



Director  
Disability and Mental Health Policy  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
Location: MC50 Level 5  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

*14 February 2013*

**Re: Improving the employment participation of people with disability in Australia discussion paper**

To the Disability and Mental Health Policy Section, Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR),

On behalf of the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the Youth Coalition), I would like to thank the Disability and Mental Health Policy Section for the opportunity to provide input into the *Improving the employment participation of people with disability in Australia* discussion paper (the Paper).

**About the Youth Coalition of the ACT**

The Youth Coalition is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 90 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government advisory structures and provides advice to the government on youth issues, along with providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition has a particular focus on the intersectionality of various issues facing young people in the community. Comment regarding young people with disability accessing employment provides an important example of the constructive contributions we make.

## **Response to the Paper**

The Youth Coalition reviewed the Paper, and commends DEEWR for seeking discussion regarding the very important and complex issue of people with disability accessing employment.

The Youth Coalition, in formulating our response to the Paper, consulted with a number of key stakeholders in the ACT sector. Targeted consultations included discussions with Tandem, Woden Community Services Disability Program, and ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS).

ADACAS are making their own submission and we broadly support the points raised in their response. In addition the Youth Coalition has identified a number of issues that specifically relate to young people. We believe DEEWR should look into these further and should use them to inform any initiatives that arise out of the feedback and action arising out of the discussion paper.

These issues, consistently raised by young people with disability, and services involved with their employment, are outlined below:

### **1 Meaningful Employment**

Employment of young people with disability needs to be meaningful employment, not just employment for the sake of it.

### **2 Adapting to Support Need**

There is a wide range of disabilities that young people are living with. Employment for young people with disability needs to be appropriate to the person. This should include adaptations to support their needs.

People with disability have a variety of needs over time. They transition between different activities and stages during their lives. Young people are likely to be facing several of these significant points of transition and need to be properly supported to make these successful.

Some young people with disability are not properly recognised as being fully capable of employment due to various forms of discrimination. Sometimes young people need support to navigate the variety of services, particularly when they are arriving in new cities.

### **3 Post School Options**

There is a need to create genuine post formal education options for people with disability, of which employment may be one. Young people with disability often remain with services based in educational institutions because little else is available for them to choose to participate in. Young people who transition out of education based services have regularly not been able to gain employment, but are instead continuing to undertake repeated training courses in order to provide them with activity.

From a service provision perspective there needs to be better support in gaining genuine work experience places for young people with a disability. Businesses have been reluctant to provide opportunities for such places. This reluctance even extends to circumstances where disability service providers have actively expressed that they will provide the business and the young person with full support needs for the role.

#### **4 Employment Rights and Benefits**

Young people with disability going into employment need to have access to the full range of employment rights and benefits. In particular, they need to be fully remunerated for the work that they do. It is not enough to suggest that merely being given a job opportunity is compensating the young person. People with disability provide significant financial and non-financial benefits to employers. People with disability should not be subjected to productivity based wage rates. Such rates are a significant form of discrimination against people with disability. Low wage rates disadvantage young people in achieving financial independence and lower their contribution to the economy through income tax.

#### **5 Cumulative Disadvantage**

People with disability can face cumulative disadvantages as they get older. During education and growing up they may miss out on various opportunities for participation, making it harder for them to be involved later due to lack of experience. Any programs or responses developed need to consider the impacts of the affect of these disadvantages.

The statistical level of disadvantage that young people with disability face includes the cumulative unemployment rates of being a young person and being a person with disability. Both youth and disability unemployment rates are higher than the rest of the population. This suggests that young people with disability have an even higher rate of unemployment, meaning they need extra supports to address this disadvantage. This disadvantage needs to be investigated further in order to monitor future progress in the employment of young people with disability.

#### **6 Skill Development**

Support for employment needs to provide a wide variety of skills. Young people who possess the skills and abilities to enter open employment need to be supported not just in direct skills related to employment, but also social aspects of work. Such support should not be time restricted. It needs to be ongoing to ensure that the young person continues to be engaged in the work environment.

#### **7 Transport**

Transport is a significant problem for young people with disability when accessing employment. Young people with disability who are engaged in employment often need to access multiple service points throughout their day. It is unrealistic to rely on the parents or carers of these young people to provide for all of those transport needs. Taxi services are currently financially unsustainable for many young people with disability. This is even when they receive taxi vouchers because the vouchers only cover a portion of the actual cost. Better public transport options need to be available for these young people to be able to get between the various locations of their activities while maintaining the financial viability of attending.

#### **8 Gaps in Employment Types**

From discussions with our member organisations, they have reported that a number of their young clients with disabilities fall in between supported and open forms of employment. This group needs a variety of supports and recognition of their different needs.

## Conclusion

The Youth Coalition would welcome the opportunity to work with DEEWR to support the youth sector, and young people with disability, to have further input into the development of policy and practice around the employment of young people with disability.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 6247 3540 or at [director@youthcoalition.net](mailto:director@youthcoalition.net) if you wish to discuss this letter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Robertson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Emma Robertson  
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