FACS Employment Forum Summary Report

Attendees included 25 human resource practitioners with representation from across NSW public sector clusters. The forum was facilitated by Alison Wallace, National Director Public Policy, Urbis.

**Presentations:**

* Michael Coutts-Trotter - Secretary, Family and Community Services
* Keynote Speaker Dr Susanne Bruyère - Chief Executive Officer, Employment Disability Institute, Cornell University, New York
* The Hon. Susan Ryan – Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner,
Australian Human Rights Commission
* Sonja Stewart – Deputy Commissioner, NSW Public Service Commission
* Lucy Macali – General Manager, National Disability Recruitment Service
* Brenda Booth – Case Manager, Central Coast District FACS employee with disability
* Naomi Bolter – Administration Assistant, Learning Development FACS employee with disability

Morning session - Presentations

Michael Coutts-Trotter opened the forum, expressing his commitment to the employment of people with disability and acknowledging the importance and benefits
of embedding inclusion within the NSW Public Sector workforce.

Commissioner Susan Ryan welcomed the request from the Attorney General, Senator Brandis, for the Australian Human Rights Commission to conduct Willing to Work,
a National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older People and People with Disability.

Commissioner Ryan explained that the inquiry will examine all barriers to employment for people with disability and older people, through extensive consultations with employers large and small, public and private, people with disability themselves,
and human resource experts and recruiters..

Afternoon session one – Keynote speaker Dr Susanne Bruyère

Dr Bruyère spoke on the importance of an inclusive workplace, and the critical role of managers in inclusion. She discussed the barriers to inclusion, the employer practices that facilitate inclusion from recruitment and hiring through to workplace accessibility and accommodations (reasonable adjustments) and practices that facilitate retention and advancement for people with disability in the workplace.

Dr Bruyère outlined that inclusive climates are comprised of three elements: fairness of employment practice, cultural integration of differences, and inclusion in decision-making.

The effects of selected practices on hiring can be measured. Various practices increase the likelihood of hiring an employee with disability between 2.7 to 4.5 times that of employers who hadn’t implemented the practice.

Organisations with the following elements and corresponding likelihood of hiring:

* Internships for people with disability (5.7 times)
* Strong senior management commitment (4.8 times)
* Explicit organisational goals for people with disability (4.1 times)
* Actively recruiting people with disability (3.2 times)
* Including people with disability in diversity & inclusion plan (3.2 times)
* Relationships with community organisations (2.7 times)

Dr Bruyère identified a number of effective employer practices:

*Develop leadership commitment*
Establish employment of people with disability as a clear priority, mobilise middle management, and place people with disability in leadership positions.

*Assign responsibility*
Put someone in charge of attracting, engaging, and advancing employees with disability.

*Find a partner*
Identify and partner with local community agencies in the job placement business for individuals with disability.

*Establish employee resource groups*
Identify leaders with interest in disability. Create inter-unit partnerships, conduct accessibility assessments, and get involved in recruiting.

*Make managers accountable*
Incorporate disability goals into performance plans for managers and supervisors.

*Measure for understanding and results*Include disability in employee surveys, measuring both performance and importance. Link to measures of employee engagement.

*Make it safe to self-identify*Most employees with disability are unidentified, or become disabled post-hire. Make disclosure safe, provide solid reasons to disclose (e.g. flexible work options, access
to accommodations, access to stretch assignments).

*Raise understanding and skill levels*
Train everyone on etiquette, understanding. Reduce fear of interacting with people
with disability. Ensure managers understand their roles and accountabilities. Make
the business case for doing so!

*Establish internship programs*
Create opportunities for young individuals with disability (and older workers) to get work experience, while giving experience with individuals with disability to supervisors and co-workers, with little risk.

*Measure your progress*
Hold the organisation accountable by using existing data and create new metrics
as needed.

Afternoon session two – Expert panel

**Sonja Stewart**

As Deputy Commissioner at the NSW Public Service Commission, Sonja Stewart has responsibility for delivering a range workforce changes under the GSE.

Sonja described how the Public Service Commission (PSC) has sent a strong message to Secretaries on their responsibility for the diversity of their workforce within their departments. Leadership, and embedding policy and practice are key.

Sonja spoke on inclusiveness broadly, indicating that the NSW public sector workforce reflects society, and that it should and does value diversity. The NSW public sector workforce is the biggest in Australasia.

Sonja explained that the PSC is looking at ways to improve workforce profile data, and that there are difficulties in capturing information on disability characteristics associated with the complex nature of disabilities as well as the accuracy and motivation of self reporting and self identifying. The PSC’s People Matter survey indicates that the public sector is not as inclusive as it could be.

The PSC is also looking at branding: how to attract people into the organisation, where to find talent in our workforce, and how to design processes for desired outcomes. Promoting part time and full time flexibility is also branding.

How we attract and retain diverse talent is a challenge, as is unconscious bias as we recruit ‘people like us’ rather than for the requirement of the role.

Sonja explained that psychometric testing is not intended to be complex, but that it is about applying the framework thoughtfully, and not over specifying the qualifications for the role. A suite of three parts are designed to work together: psychometric (cognitive testing), a capability interview, and work tasks testing.

The premise is to delineate requirements, and not be prescriptive.

**Brenda Booth**

Brenda has worked as a Case Manager with Ageing, Disability and Home Care for over 23 years. Following a stroke, Brenda acquired a brain injury which meant she had to modify the way in which she did her job. Brenda spoke about her memory loss and how she is known in her office as the post-it queen because she constantly leaves herself reminder notes.

Brenda spoke about the barriers of having a hidden disability. “It makes it incredibly confronting to stop my manager and ask them to slow down or to repeat themselves because I am unable to keep up with the speed of the conversation”.

Brenda uses speech recognition software called Dragon which was procured through the Employee Assistance Fund (EAF). Brenda stated that she was the first employee from her district to use the EAF, and both Brenda and her Manager found the process difficult and problematic due to FACS not having a policy or procedure on workplace adjustments.

Brenda is a FACS Disability Employee Network member and spoke about the work of the network, including the People with Disability in the workplace – a guide for managers and employees resource available on the FACS intranet, and included as a separate attachment. Brenda added that while the resource is not a policy or procedure to guide you through obtaining workplace adjustments, it is a helpful tool on language etiquette, inclusive training, recruitment and offices etc.

 **Naomi Bolter**

Naomi explained how she first started within the department as a volunteer through a cadetship with Vision Australia.

Naomi described her workplace accommodations as aids that enable her to complete her work tasks efficiently and effectively. She compared her workplace adjustment JAWS (Job Access With Speech), a synthetic speech screen reader program, as a navigation tool not dissimilar to her guide dog, adding that without her guide dog she would not be able to independently travel.

Naomi stressed the crucial need for accessible information and communication technology (ICT) and how people with disability can feel isolated, devalued and embarrassed by having to rely on colleagues to input details into HR systems.

Naomi added that each time she wants to check or enter her leave she needs to either divulge her personal password to a colleague, or phone Business Services and beg them to enter it for her. Naomi explained that these ICT barriers are no fault of hers and her capabilities, but rather the department’s inability to install systems that are compatible with synthetic speech software.

**Lucy Macali**

Lucy spoke about the Employee Assistance Fund (EAF) which is a Commonwealth funded scheme designed to fund workplace modifications for people with disability in employment. Lucy explained that the EAF eligibility criteria is open to self employed people with disability and applicants need to be in employment for at least 12 weeks and work at least 12 hours per week.

Lucy added that the EAF does more than simply fund workplace modifications. The EAF also funds workplace training on disability awareness and mental health awareness. Four questions were taken on notice, and are addressed below.

1. *Who uses EAF more – the private or public sector?*
This data is not collected by JobAccess as each application is processed on an individual basis. It appears however that usage rates across both sectors is good.
2. *Does EAF cover volunteering?*
No – the individual must be in paid work either employed or self employed, or jobseeking for a job that meets JobAccess criteria. EAF does not cover volunteering.
3. *What happens to equipment when employees with disability retire and no longer need it? Is there an opportunity to recycle the equipment and share
with people who may not be eligible for EAF (e.g. volunteers)?*
Ownership of equipment is generally given to the worker so they can take it onto
a new workplace if they move. Therefore it is their property, so if they retire they can either use it at home or sell it. JobAccess is aware of the occasional instance where they have signed it over to their DES provider to use for another worker. The decision is up to the person who has been given ownership.
4. *Is travel training covered?*
Travel can be covered for training related to equipment JobAccess provided and quoted on. Travel is not available for Awareness Training or Auslan 2 (interviews).
If the person with disability has to attend training interstate or travel distances over 300 km, then travel costs can be considered on a case by case basis. Travel is available for Auslan 1 (workplace interpreting) which is separate from the $6,000 annual cap.

**JobAccess & Employment Assistance Fund**
1800 464 800
http://www.jobaccess.gov.au/
<http://jobaccess.gov.au/content/employment-assistance-fund>

Afternoon workshop – Where to from here?

Participants discussed the following four questions:

1. What does your department need to start doing?
2. What does your department need to stop doing?
3. What are the potential challenges and how could you address them?
4. How will your department know it is succeeding?

The full matrix of responses was attached separately, and is available on request
by email to NSWDIP@facs.nsw.gov.au