

EMPLOYABILITY!

Is it a Myth or our Mission?

Author Paul Larcombe

Firstly, let me say thank you for allowing me the time to present my thoughts on the new quality assurance system for FaCS funded services. I appreciate you taking the time to read my thoughts on this situation and in fact taking the time to bring potential change to a sector in desperate need of reform.

Secondly, I would like to introduce myself to you in the following way: I have been involved in the disability employment sector for the past 2 years. I started work as a marketing manager for a disability employment service and then became state marketing manager for the Disability Recruitment co-ordinator of Queensland. I currently sit on the board of a disability employment service and I am the president of the National Association of Technical Experts (which is a body supporting people with disabilities involved in the quality assurance program). I have been involved in the JAS-ANZ technical committee and I spent 22 days in the field as a consumer technical expert during the quality assurance trial. I have also completed the ISO 9001:2000 external auditor training. Although I am 39 and blind, I did not know the disability employment sector existed until I found it by accident two years ago.

These are my thoughts on the need for reform and change.

“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive”.
Mahatma Gandhi

The gift of life is priceless and we prize it above all things under the Southern Cross. We prize a life lived with freedom, free will, free choice and the ability to direct our own futures. I always believed that this was the right of all Australian people. This is not true and for the lives of many within the disability sub culture these principles do not stand. As Australians we cannot let it continue just because it is the way it has always been. The Disability Employment sector is failing to create an environment where Australians can live lives that they are in control of. It is inconceivable to me that we must make it law to treat people with disabilities with the same rights as the rest of the population.

***“It is impossible to solve a problem with the same mindset
that created it.”***
Albert Einstein

To have reform with any hope of change it must come from ideologies that are based on correct premises. Is it not upholding the rights of people if the sector has been developed from an ideology of compassionate care that has premises like

1. People with disabilities cannot possibly cope with the normal employment sector so we must look after them in sheltered employment.

2. It is better for people with disabilities to be together in the one place doing basic tasks that they can do.
3. If we pay them more they would lose some pension.
4. If we pay them more then we would not be competitive on contracts any more and the companies would take their contracts to third world countries where it can be done as cheaply.
5. There is a distinction between staff and workers with disabilities.
6. It is ok to treat and refer to people with disabilities as “adult children”.

It is time that we accept that people with disabilities are people first and they have a disability second. The new quality assurance system for disability employment will give people with disabilities a say in how they are treated. It is the leadership roles being given to people with disabilities within this new system that can bring the ideologies together. For a very long time we have been disabled not enabled, dis-empowered not empowered, oppressed by fear not full of confidence and guided not guiding our own destinies. If people with disabilities have been immersed within a culture of exclusion for so long they are not able to stand up for themselves and instead they will put up with the status quo. How can we expect people who have been dis-empowered for so long to be able to take the brave step into a future of their own creation without assistance? The people with disabilities who have not been smothered by, or had their mindset influenced by, this environment should be allowed to lead the sub culture into a future filled with promise.

Please give us -as people with abilities- a chance to bring hope and guidance to others who are differently-abled. Let us lead them out of the dark ages and into the light of a future filled with opportunities and choices that empower them. As a nation we can take a stand and give a sub culture a future in which we should all share.

Why can't we come together and create the catalyst for change in this sector? It is difficult to solve the problems that seem so ideologically opposed but this is only because the people who created them or have been opposed to them are the people who are solving the problems. If external logic is not brought into the equation then history is doomed to repeat itself. By stepping outside the problem and seeing it through the eyes of those who are not emotionally involved in it we stand a better chance of solving this problem. If we are going to reform the disability employment sector, let us use the creative intelligence of that culture. This is not as impossible as it seems to those outside. This country has made its mark on the world so let us – as part of this unquenchable Australian culture make our mark on it too.

“There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come.”

Victor Hugo

The proposed quality assurance system for FaCS funded Employment Services is ground breaking and unprecedented. If legislation carries consideration for difficult areas, with room for amendments and reworking in sensitive areas until consultation and compromise produces a win-win situation to the disability sector and its people, then real reform will be achievable. If the reform is allowed to be influenced by emotion, economics or politics then true reform will not happen. The current state of disempowerment and devalued status will be allowed to continue. This is an unacceptable outcome. All the work that has been done, and the progress that has been made, must continue, and so liberate fellow Australians.