

# Diversity Field Officer Service

## Snapshot



## The challenge

The unemployment rate amongst people with disability is more than double the rate of unemployment amongst the rest of the Australian population. These rates have stubbornly remained high, despite attempts over many decades to address the issue.

Most of those attempts have focused on people with disability – increasing skills, or offering placements, or contracting employment agencies to assist people find jobs.

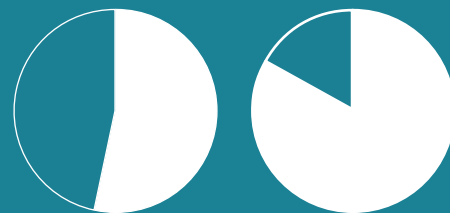
But that's only part of the solution. Small to medium sized businesses are the backbone of the Australian economy, yet have received very little support to grow their confidence about disability and increase their awareness of the skillsets people with disability can bring. Most people with disability want to work – but lack the opportunity to do so due to societal attitudes and barriers to employment.

The Diversity Field Officer Service has been designed to build the confidence of small and medium sized businesses to help create those opportunities.

2.1 million Australians of working age (15–64) have a disability



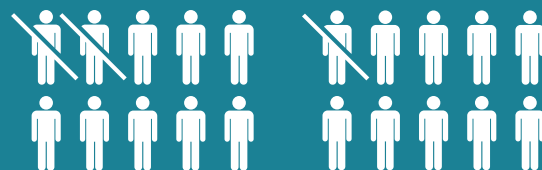
53% of Australians with a disability aged 15–64 participate in the workforce, compared with 83% of Australians without a disability



90% of Australians are employed in small to medium sized businesses



9.4% of Australians with disability are unemployed compared to 4.9% of Australians without a disability



Source: ABS 4430.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2015

<http://linkis.com/www.abs.gov.au/ausst/117gj>

# How we are different

The Diversity Field Officer Service has been developed by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), in collaboration with Deakin University. AFDO is a national peak organisation run by and for people with disability. Collectively, over 30,000 people with disability and their families make up AFDO's members. We draw on this extensive and unique experience in the design and operation of the service, combined with extensive small business expertise.



The model is different to other services, in that the Diversity Field Officer Service:

- **Focuses solely on the needs of the business and is independent** – as we do not have jobseekers waiting to be placed, we can offer one to one, practical strategies that are specific to each business' needs and objectives. This has been consistently identified by businesses as a primary reason for engaging with the service.
- **Focuses on more than job placements.** We assist businesses to think about how welcoming and accessible they really are by improving current comfort around people with disability, improving their workplace culture, the customer experience, as well as current employment practices and barriers that exist in recruitment and interviewing.
- **Provides capacity to work with very small businesses** with limited or no HR, to larger businesses, with a focus on building confidence in the leadership team. Our support scales back over time as confidence increases.

- **Shifts how disability is viewed**, including stigma and unconscious bias towards disability.
- **Equips businesses with the strategies and resources to retain valuable staff** when they acquire or disclose a disability - giving businesses the knowledge of what to do and where to go for support.
  - **Assistance to businesses to think about opportunities from entry level to CEO**, including work experience, volunteering, apprenticeships, internships and job carving, in addition to improving regular recruitment processes.
- **Provides tailored recommendations to improve accessibility**, including physical accessibility, customer considerations and information access.
- **Connects businesses to local services who can support their objectives** – rather than duplicate existing services, we connect to Disability Employment Services, specialist disability and mental health providers, and existing information and resources (such as JobAccess).
- **Establishes connections between businesses to share stories and advice** through Diversity Field Officer Service hosted events.

A toolkit has been developed to support businesses to implement actions to become more welcoming longer term.

**Due to the success of the 12 month pilot, AFDO and Deakin University are now seeking funding to expand the service to other communities in Australia.**

# How we've been going

Worked with 50 workplaces across 15+ industries, with 36 participating in the evaluation



97% satisfied with the Diversity Field Officer Service, with business expectations 'fully' or 'mostly' met



75% were employing people with disability at the end of the pilot, compared to 38% at the start of the pilot



86% indicated that there might be an opportunity to employ people with disability in the next 12 months, compared to 58% at the start of the pilot



79% have, or plan to, include welcoming wording in job advertisements and position descriptions



36% have, or plan to offer, work experience to a person with disability



30% have, or plan to offer, graduate opportunities or internships to a person with disability



42% currently looking at "job carving"- creating a set of tasks or particular role to match a job candidate with disability



64% of businesses have committed, or are currently working to improve mental health in their workplace



Source: Murfitt. K, et.al. Diversity Field Officer Service Pilot Evaluation, Deakin University, 2017.

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**Changing our mindsets**, which are often engrained, takes time. As a result of our work, businesses have reported a 10% increase in confidence and:

- Greater awareness about the extent of disability and non visible disabilities (dyslexia, PTSD, chronic conditions) and that people can have completely different experiences of the same disability.
- Increased understanding that our views about disability are framed by our experiences, society and media – views that are not always correct.
- Realisation that people with disability work across a variety of workplaces in both entry level and senior roles - including in their own. This challenged businesses to think more deeply about their own practices.

As a result, businesses have implemented a wider range of outcomes including:

- **Improved accessibility of workplaces**, including improvements to physical access and workplace flexibility for new and existing staff.
- **Interview process improvements**, with 36% seeking to introduce a guarantee to shortlist one or more people with disability where they meet the requirements of a role.
- **Mental health improvements** - Employee Assistance Programs; encouraging extra health and wellbeing activities; health and wellness surveys; Mental Health First Aid or customised training; or Mental Health Action Plans.
- **Increased awareness of the JobAccess Employment Assistance Fund** to assist employees with disability and employers with the costs of modifications, equipment & training.
- **Businesses growing their experience** of people with different disabilities through mock interviews, industry visits, disability awareness training and guest speakers.

*"I hope that this system is rolled out ... It is the sort of forward thinking, proactive approach that both business and people with disability will benefit from."*

*"It's a good program, something that no one else is doing. It's hard work to get businesses to change attitudes and to get on to doing things."*



*"You don't know what you don't know a lot of the time. I was blown away ... by the depth of knowledge that I feel I have picked up along the way."*

*"Two years ago, I had an operation that left me with brain damage. That was a huge leap into the unknown. WCIG's work with the Diversity Field Officer Service has changed life for me. My new job has allowed me to see that who I am is still in there."*

*"Our short service really makes a difference. Four hours with an engaged business leader can result in not only a changed mindset but a clear path forward with practical tools for change." - Diversity Field Officer*