employer discrimination**

We agree with HREOC's suggestion, in their 3<sup>rd</sup> Inquiry Issues paper, that most if not all, of the reasons often cited for employer reluctance to recruit, hire and retain people with disabilities (namely the 'additional costs and risks' associated with such employment) are 'the result of stigma, lack of information and/or education'. Indeed the work of countless employment consultants and marketing staff at Disability Employment Services around the country has been to confront and counter these discriminatory beliefs.

The websites of organisations like Disability Works Australia ([www.dwa.org.au](http://www.dwa.org.au)) and Diversity@work ([www.work.asn.au](http://www.work.asn.au)) as well as DEWR's own JobAble portal ([www.jobable.gov.au](http://www.jobable.gov.au)) show that much time and effort has been spent in answering the concerns, anxieties and common objections of employers about employing people with disabilities (Graffam et al, 1999, 2002). It is worth examining the extent to which these employer objections are valid:

*Too expensive to hire due to need for physical adjustments:* costs of workplace adjustments and special aids/equipment can be partly or fully reimbursed under the Workplace Modifications scheme. While an average of \$2,200 was reimbursed for each modification under this scheme between 1998-2002, there were only around 275 successful applications per year (over 60 per cent with vision impairment or physical disabilities) and most people with disabilities need no money spent in this way (FACS 2003). It does appear though, that employers are often unaware of this assistance.

*Less productive in the workplace:* Most workers with disabilities (and there are over 2 million in the Australian workforce) are just as productive as their non-disabled counterparts. The Supported Wage System is designed for those employees whose productive capacity is reduced by their disability, with nearly 10, 000 individuals having gained employment under the program and been paid productivity based wages since July 1994 (Macfarlane 2005b).

*Costly additional workplace support may be required:* Disability Employment Providers are funded to provide ongoing support at no cost to employers; indeed such post-placement support is what employers themselves have said they value highly (FACS 2003, Graffam et al 1999).

*Potentially higher costs for insurance, workers compensation and OH&S:* there is no evidence that workers with disabilities have higher accident rates. For those returning to work after work-related injuries and compensation claims, a careful risk management approach in setting up the job and preparing the workplace has been shown to be an effective in alleviating risks of re-injury and ensuring continued employment. Such an approach could easily be extended to workers whose conditions are not work-related.

*Higher risk of litigation if job does not work out:* if due process is followed throughout the recruitment and employment process and workers with disabilities are treated fairly we do not believe that there is any higher risk of unfair dismissal or discrimination claims.

*Adverse impact on other staff and customers:* no proof exists that hiring people with disabilities damages business through adverse customer or staff reactions; the opposite is often the case with many employers citing increased patronage and staff morale.

## **Access issues**

Access issues are still relevant to workplace participation, especially to those with physical and sensory disabilities:

- many premises are still forbiddingly inaccessible
- public transport is still far from universally accessible
- taxis are expensive (and in Victoria the Bracks government's cuts to the half-price taxi-card scheme has made community access harder and more costly for many)
- the Workplace Modifications scheme sometimes cannot cover very expensive adaptive computer equipment needed by those with impaired vision, and some people (e.g. self-employed consultants) are not eligible
- deaf jobseekers and employees struggle to meet the costs of Auslan interpreters so important at various points in employment (e.g. job interviews, training, meetings).

The principles of reasonable adjustment and job redesign are not generally well-known amongst employers. Inflexible workplaces/work practices continue limit employment possibilities for people with disabilities in a number of ways. These include employer unwillingness to:

- alter work routines or hours to suit those with episodic illnesses (e.g. psychiatric conditions) or medical treatment needs (e.g. kidney disease)
- make workplace adjustments or purchase necessary equipment
- allow additional training time, alternative training strategies or the on-site assistance of a support worker (often vital to the successful employment of people with cognitive impairments).

## **Inadequate access to employment assistance and training**

There are waiting lists and unmet need for additional employment services. Even though most of the major recommendations of the 1996 *Strategic Review of Commonwealth Disability Services Program* (for a more equitable & outcome-focused funding system, a streamlined referral and assessment process, and quality assurance accreditation) have now or will very soon come to fruition, the call for increased investment has not. What was said in the Baume Report a decade ago remains relevant today:

‘The need for services far exceeds the provision. Rhetoric talks about providing places and support to allow people with a disability to achieve their full potential. However the reality is that only about 40 per cent of even the minimal estimate of the potentially eligible population gets access to funded services....Government must decide whether its commitment is to some eligible people with a disability or whether it has a commitment to offer support to all eligible people with a disability’ (Department of Human Services and Health 1995)

There is also a lack of training/re-training avenues. Since \$1.8 million was removed from labour market programs in 1996 very little exists in the way of funded skills training or career re-development for people with disabilities apart from a few numeracy/literacy courses and not always appropriate New Apprenticeships/Traineeships. It should be acknowledged though, that one

of the great successes of ANTA's 'Bridging Pathways' Disability Action agenda in VET was to open up funding under the Disability New Apprenticeship Scheme (DNAWS), which includes wage subsidies and money for mentor/tutorial/interpreter support, to all Trainees and not just traditional apprentices.

There are poor school/post-school employment service links. Presently there are inadequate links between specialist disability employment services and students in special schools, mainstream integration programs at secondary colleges and TAFE vocational courses such that many students are ill-prepared for the school-to-work transition once their courses of study are over.

## **Inadequate income security arrangements**

It is difficult for people with disabilities on income support to make ends meet, let alone afford the additional and often unfunded costs of participation (transport, equipment, medicines, support). The same applies to many people with disabilities in jobs (low-paid fulltime, part-time or under productivity-based 'supported wages') who are not earning a 'living wage' (Macfarlane 2003).

Financial disincentives exist within the current income support system: often DSP recipients believe that they will be little better off financially from working since the combination of the current income test and taper rates (\$0.40 per dollar after \$122 earned per fortnight) and potential loss of the Pensioner Concession Card reduce the benefits substantially. People also fear that they may have difficulty of getting the pension again if a full-time job does not work out.

Sometimes these concerns are based on a lack of full information about the rules and regulations surrounding DSP and income –not everyone, for example, knows about the earnings credit scheme, the income tests, the two year grace period for re-application after disability-related job failure, or education/ employment bonus entry payments. This was one of the lessons DEWR drew from its recent DSP Employment Pilot:

'A major disincentive is the fear of losing the pension and/or associated concessions, and concerns about their ability to either retain the DSP as a safety net or re-establish eligibility for DSP (as) under current pension suspension arrangements, there are insufficient guarantees of a return to pension if a recipient leaves work for reasons other than their disability' (DEWR 2004)

These fears have been further exacerbated by the proposed tightening of DSP eligibility criteria which ACOSS has estimated will result in 120,000 people with disabilities losing income. Reducing the number of hours a person can be assessed as able to work and still get the DSP from 30 to 15 hours per week will have a number of negative effects.

If these changes are introduced it will become much harder than it already is for new applicants to get DSP: it is estimated that 60 per cent of new applications will be rejected as compared to 37 per cent in 2003-04 which means around 60,000 people with disabilities over the next three years will be put onto the lower paying unemployment allowance (ACOSS 2005e). These people will be worse off financially by \$20-40 per week going deeper into poverty and having less means to job search or cover the 'costs of disability' as well as having to satisfy activity testing (if not exempted) and being subject to possible breaching (Goggin & Newell 2004, ACOSS 2005e). Breaching has been a very real issue for people with disabilities, with high breach rates for those with acquired brain injury, mental illness and drug/alcohol problems (Abello 2002).

Receipt of Newstart Allowance rather than DSP will also mean people's payments become taxable, they are subject to a more stringent income test if they work part time (losing 70 cents in the dollar for any earnings over \$142 a fortnight), they are entitled to less concessions (especially transport and utilities related) with just a Health Care Card which they would only keep for six months if

they went off payments through work (as opposed to 12 months with the Pensioner Concession Card) (Abello 2002).

We believe that these changes will do little to improve people's chances of gaining employment and in fact may worsen the situation for some. People on DSP may be less willing to try working as they will fear losing the pension if they demonstrate they can work even close to 15 hours per week. This flies in the face of the government's intention of encouraging economic participation. As a report to the New Zealand government on welfare reform issues argues:

'the 15 hour rule...creates perverse incentive for people with ill health or disability to exaggerate their labour market barriers and penalises people on IB (incapacity benefit) who want to work 15 hours or more per week' (NZ Minister for Social Development 2005)

People with psychiatric disabilities and other episodic conditions may be able to work full-time at some period but not at all when they have a relapse or are unwell. These changes may impact very severely on this group. People with psychiatric disabilities are already prone to relapse when exposed to stress, and we are concerned that the onerous and often pointless obligations required of Newstart recipients may negatively affect the mental health of people in this situation.

## 4 Directions for reform

'We need policy that genuinely draws on the life experiences of Australians with a disability to explore a three-pronged systemic problem that crosses government portfolios: the negative attitudes towards people with disability; the inability of the state to address the extra cost of disability; and the failure of governments to adopt welfare policies that can ensure people with disabilities can achieve their full potential as human beings' (Goggin & Newell, 2004, p6)

BSL agrees with the recommendation from the 2004 Senate Inquiry into Poverty that the Federal Government introduce a national jobs strategy to promote permanent full-time employment opportunities and better targeted employment programs. This is the same message that has been delivered by a succession of government reports since 1985; FACS continued this tradition in its 2003 Review of the Employer Incentives Strategy by arguing for collaborative policy development amongst all stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors (including representative disability consumer organisations) to implement an effective integrated suite of measures to encourage the employment of people with disabilities.

The following are BSL's suggestions for an integrated plan of action:

### **Increase investment in disability employment assistance**

**Provide more places in disability open employment services**, preferably by removing the funding appropriation cap. This could be done administratively or by amending the *Disability Services Act 1986* to introduce an entitlement to employment service job assistance to the current target group (those people with permanent disabilities who need ongoing support to achieve sustainable open employment).

**Guarantee the future viability of specialist Disability Open Employment Services** within the Job Network through an equitable funding and performance management system developed collaboratively and carefully with DEWR over the next 2 years.

Many in the disability employment sector have expressed uncertainties, following the recent transition of Open Employment services from FACS to DEWR, about funding and mission. These doubts about whether the same level of service provision will be possible in the future arise from concerns about over-large client caseloads and inadequate post-placement support in many Job Network providers (Macfarlane 2005a). Staff at BSL work with people with mental illness as well as refugees with torture trauma & resettlement issues. Our experience suggests that smaller services working with demanding client groups with more severe disabilities, more complex needs and higher support needs may be in jeopardy if the Job Network model is used to fund DOE services.

**Investigate methods to support ‘social firms’**, which are affirmative-action not-for-profit small businesses with an integrated mixed workforce of 15-25 employees (with a 25-50 per cent target for workers with disabilities or other disadvantage). These businesses focus on quality value-added services and products, provide a range of work roles and diverse activities, pay award rate or productivity-based wages, aim to generate 60 per cent of income from the business (the other 40 per cent coming from grants or subsidies) and custom-build a supportive and flexible work environment. The social firm model grew out of the Italian social co-operative movement in the 1960s and is now widespread throughout Europe and the UK (Crosse 2004).

These firms provide employment, either permanent jobs or time-limited placements which act as transition into other vacancies. They provide an integrated work environment alongside the support needed by people engaging or re-engaging with employment. DEWR could finance business feasibility studies to interested organizations through its Employer Innovation Fund; and the Commonwealth’s Community Business Partnerships strategy should include the fostering and creation of social firms within its brief.

**Revamp the Personal Support Program (PSP) for those with multiple barriers to workforce participation.** The PSP is an important program for people with multiple barriers to employment, and a large proportion of its caseload are people with mental health problems of some sort. It is limited by inadequate funding and no discretionary funding to spend on overcoming jobseekers employment barriers. The program could be improved by increasing the funding per person, building in better linkages with employment programs, and with a focus on employment outcomes over a two-year period. The state-funded ‘Given The Chance’ program run for refugees run by the Ecumenical Migration Centre at the BSL combines training, work experience and mentoring.

**Use the BSL’s approach to employment assistance as a model for future coordinated service provision.** The BSL has developed an integrated model of employment assistance through ‘intermediate labour markets’ for long-term unemployed residents (including some people with disabilities) in Fitzroy and Collingwood housing estates. This work has formed the basis of a recommendation from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation:

‘The Committee considers that the approach taken by the BSL as a model for assisting long-term unemployed persons has broader applicability ... The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with local, State and Territory governments, business, union and community organizations to invest in more holistic pilot projects which combine personal support, paid work experience, pre-vocational training, employment assistance, traineeships and post-placement support for the long-term unemployed’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2005).

This BSL project combined its own donation-based dollars with resources provided by the federal and Victorian governments, and made use of a variety of job development strategies –community and government traineeship placements, employment in a BSL/AMES social enterprise, local networking (aged & child care centres) and an affirmative action contract compliance (a public tenant employment clause was inserted by the Department of Housing in its gardening and cleaning contracts) (Temby et al 2004)

**Explore the feasibility of supporting ‘temp agencies’** that could provide fill-in workers when an employee with a disability was unable to work because of their condition. This could be a version of what is known in psychiatric rehabilitation circles as ‘transitional employment’, agreements between a disability agency and an employer to create supportive temporary work training in real work situations for people rehabilitating from mental illness with back-up work coverage provided by agency staff. Telstra has run such a project with Bronham Place Clubhouse in Melbourne.

**Increase funding and numbers of training programs** to facilitate the education, training and skill development of students and jobseekers with disabilities.

**Increase the amount of money available through the Job Network’s Training Credit or Jobseeker Account**, whilst outcome fees need to be restructured (currently a training outcome is worth much less than a job outcome) to boost training. Disability Employment Services and Personal Support Programs also need to have access to reasonable training dollars for their participants.

**Establish a ‘Disability Access and Support’ program** to assist New Apprenticeship centres or Group Training Companies who lack the expertise in assisting and supporting people with disabilities participating in VET through the New Apprenticeship scheme. Fund Disability Open Employment services to provide ‘work experience’ support for students in special schools, secondary college integration programs, and TAFE courses.

## **Provide greater incentives and education to employers**

**Develop a well-resourced employer incentives package**, akin to the UK’s ‘Access to Work’ program (DWP 2005). This package would include a range of interventions necessary to neutralise disability-related participation barriers and increase the probability of a successful employment outcome including assistance with the purchase of special licenses; skills training; pre- and post-placement assistance (interpreters, note-takers, mentors, job coaches, vocational counsellors, support workers); work-based personal assistance; supported wage assessments; disability awareness training; ergonomic/work capacity assessments; workplace adaptations or purchase/hire of special aids/equipment.

**Retain a wage subsidy scheme** funded separately to employment assistance. Currently DOE services have access to a subsidy for employers of up to \$1,500 paid in addition to funding for employment assistance. In future, this subsidy will have to be paid from the case-based funding for the service, and there is a risk that these subsidies will not be affordable.

**Fund paid work trials** that enable employers to try out jobseekers with disability for up to 13 weeks, agencies to showcase their services and jobseekers to demonstrate their abilities. FACS have argued the need for developing a ‘robust platform for work trials’ (FACS 2003). These could be funded either through a CRS-like ‘Work Training Scheme’ where government covers employers for workers compensation and pays the individuals a weekly training allowance, or through short-term award/trainee wage projects as currently run through the Victorian Government’s Community Job Project.

**Improve access to the Workplace Modifications Scheme** by distributing more information to employers, and allow greater flexibility in guidelines. Similarly, the **Supported Wage System** could be improved through more promotion, streamlined administration, improvements to assessment process and quality assurance and upgraded assessor training & accreditation (FACS 2003). Indeed if government is serious about improving employment opportunities for people with more significant disabilities then these two schemes need be better funded and more widely advertised.

**Improve targeted information, advice and support** to employers about employing people with disabilities. The US Job Accommodation Network (JAN) could serve as a model to expand current initiatives. JAN provides phone-based advisory information services to employers and people with disabilities as well as operating a comprehensive website that presents relevant legal/disability program/self-employment information, service linkages, and detailed case studies of workplace 'reasonable adjustments' for all types of disability groups and jobs. BSL would support the establishment of such a service; perhaps DEWR's current JobAble web-site could be adapted and expanded to create such a service.

**Establish a national marketing campaign** aimed at employers and the entire community about the ability of workers with disabilities and what assistance/programs government funds. The campaign should involve commercial television advertisements, the development of recognisable logos/brand names, and include several waves as different initiatives are unfolded. This should supplement existing lower key marketing such as the Canberra-based Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Award, which would probably be more effective if it was regionalized with award dinner/presentations/press releases happening all around Australia in every state and territory. The aim must be to counteract negative stereotypes of people with disabilities that exist in the community and that continue to fuel employer recruitment reluctance.

**Introduce initiatives to increase the proportion of jobs within the Australian Public Service filled by people with disabilities.** Given Employment Minister Kevin Andrew's recent public acknowledgement of declining federal public service employment for people with disabilities and the leadership role the Commonwealth ought to play in encouraging private sector disability employment (Andrews 2005), there is scope to argue for the re-introduction and widening of the Intellectual Disability Access Program (an affirmative action initiative from the early 1990s whereby the public service entrance test was bypassed through direct job selection based on ability to undertake various base-grade clerical or ancillary positions), and the targeting of Traineeship or Entry Graduate positions.

**Require all levels of government to introduce affirmative action principles** when tendering for services or issuing grants or subsidies (over a certain size or period of time). These would require contractors to adequately show that they had in place an affirmative action or EEO program of the recruitment, training and promotion of people with disabilities.

**Investigate the effectiveness of quotas** for the employment of people with disabilities as applies in some European countries. Companies and government agencies over a certain size (say 50 employees) could be required by law to hire a percentage of people with disabilities as a matter of social responsibility. Quota systems operate in quite a number of OECD countries and their effectiveness could be researched before introducing such a scheme.

**Retain existing minimum wage fixing mechanisms** to ensure that wages and conditions for low-paid workers do not become separated from those of higher paid workers. Cutting the minimum wage will increase the poverty of people with disabilities, many of whom are in low-paid jobs and are dependent on the National Wage Case to get annual pay increases. A range of economic commentators have argued that labour market deregulation involving wage cuts will neither solve unemployment nor significantly impact on employment levels, and will only serve to increase economic inequality and poverty levels among social security beneficiaries (Watson & Buchanan 2001, Junankar 2000, Bell 1999, Gregory 1999 ACIRRT 2003).

## **Reform the Disability Support Pension**

**Change the eligibility criteria for DSP** so that it is based on barriers to employment rather than simply ability to work a certain number of hours per week; this would mean people would not fear losing their pension if they try working. New Zealand has tried and is now getting rid of the 15 hour eligibility rule for DSP.

**Ensure that people who start a job are able to return to DSP if their job falls through whatever the reason for the work finishing.** At present, people on DSP who take up employment are able to be reinstated if they lose their job because of their disability, but this does not apply for other reasons for the job finishing. For some people who find work, the approach of the two year limit raises anxiety about their future if they should lose their job. It may be effective to extend the two year grace period for some clients.

**Provide better information to people returning to work about the earnings credit scheme** that was re-introduced in 2003. This scheme is fairly complicated and often poorly understood.

**Create a Single Benefit supplemented by a second tier disability allowance based on the costs of ill health or disability;** this is the approach being favoured by the New Zealand government which has accepted that such a single benefit and 'an integrated cost-based disability payment would eliminate the incentive for people with disabilities to distance themselves from the labour market in order to access a higher level of benefit' (NZ Minister for Social Development 2005)

**Remove the anomalies between pensions and allowances** without any reduction in payments, i.e. close the \$40 a week gap between Newstart Allowance and DSP to make the system simpler and fairer, as proposed in the McClure Report (ACOSS 2005d)

**Introduce a 'costs of disability' allowance** by expanding the current 'mobility allowance' to cover the extra costs associated with having a disability both in and out of work and based on an assessment of a person's disability-related life expenses. This would continue if the person started work and be separated from pension or unemployment benefit entitlement (ACOSS 2005d, NZ Minister for Social Development 2005).

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