The Honourable
Tony Abbott. MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA   ACT 2600

Mrs Stella Ha

22 July 2014

Dear Mr Abbott

At the recent International Rotary Conference held in Sydney I heard you speak. You bought tears to my eyes when you acknowledged your father for his 40 year contribution to Rotary, the emotion and respect portrayed in your voice was genuine and beautiful.
Just as your father is outstanding to you so were my parents to me.

In 1966 they boarded a ship with eight children as 10 pound poms. They wanted a better life for their children.
Neither of my parents were ever a burden on society, they both worked to feed and clothe and educate their children. They would often work more than one job at a time. They would somehow accomplish this and yet I still remember my mum always being there for us.
We originally lived in Castlemaine, Victoria and then after two years relocated to Bendigo.
My eldest brother served in the Navy. He went to Vietnam and died in his 50's of a brain tumour.
1 brother served in the army.
2 sisters trained in nursing.
1 sister worked in retail.
2 brothers did apprenticeships.

In 1964 as their eighth child I was born with **Cerebral Palsy. Triplegia** (affects both legs, feet, right arm and hand) I walk with the aid of a four prong stick.

At the age of 6 for two years I was sent to Melbourne from Bendigo to Marathon the Spastic Society Special School. I lived in a hostel ran by Yooralla.
I did Prep then jumped Grade 1 and went into Grade 2 because I was intelligent.
I then returned to Bendigo and attended the local primary School in Kangaroo Flat from Grade 3 until the end of Grade 6.
From form 1 I attended Golden Square High School, where I was mercilessly bullied both emotionally and physically. Half way through form 10 my parents were called in by the principal and they were asked to remove me from the school because the school "could no longer protect me". My parents refused and explained that unless I completed form 10 then I wouldn't have a chance of employment.
The compromise agreed to was that I would complete only five subjects instead of eight and that would give me a pass. This also meant I could be removed from the classes where I was at most risk of abuse and spend that time safely in the library.

Once I had left school I approached a service called Access in Bendigo. I was given two options.
1. Accept a disability pension for the rest of my life.
2. At the age of 16 go to Melbourne and attend Glenwaverley Rehabilitation Centre for vocational training.
I chose the latter. I lived there for 9 months and was trained as a telephonist and receptionist.
Once I completed the training, there was a policy in place that the government would pay a percentage of my wage and the employer would pay the deficit for a short period of time.
As soon as that policy ran out I stayed in full time employment from the age of 16. Often working shift work. When our children were born I went to part time. I eventually retired from the workforce to dedicate my life to being a full time mum and home maker. At both roles I have been a great success.
Our Son graduated at the end of 2013 from Penleigh and Essendon Grammar private school with a perfect ATAR score of 99.95. Making him dux for that year. He also was selected to attend Perth for the National Youth Science Forum and then was chosen to represent Australia in London for the International Youth Science Forum. He did all this during his year 12 studies. He was recently awarded a VCE premiers award for coming 2nd in Victoria in the language of Latin. He is also a recipient of the Australian Government Department of Education Australian Student Prize for 2013. He has also been awarded a scholarship at Melbourne University, where he is currently studying Science.
His achievements are due to his hard work.

Our daughter is currently in year 11 at Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School. She recently performed in the school production of Singin' in the Rain as one of the principal cast members and in the chorus as a dancer and singer. A member of the school choir. Plays in the school's first soccer team and plays Volleyball. She is also a member of the schools Dance club.
We as parents are extremely proud of our children.

My husband is a professional in the workforce; through our hard work and budgeting and sacrifices we have been able to make investments and hopefully will be self-funded retirees. We have achieved this by ourselves. Due to our hard work we both still pay tax. We are proud of what we have accomplished. We are extremely private people.
This being said, it takes incredible courage for me to write this letter.

I am the greatest advocate for people with disabilities entering the workforce; it is extremely fulfilling and rewarding. But what will happen at the end of their working life? Will they be in the same situation I now find myself in?
I am now 50 years of age and my health and mobility are rapidly declining. I am in severe chronic pain. My husband and I have always paid for top private health cover with extras.
I am a person with a PERMANENT disability that keeps falling through the cracks.
I don't fit within the private medical system because I don't get better and there is no category for maintaining my health and mobility. Every allied health service I try to access my private Health will only cover a certain number of visits.
I don't fit into the public health system because I have private Health cover or because I have never had a pension or a healthcare card.

I have been told by St Vincent's public Hospital Cerebral Palsy Clinic that I don't qualify because the cut off age is 37 and that "I am to high functioning"

Cerebral Palsy is not a high profile disability. Once The Miss Australia Quest was no longer politically correct and disbanded there doesn't seem to be a replacement to bring it to the attention of the media, public or politicians.

For some time I have been having some regular falls resulting in being hospitalised. I have tried desperately to seek help. Firstly approaching Cerebral Palsy Support Network. [redacted] from this organisation contacted Yooralla and helped me to register with Department of Human Services.

Samual Curtis – Physiotherapist Yooralla
Kylie Chandler- Occupational Therapist Yooralla
These two people are the only ones who have actually physically done anything to help. I can only stay with this organisation for a short period of time. In my opinion Yooralla should be more highly funded and supported.

To enable me to register with Department of Human Services as a person with a permanent disability, I had to answer 10 pages of the most intrusive personal questions that totally robbed me of my dignity. My Neurologist had to sign off on one copy and my GP on another copy of the same questions. My GP was disgusted and appalled at the questions.
Once these forms had been submitted I received a telephone call from a speech pathologist from the Department of Human Services at approx. 2pm on 7 March 2014 asking me questions and she made her assessment as follows: My Cerebral Palsy is mild based on three things. 1. I can communicate 2. As yet I'm not permanently in a wheelchair 3. I'm not fed through a tube. After many months a meeting was scheduled at our home for 2pm Friday 11 July between [redacted] Cerebral Palsy support Network and [redacted] from Department of Human Services. My Husband took leave from work (with no wages) to attend. At 2pm Cerebral Palsy support network rang to say [redacted] was away and that no one would be attending from their office. At 2.20pm I rang Department of Human Services to be told no one even knew if [redacted] was in or whether she was attending. She finally arrived at 2.40pm and announced, "I knew I was on my way".
During the meeting she spoke more to my husband and kept referring to him as my "carer" and that she could supply him with a lot of support. I pointed out that he was my husband not my carer. It was as if my needs were of no importance and that even though I can speak for myself I was not heard.
She told me to be available on Monday 14 July between 1pm – 2pm and she would phone me. I still have not heard from her.
She was to follow up on Medi alert alarms and other organisations I may be able to access.

I do not know what games to play, or what box to tick or who next to approach.
Please I am begging you: READ THIS. DO NOT SHUFFLE IT TO THE BOTTOM OF YOUR PILE. DO NOT PUT ME IN TO YOUR TO HARD BASKET AS EVERYONE ELSE IS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF YOORALLA)
MEET ME. SPEAK WITH ME.

I AM NOT A SOB STORY. I AM AN HONEST HARD WORKING AUSTRALIAN CITIZEN WHO RAISED OVER $10,000 FOR THE MISS AUSTRALIA QUEST IN 1986 At the time my maiden name was JONES . I HAVE BEEN TREASURER TWICE FOR LOCAL BRANCHES OF THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION.
I'M NOT ASKING FOR A HAND OUT JUST A FOOT IN A DOOR THAT WILL ACTUALLY HELP ME BEFORE I AGAIN FALL AND LAY ON MY FLOOR FOR HOURS UNABLE TO GET UP.

People with permanent disabilities need on- going maintenance services to maintain our health, mobility and dignity. Not referral organisations when there are very few actual Hands- on help available to refer us to.
If I had gotten into a car and had an accident I would be covered under the TAC. If my disability resulted from a work accident then I would be covered under work cover or if I was a high profile sports person then "the red carpet treatment and services would be rolled out for me"
Unfortunately none of these categories cover me. I am a person who was born with Cerebral Palsy who has managed to accomplish so much at no expense to the taxpayer or society.
When Bill Shorten was the minister for disabilities, I made enquiries about the National Disability Insurance Scheme. His office told me "That it would be given to children and Youth and that I probably wouldn't qualify as I am too old and I have worked.

Please consider my predicament when you are making policies to place people with permanent disabilities into the work force.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Stella Ha