

To the Senate Inquiry into the administration and purchasing of Disability Employment Services in Australia.

To the Senators,

I am Susan Milbank, the parent and carer of Jacob Milbank who has Down syndrome. Jacob, with my support, has tried to find employment accessing several Disability Employment agencies since 2008. It was not until Jacob accessed Personnel Employment in 2010 that he managed to gain employment which suited his needs. Jacob is illiterate and innumerate but has very strong social skills and a great ability to learn through observation and copying.

Without Personnel Employment's awareness of his ability and needs and their support he would not have gained and maintained his dream job as Training Services Assistant at the AFL football club, the Adelaide Crows.

I am deeply concerned that competitive tendering using the star rating system does not take into account the quality of Jacob's employment and does not measure the support of a Disability Service in getting him a job at the hours and wages he wants. It also does not take into consideration the support he needs in the long term to remain in the job he has or help him to develop new skills and to progress in his career. One of Jacob's biggest challenges is coping with change and so he has a high requirement for stability in support, which will also not be considered.

It is vitally important for Jacob to have employment that meets his aspirations. He would not be happy in a job he does not consider to be important. He has always aspired to work in a football club as that is his passion. Without the support of Personnel Employment this would not have been possible. They have negotiated paid employment and the hours of work to suit his needs. Through the acquiring of this employment he is now held in great esteem in his local community, especially by his local football club with whom he has done volunteer work for many years. This has changed his attitude towards himself and his ability to find high quality employment like his able-bodied peers.

Without the ongoing support of Personnel Employment he would not be able to have long term pathways in employment. They have put in strategies to enable him to learn how to cope with the many ongoing changes in his employment. They have also educated and supported his employers in coping with Jacob's differences, needs and capabilities and put in place a support network in order that he succeeds in his employment. They have assisted in Jacob's social development in teaching him how to respond to his employers and workmates at the same time putting steps in place to help him cope with his frustrations and his anger management. Jacob's response has been exemplary due to the respect and close relationship which has developed with his Employment Consultant. This demonstrates the need for stability in his Disability Employment Service, without which he would be unable to continue in his employment.

Jacob's Employment Consultant has worked hard on getting to know Jacob well, his needs, complexities and his capabilities in order to support Jacob in the success of his employment. His communication is exemplary, allowing me to step back in the knowledge that he will communicate Jacob's needs in his employment as well as keeping me closely informed. This has also been of amazing assistance and support to his employer. Also putting many things in place to enable Jacob to work towards becoming an independent worker, like checklists and time management which Jacob finds very difficult.

Jacob's improvement in, confidence, ability to cope with change, fitness, ability to stay on task, interaction with people, to work faster and to cope with longer work sessions have been some of his successes as a consequence of being supported by a Personnel Employment Consultant

Without this long term relationship and ongoing support, Jacob's employment would not be possible.

In conclusion, I can not emphasise enough how important Personnel Employment's ongoing support and services have meant to Jacob and his quality of life and also mine.

I would ask the Senators to consider what the changes they propose to make will mean to Jacob and people like him and to make sure that high quality services such as Personnel Employment are not lost through competitive tendering. I agree that some Disability Services do not reach this high standard of support and achievement and need to be monitored as I have certainly had negative experiences with some who do not value Jacob's abilities or take the time to attempt to find him suitable employment. Surely there must be other ways of bringing them to account or addressing issues with them.

To have competitive tendering would penalise services such as Personnel Employment without which it would be a great loss to the outcomes of many disabled persons quality of life.

Thanking you for your consideration,

Yours Sincerely

Jacob and Susan Milbank